

Do Not Be Afraid: Zechariah (Luke 1:5-25; 57-69)

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Intro

What's up Summit Family! Shout out to all of our campuses in Durham, Cary, and Raleigh, from your family in Chapel Hill! I'm excited about kicking off a mini- series leading us into our Christmas season!

Over the next few weeks, we will be in the gospel of Luke. In Luke's version of the Christmas story, the phrase '**Do Not Be Afraid**' comes up 3 separate times. So today, we want to focus our attention on the life of a man – Zechariah. It is amazing how the Pain of our Past teams up with our Fears to create **doubt** and **unbelief**. There is a tug-o-war between his Promises and our FEARS.

What do your Fears look like? Well I happen to have a **literal picture** of fear from my kids. (And that was a bee the saw while my wife was snapping the picture).

If you want to see me look this way – All I need to see is a SNAKE.

Now, I'm somewhat a country boy, but I don't fool with snakes unless I absolutely have to... (trying to hold on to my *man* card.) But the idea of a camping trip came up amongst a few of the campus pastors...not saying any names by their initials are RJ Hoggard, Ryan Doherty, Todd Unzicker, and Daniel Simmons who have no problem embracing the great outdoors!

But you know what they all have in common – they are white! White people, you know I love you – but what is with you and camping? They were like – there is nothing like experiencing the presence of God at night by the campfire with a picturesque view of the heavens! And I'm like there is nothing like being with an omnipresence of God with ESPN in a hotel room!

Besides, I already visualized dealing with coyote, bear, wild boar...then they would be like "Cmon' Chris - It's just a garden snake, it's harmless." Good for you, and extra points on your man card. I'm good. A snake is a snake...is a snake.

See, I have a **Fear** of snakes, and that fear is directly related to my **Doubt** of being able to properly handle a snake situation . So camping for me & most black people remains a faith issue – help us Jesus.

People are afraid of a lot of things... and those **fears** and **doubts** impact what we believe about God and how he can intervene in our lives. As we walk through this passage, ask God to speak to your FEARS.

Let's read.

(Luke 1:5-7 ESV)

[5] In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] **But** they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

- This couple, in the midst of their faithfulness to God, lived everyday and every night facing the reality that they were **barren** and now **old**.
- In this culture, being childless was socially and economically disastrous.¹ **Economically**, because children often took care of their parents

¹ Notes from Dr. Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary. (Intervarsity Press 1993). Pgs. 187-189.

in their older age - (pre 401k days). **Socially**, barrenness was often viewed as a result of sin (especially seen as a defect of the wife), therefore men were often counseled to divorce in order to avoid unceasing social disgrace, so divorce & remarriage could possibly propel them into healthier financial situation.

Many of us here today, face these same type of challenges. You have been faithful, but it seems like **disappointment** meets you around every corner in life – **personally**, **financially**, **physically**, or **socially**.

Personally – we are disappointed that we are not married yet (single) & others are disappointed in their marriage. Some of are disappointed in our inability to have children, while others are disappointed in how we raised the children we have.

Financially – we are disappointed with how long it is taking to breakthrough in our current career path and others are disappointed that this dream job has not met up to its expectations.

Physically – we are disappointed in how our health is failing or we are disappointed in how we slowly see health failing in the lives of our loved ones.

Socially – we are disappointed with the racial divide that is alive and well in our society. It would be absurd to ignore the hurt, pain, frustration and fear of ALL those involved in places with national attention like Ferguson & New York – **everyone is hurting** - people are disappointed with the grand jury's decisions; others are disappointed with the reaction of the people towards officers & city officials, while others are disappointed with our lack of awareness on this particular issue. “We are disappointed that the world... that we believe... should exist, and want to exist... DOES NOT exist... Are we ever going to get past this? Are we ever going to have peace and find true justice?”

It is EASY to let our circumstances, disappointments and pain **eat away at the fabric of our faith** – It makes us question our faith instead of trusting and believing that our Heavenly Father **STILL, in the midst of our world** - has our best interest in mind.

So what do we learn so far from this couple?

Never let your FEARS redefine your FAITH!

We should celebrate this couple because despite their cycle of disappointment, they trusted and obeyed God.
How do we know?

- **They didn't get a divorce** – (could have been an “easy” out...Zechariah was man enough to love his wife and deal with any social ramification & financial repercussion that followed² – for years!)
- **They didn't commit adultery** (they honored their vows to one another – for better or for worse, or in sickness and in health)
- **They didn't become bitter towards God.** (Remember Zechariah was a priest, so he often prayed **for** and believed God **for** people, even though he seemed to be overlooked personally. Could you imagine praying for people and watching their prayers come to fruition, but

² Craig S. Keener, *ibid.* Zechariah was a priest, he was supposed to be live and eat from the tithes of the people...but he had to work due to the corruption (high taxes on the poor and corrupted priestly aristocracy). He probably did manual labor on a farm in his old age, with no children to help him financially...financial strain b/c of his faithfulness.

yours haven't been answered? We should admire and should mimic their faith.)

But though their faith was admirable, they were still missing something, and something important.

Let's keep reading to see what it is! Zechariah is going about his priestly duties...look at vs. 11.

[11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and **fear** fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "**Do not be afraid**, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

- Vs. 14-17 go on to explain how they are going to give birth to a son who will bring great joy as a great prophet, lead the nation in repentance, and prepare the way for an even **greater** child, Jesus – the Messiah!
- **See, God's answer was better than anything they could have hoped for. Better than what they knew to ask. That's always how it is with God. You may wonder why he hasn't yet**

come through, but it's because he's got a **GREATER PLAN** than your limited perspective has known to hope for.

BUT because we are indeed limited in our thinking - let's listen to Zechariah's **Response**, pay attention to how his past disappointment tag teams with his fear to create doubt and unbelief.

[18] And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

- Zechariah's doubt actually said - I'm too old, and the wifey over here, she's more advanced than me, she has a Master's Degree in **DEPENDS** (that's adult diapers for all the young people) and a PHD in Geriatrics – she's advanced! It's a good thing, he is in the temple talking to an angel, because Elizabeth might have a few choice words for this brotha. No man *in his right mind* uses the word *old* and *wife* in the same sentence...especially when there's a chance it's going to get written down in Scripture. For all of eternity, Elizabeth will go down as 'the old chic.'

- This is how we often react to God’s promises too. There are over 3000 promises in his Word. Whenever the Holy Spirit whispers one in your heart, the enemy whispers back with FEAR!

There are 2 types of responses towards God’s promises. One that is grounded in **FAITH** & the other is in **HOPELESSNESS/BITTERNESS**.

1. There are the RESPONSES that come from faith: *God, you confuse me, you frustrate me, but I know that you are real and that you have my best interests at heart even though I can’t feel it.* These were the type of authentic prayers we see in throughout Psalms by David.
- 2.
3. On the flipside, there are RESPONSES that come from hopelessness and bitterness. You doubt God’s character, his love, and sometimes his existence.

In the first, you are **looking at God** with confusion, even anger.

But in the second, you are only **looking at your---self** in self-pity. (Selah)

- Zechariah is basically telling this messenger from God in self-pity & bitterness– **“I don’t believe you, why now, when it’s too late! How can I trust you? This sounds too good to be true. Yes, you are a messenger from God but, you’re the junk mail angel.”** (ex. junk mail & kids - \$1thousand check – “junk mail gospel”)
- Let me ask you right now, which promises do you consider *junk mail* gospel? (Jeremiah 29:11 (hope &future), II Chronicles 7:14, (forgiveness & healing) Zephaniah 3:17 (in your midst & singing over you))
- **DO.YOU.BELIEVE.**

After his pity party, the angel speaks. Let’s Keep reading.

[19] And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

Gabriel said - in the immortal words of Beyonce' –, “*You must not know bout me. I’m Gabriel...I made pretty significant appearances that you priests should have studied in the book of Daniel (8 & 9) - ” I don’t text God, or look at his Instagram posts – I STAND in his very presence and have been sent by him to bring you this good news, this promise.*

It was understandable for Zechariah to be afraid when the angel showed up, but he should FEAR the one who sent the angel – we might want to listen&believe him. (me & snakes) So.....since you have doubts, since you are afraid, we are going to help you believe...vs. 20.

[20] And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak ... (this is like the first God-ordained time-out) until the day that these things take place, because you did not **believe** my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” (after Elizabeth found out she was like...Who is da “old chic” now, homeboy...drops the mic.) [21] And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. [22] And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and

remained mute. [23] And when his time of service was ended³, he went to his home.

Quick caveat: notice it says, he remained until his *time of service had ended*...he immediatiely realized that he was disciplined for his self-pity and bitter comments...so he persevered by continuing his priestly duties for at least a week, despite his new disabilities!

Then in vs. 24-25 ...After Zechariah returns home, this couple finds out that they are pregnant and they are grateful that things will be better economically & socially for them.

Nevertheless:

- Zechariah is still **disciplined** for 9 MONTHS for his skepticism. He cannot speak or hear {mute}. (vs. 62 people made signs back to communicate with him). Doesn’t this consequence for unbelief seem a little harsh for a righteous man?
- Others in the past like **Abraham⁴ & Gideon** requested signs in the state of their unbelief ,

³ This time of service could have been 1-2 weeks.

⁴ Genesis 15:8,17:17 & Judges 6:17, 36-40;7:10-11

but they didn't suffer these type of consequences. Why such severity on Zechariah?

- He is being disciplined for responding to God's promise with hopelessness. **See, Zech followed all the rules, but he had NO JOY in the promises of God.** Let that sink in for a minute.

So God had to shut him up, literally. Why? To bring him back. To love him. To heal him. He is working out your salvation in ways that sometimes feel foreign to us, but you must believe that our loving Father is loving us back to his presence.

Pastor JD shared with us before:

Discipline is not God trying to pay you back, it's God trying to bring you back.

While it may "feel" like punishment – God has already punished his Son in order to **reconcile** us back himself – there is no punishment/condemnation left - Scripture teaches us *there is no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus.*⁵ God has poured his

⁵ Romans 8:1 (ESV)

wrath out on his perfect, blameless, sinless son...not us. We indeed have an enemy that seeks to steal, kill and destroy⁶, the enemy would love for you to question God's Word, his promises, not consider the consequences of our sin, and remain uncertain about how much God loves us! As believers, we are not punished for our sins, we are disciplined – punishment was given to our substitute – Jesus - in Our Place.

Matt Chandler said it this way:

The *wrath* of God is most clearly seen in his allowing us to continue in our sin. The *love* of God is most clearly seen when he steps in and disciplines us for our sin.

Remember - His intentions are your healing, not your destruction.⁷

Jump down to vs. 62...Elizabeth gave birth to John, everyone is excited, and when they heard the child was not given a family name (Zechariah, Obadiah,

⁶ John 10:10

⁷ Quote from J.D. Gear. Kingdom Come Series. *Surprise*. 2011.

Hezekiah...John?What?) –they turned to Zechariah to see what he had to “say” or sign.

62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. **63** And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. **64** And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

You can learn a lot in time- out for 9 months? What has God been teaching you these last 9 months? Can you hear him? Has your heart softened enough, to receive his Word?

The greatest lesson that Zechariah learned was to quit looking at himself and gaze upon the promises and the power of God. **That’s the greatest lesson we can learn is: to look at God.** Even in bewilderment and confusion: **Look at God!** In failed relationships: **Look at God!** In your fickle job situation: **Look at God!** With your unfulfilled dreams: **Look at God!** Get your eyes off of yourself in self-pity: and onto God in faith and in hope!

See, God took *being slow to speak* and *quick to listen* to new levels our brother Zechariah – **his eyes were the only function he kept.** He quietly watched the love of his life – Elizabeth, despite her old body - overcome her barrenness day by day for 9 months. In fact, he was so amped after the birth of John – he pulled out his notebook and began reciting a freestyle rap he wrote! (vs. 67-79)

Listen to how he sets up this song!

[68] “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and **redeemed** his people [69] and has raised up a horn of **salvation** for us in the house of his servant David,⁸

This was the answer for the Nation, our Deliverer, the horn of salvation, Jesus. He went on further to speak of Jesus more, then he prophesied about his son, John - last...When he finished, I’m sure people were like - “That dude Zech got bars son, Bars!*snapping (If you don’t know what “bars” are, you probably go camping...ask your black friends.)

This teaches us this... Write this down.

⁸ Psalm 132:17-18

Let your Faith conquer your Fears.

Some of you may say, Chris – Zechariah got what he was praying for. Yes, he was disciplined because of his unbelief, and he persevered - but I'm still over here with **unanswered prayer & drowning in disappointment** – how can this help me? If you read his rap/song/prophesy closely – you will notice that Zechariah's joy is emphatically grounded first, on the birth of Jesus, then his own baby boy - John.

Why? Because he is the **ONLY hope for the salvation** for his people (vs. 69). The first few words that come out of his mouth in 9 months - points his listeners to have faith in the Messiah!

The BEST gift that He gives, is the one that **takes away** our sadness and despair and **fills** us with true joy and real security - it is not in things; **the best gift is God Himself.**⁹

He is not just about giving you a wife and kids, or cars and houses. He wants to give you JESUS!

⁹ Quote from J.D. Gear. Kingdom Come Series. *Surprise*. 2011.

He is **better** than anything else life can give & so secure - that death cannot take this away. If God chooses to shut you up for 9 months in silence - to **birth** a love for Jesus, the greatest gift in you, trust me - you'll say - *it's worth it*.

The greatest birth in this passage IS NOT John, it was the birth of faith that would come through Jesus.

Did you notice, by the way, that his time of silence was 9 months? Out of your pain and despair God is **birthing** a love and trust in the Messiah, the **GREATEST** gift he could give you. A gift that is the answer to all your fears, so don't be afraid – you can be born-again.

As I close, Write this down (band can vamp).

Don't' let Fear and Doubt create disillusionment about the Presence of God.

One thing that I didn't mention earlier – and that's what Zechariah name means: **It means God Remembers.**

Summit Family. God remembers. He has not forgotten you or your prayers. He has not forgotten any of his promises towards you – So, DON'T stop believing! DON'T stop crying out to him! DON'T give in to this world and all its disappointments. DON'T EVER stop praying! DO.NOT.BE.AFRAID.

Let's Pray.

- First I want you to pray at your seat. I want you to examine your heart, confess your fears right now, to your Father who is always listening and has your best interest in mind. The enemy has whispered doubt and unbelief, and I want you to trust in the promises of God. Pray.

I also want us to pray for our Nation....**would you, AT ALL OF OUR CAMPUSES stand with me.** One of the promises we see Jesus pray is in John 17 – where he asks God to make us ONE – to bring us into COMPLETE UNITY. Just like Zechariah, this sounds to good to be true, right? Especially in the face of

recent events in Ferguson and New York. Many of us are trying to process these events – but we should not let this PREVENT US FROM praying!

Let's pray bold-faith filled prayers – that God will teach us how to mourn with those mourn. Pray we extend the same grace and mercy to others that has been given to us, never to be wise in our own sight, but humbled that Jesus undeservingly has given to us. VOICE your prayers now.

(I will pray here to close...)

(1 Timothy 2:1-2)

[1] First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.