

12132020 We need to understand that Christmas was not man's idea...it was birthed in the heart of God...foretold through the prophets and came to pass two thousand years ago.

So Context matters when we encounter the inspired words of Scripture. The context allows us to put ourselves into the mindset of the life and times of the people written about in the Holy Scriptures...And today we will do this as we look at the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the eventual parents of John the Baptist and to experience their issues as if we were their neighbors. It was their reality, and their journey of faith, and their journey is much like ours, with its ups and downs, and as children of God ...they had the great privilege we have...to pray!

Today we will look at the God who answers prayers...**the hard question is how do you handle the No answers and dashed hopes?** Everyone is good with a yes answer...in fact that is the answer we are looking for in our prayers...but how do you live with the no answer?

Jesus when he was teaching his disciples to pray ...said this: Pray

Matt6:10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

- When we pray God's will to be done on earth...there will be a natural clash at times with our will...**and when our prayers don't line up with his will the answer is no or not now...**
- **And no answers are almost always painful leading to questions of why?**
- **It is in the no answer where faith is exercised and hope is maintained by this truth...**

Rom 8: 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together^[m] for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

So today as we examine a part of Zechariah and Elizabeth's story in context, we experience this couple's great start and their high hopes, then to endure painful loss, and dashed dreams, which God ultimately restores according to his will in a most remarkable way. **Through it all, Zechariah and Elizabeth persist in their faithfulness to God, revealing our God remembers our prayers.**

As a result, their journey, with its waiting, wondering, pain and resignation, speaks personally to our own faith journeys in God's providential hand.

Everybody story takes place in context... a time in history, a location, under a government...The same with Zechariah and Elizabeth

Luke 1:5 When Herod was king of Judea,... (5a)

- **Luke is reminding us the Israelite people lived under the spiritual and governmental oppression of the occupying Roman government. With Herod the Great in power, To a devout Jew, this was a dark and oppressive time; Roman occupation was viewed as the equivalent of the kingdom of evil ruling the land. And he ruled over the Jews with an Iron fist**
- **Herod the Great ruled Palestine from 39bc to around 4 some say 2 BC.. he was also the rebuilder and political controller of the great Temple in Jerusalem.**
- **The Temple use was subject to Herod's continuing approval, it was not only spiritually illegitimate, but corrupt.**
- **His government leadership was stained in blood ... he was ruthless to perceived enemies and was very insecure killing numerous members of his own family in fear...it was said you had more security as his pet than as his child..**
- **not only do people live in a specific time in History and under a government ...they also have a name...**

Luke 1:B there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah,

Zechariah's father, an ordinary Levitical priest whose name we do not know, when he found out God had blessed him with a son who could carry on the priestly tradition of the family he would be overjoyed.

- **In a culture in which the act of naming was highly significant Zechariah's father had just given him a name that came with a history and a legacy.**
- **And so when the eighth day came, the time for circumcision this priest declared the infant's name to be *Zechariah*. The meaning of Zechariah is "whom Jehovah remembers,"**
- **It was a desperate time for the nation, Zechariah's father drew upon a prophetic name that harkens back almost 500 years in the nation's history. A time when hope was given to the Israelite people**
- **The Israelite people returning from Babylon to rebuild the Temple, a prophet and priest named Zechariah was visited by an angel,**
- **From that vision, he penned God's words of prophetic hope that promised a "restored kingdom community and a functioning temple."**
- **This old Testament Zechariah like Isaiah spoke prophetic words of the Messiah's coming, His kingship, and His enduring reign of peace and prosperity. Those words from long ago also served as a reminder of the promise that God made to Israel.**

listen to a few of His prophecies....: The First Coming of Zion's King

Zech 9: 9 Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt.

Also Zechariah prophesied the Lord's second coming ..and the repentance of the Jews for killing Jesus

Zech 12: 9 For on that day I will begin to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 10 “Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.

Zech 13: 6 And if someone asks, ‘Then what about those wounds on your chest?’^[a] he will say, ‘I was wounded at my friends’ house!’

And the reign of The Lord forever...

Zech 14: 3 Then the LORD will go out to fight against those nations, as he has fought in times past. 4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. And the Mount of Olives will split apart, making a wide valley running from east to west. Half the mountain will move toward the north and half toward the south. 5 You will flee through this valley, for it will reach across to Azal. Yes, you will flee as you did from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all his holy ones with him. 6 On that day the sources of light will no longer shine!

ZEC 14: 8 On that day life-giving waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half toward the Dead Sea and half toward the Mediterranean, flowing continuously in both summer and winter. 9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one LORD—his name alone will be worshiped.

Living Water will flow from the Lord out of Jerusalem... and Israel will be restored to the Kingdom...and Justice will finally come to earth...count on it.. now there is not one person who did not want that to happen in their lifetime....and many generations lived through the No answers to their prayers during their times of trouble....500 years later still waiting ...and this new generation of priest turn serve and wait was up.... So life is still to be lived

and every Priest needed to be married...

Luke 1:5C... and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron.

- Having been blessed and entrusted by God with this son, Zechariah's father had other cultural responsibilities. **One of these was to arrange his son's marriage, which could not be with just any family from the tribes of Israel.**
- If priests wanted their sons to remain in the priesthood, their sons had to marry the daughters of priests..
- Finally a family with a daughter was found for a possible marriage that seemed almost too good to be true. The daughter was named Elizabeth, the name of **Aaron's wife**. **Because Aaron had been Israel's very first Chief Priest, and with Elizabeth's name meaning "one who swears by God,"**
- **if one wanted a great name and legacy for a priest's wife, this was it! Zechariah would have been at least twenty years old and Elizabeth most likely around 15, at their young ages they would have many children...**
- **When the marriage details were agreed to, and the betrothal contract between the two families finalized, Zechariah's father and mother would have been overjoyed.**
- **His son had married into Aaron's priestly line, just as his father had, and generations of their fathers before him.**
- **They would surely be blessed by the Lord with Children!! In this religious culture, children were seen as God's direct and evident blessing to His people.**

Luke 5: ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations.

- **Luke's use of the present tense were "righteous" in God's eyes. tells us that this couple consistently lived out this righteous life**
- **In this culture, that meant that they were behaviorally obedient in observing the Ten Commandments, as well as all the Levitical laws concerning diet, including all the feasts and festivals.**

- In describing Zechariah and Elizabeth this way, Luke is also telling us that God looked upon this couple with favor, not only because of their faithful behavior, but because their hearts were right in God's sight as well. THEY WANTED TO BE CLOSE TO GOD
- SO...in the mindset of Luke's first-century readers, there is nothing unusual or unexpected in the unfolding of this story.
- So far it all fits with their understanding of how things work for "good" people.
- GREAT EXPECTATIONS The only question is how many children, and more particularly, how many priestly sons might God bless them with?
- in their religious culture You were either "righteous" or you were a "sinner." You were either "in" or "out." Therefore, it is no surprise that in this culture "barrenness was a woman's and a family's greatest misfortune."an an indicator of being in sin and under the judgment of God...
- *And in defining their expectations for a family, they unknowingly set the stage for future disappointment...* Often when we set our expectations, we also set the stage for our disappointments.
- Life seldom turns out like we thought or hoped it would. Thus we need to be people who hold our hopes and dreams loosely, not clutching them as if there is only one way they can be.
- God is faithful, yet very unpredictable. God loves us but is not controlled by us...God gives us free will but his will prevails....
- As a result, we can comprehend only a small portion of what God is really doing in and with our lives. So it is best to avoid rigid expectations of how and when God should be doing things in and with our lives.

******Have you ever had situations and experiences in which, by the very process of defining your expectations you also planted the seeds of your disappointments?**

Proverbs 16:9 We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.

So With Zechariah and Elizabeth!!!

Luke 5:7 They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

- **Luke quickly introduces an inconceivable fact into the minds of his first-century readers.** With one sentence, Luke packs decades of pain, disappointment, hurt, frustration, self-doubt and misunderstanding into one sentence, with the word “barren” being the most arresting.
- **To be considered upright in God’s eyes, and yet to be barren all these years, was incomprehensible to Luke’s listeners. It was outside a devout Jew’s mindset, it simply could not be.**
- **In Zechariah and Elizabeth’s culture, God didn’t bless “righteous” people that way. Everybody knows that—or do they?**
- **As the decades unfolded, only one conclusion was possible within the family clan’s mindset. Although Zechariah and Elizabeth appeared to be righteous, they must have offended God in some way, and He is punishing them for their sin.**

Do you have your own notions of how God’s blessing system should work?

Have you ever had experiences of “waiting on the Lord?” Waiting for Him to do something that seemed so right? How about waiting for so long that it seemed you were waiting in vain? What are or were you waiting for? How did that waiting affect you?

- **Have you ever had to wait on the Lord during periods of illness, unemployment, singleness, wayward children, infertility, or spiritual dryness? For how long? What challenges, encouragements, affirmations, discouragements, did you experience during those times of prolonged waiting?**
- **Have you had any waiting disappointments that caused you to feel that**

somehow God short-changed you in life?

➤ **Take Heart! The Lord never forgets a prayer!!**

Luke gives us insight into how Zechariah and Elizabeth handled this progressive accumulation of cultural disgrace. They simply persevered in being faithful.

LK 1: 8 One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. 9 As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. 10 While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

- **By the time Zechariah was born in Israel's history, the number of ordinary Levitical priests is estimated to be upwards of 20,000. For organizational purposes, the priesthood was divided into 24 divisions of approximately 850 priests each.**
- **these 24 divisions, would be on duty for one week's service, then off for 23 weeks while the other priestly divisions served in their appointed order. He belonged to the division of Abijah**
- **They ministered at the Temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services.**
- **Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the Temple and burn incense. This great honor could only be done once in a priest lifetime...**
- **Lots were cast to decide who would enter the sanctuary, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah.**
- **But what appeared to be chance was not by chance ... Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place—**

Incense was burned in the Temple twice daily. 9am before the morning sacrifice and 3pm after the evening sacrifice...

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John.

(quit praying that prayer 20 years ago...God’s no answer to their prayer was going to be turned to yes at the right time.)

- **Israel the nation....has been waiting for over 400 years for this promise to come ..**

Malachi 3 “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

Know it is in the no years...where perseverance is taught, practiced and matured...

- **know this my friends every prayer will be answered , every wrong righted, every hurt healed...all the suffering will end...that is what the Christmas promise is all about...we give each other gifts...**
- **God gives us the gift of his promise to heal us to answer our prayers, to bring justice... however the timing and circumstances are in his control...but his promise to do it gives us the courage to face anything and go through it... knowing he has a timing for everything**

end

- *Psalm 27:14... Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*
- *Psalm 130:5&6a I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning.*
- *Proverbs 3:5&6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

- **Persevere...they know that life is always in a preparation mode...a journey**
- **Interrupted by arriving at destinations...yet to begin the journey again**

1. The " Do not be afraid " of unanswered prayer:

Luke 1:5 When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be

afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John.

Matt 6:8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

Psalm 107:42-43

New Living Translation

⁴²The godly will see these things and be glad,

while the wicked are struck silent.

⁴³Those who are wise will take all this to heart;

they will see in our history the faithful love of the LORD.

JN 7:37 ³⁷On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! ³⁸Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" ³⁹(When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, ⁴⁰because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)