

When God Is Silent

Luke - Chapter 1:5-25

Luk 1:5-7 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. (6) ***Both of them were righteous*** in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. (7) ***But they were childless*** because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and ***they were both very old***.

Luk 1:13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; ***your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son***

They had been living A LONG TIME with an unanswered prayer

- How do we react when prayers are unanswered - FOR A LONG TIME?
 - God doesn't love me
 - I don't understand God's will
 - He doesn't hear me
 - There must be some sin in my life

2 things were going on during the time no answer came (work in hearts)

They endured being disgraced FOR A LONG TIME

- Fertility was one of the blessings that God had promised as a result of obedience and barrenness as a sign of God's disfavor.
 - You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall be no male or female barren among you or your cattle. (Deuteronomy 7:14).
- Luk 1:25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and ***taken away my disgrace among the people.***"
 - Disgrace - Notoriety - They became notorious **Strong's G3681 Disgrace = notoriety, that is, a taunt (disgrace): - reproach**

They remained faithful to the LORD

- Both were ***righteous in the sight of God*** - FOR A LONG TIME
 - They observed the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly
 - This is a righteousness describing their keeping the commands and decrees similar to Paul before he was saved
 - Philippians 3:6 ASV ... as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.

God was at work preparing them to be parents of the forerunner of Jesus Christ - only they didn't know it.

How Did God Finally Answer His Prayer?

1) God intervened in an every day life situation (doing his job)

Luk 1:8 -9 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, (9) he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

- **The priestly division of Abijah** (I Chron 24:7-18)
 - There were 24 priestly divisions set up by David
 - There were 1000's of priests during this time
 - Each division worked 2 weeks out of a year at the temple
 - To burn the incense was a once in a lifetime event
- **The casting of the lot**
 - Proverbs 16:33 NIV The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD
- **The burning of incense**

2) God used the very thing that they may have lost confidence in (prayer)

Luk 1:10-13 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (11) Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. (12) When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. (13) But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; ***your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son***, and you are to call him John.

- He was called to burn incense - incense is symbolic of prayer
 - Psalms 141:2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense.
- All assembled worshipers were **praying outside**
- The angel of the Lord appeared on the right side of the **altar of incense**
- **YOUR PRAYER HAS BEEN HEARD**

It is interesting that God chose the "time of prayer" to actually answer his prayer. They had prayed for years with no answer - and maybe to some degree came to the realization that their prayer may never be answered. ***Sometimes the very thing we have lost confidence in or we think has no power holds the key to the miracle***

- The boy with the five loaves and two fish
- Let down your nets on the other side of the boat

3) God answered exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think)

- **God is speaking for the first time in 400 years** and it was in answer to a man and a woman who prayed an “unanswered prayer” for MANY YEARS
- Zechariah got more than he asked for - **he asked for a baby and he got the forerunner to Messiah**
- **God is using this man to be the father of a child** that Jesus said - of those born among women there is none greater than John the Baptist (except him that is least in the kingdom)

Zechariah - The Last Prophecy of Malachi is Fulfilled in Your Son

(14) He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,
(15) for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.

(16) He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. (17) And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The Last Prophetic Words in the O.T...And then 400 Years of Silence

Malachi 3:1 NIV "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi 4:5-6 NIV "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. (6) He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

4) God's answered prayer brought a greater revelation of His nature

Zechariah means **H2148 "Yahweh Has Remembered."**

Elizabeth means **H472 "God of the Oath"**

- The marriage of Zechariah and Elizabeth brought forth John
- The answered prayer was in a sense the marriage of their name
 - “Yahweh has Remembered His Oath”
 - He remembered his oath from Malachi
 - He fulfilled His promise in family of people who thought their prayers were not being answered
- John “**Favored of God**” was the fulfillment of the promise God made 400 years earlier
- The answer to this prayer was worth waiting for

HAPPY FATHERS DAY

What a great set of aspirations for our children

(14) He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, (15) for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. (16) He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. (17) And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- He will be **a joy and a delight to you** (so many of us stop here)
- **Many will rejoice** at his birth
- He will be **great in the sight of the Lord**
- He will be a Nazarite (meaning "consecrated" or "separated" - **dedicated to the LORD**)
 - Numbers 6:1-21
- He will be **filled with the Spirit**
- He will **bring back many people to the LORD**

Qualities of a Father grew within him as God was silent

- **God was preparing him for greatness** - the greatness of raising up a son
- **He was committed to marriage** - he did not take the easy way out
 - he could have divorced her after 10 years of barrenness - but chose to stay
- **He was committed to his wife as a person** - he bore her shame and identified with her - FOR A LONG TIME
 - THEY were childless because SHE could not conceive - but he carried the shame with her
- **He was committed to God** (he continued to pray for A LONG TIME) - even as the hope of having children dwindled due to their age
- **He was a man of the word** - look at his prophecy about John (Luk 1:67-79)
- **He was a man of prayer** - he continued in prayer for many years
- **He had moments of weak faith** - (Luk 1:18 - how can I be sure of this?) - but God used him

*APPLICATION - talk a little bit about prayer

- Some of us have stopped praying about a particular thing because we think the LORD will not answer.

This Story Clarifies Two Common Misconceptions About Prayer

- That unanswered prayer means there is something wrong in my life...
 - They were righteous in the sight of God - but their prayers were unanswered
- Zechariah did not have great faith yet the LORD answered His prayer
 - Luk 1:18 - Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

How Do We Deal with the LORD's Silence or Unanswered Prayer?

Realize He has a better plan

- When He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was —John 11:6

He may be doing a work in my heart

- 2 Chron 32:31 ... God withdrew from Hezekiah in order to test him and to see what was really in his heart.

I want first to find HIS will for my life

- Luke 22:42 NIV "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Continue to be persistent

- They were old and had been praying for a child for a long time

Pray even when things seem impossible

- They were past the age of bearing children - but we serve a God who thrives in the realm of the impossible

Sometimes unanswered prayer is sometimes simply about timing