

Because we Doubt

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Date: 07 December 2019

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[0 : 00] Do you see what I see? A rabbit or a duck? What seems impossible to work out at first, but you'll get it eventually with some help.

How about this one? Imagine a duck is eating a rabbit. Can you see both of them now? It works as an illusion, but in real life, can someone be both righteous in God's eyes, but unbelieving and not sure of themselves at the same time?

There are a couple in the Gospel of Luke, which we just read out. Zechariah, the husband, is a priest, and his wife, Elizabeth. And this couple is identified in verse 6 of chapter 1 as both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees painlessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. Righteous in God's eyes and blameless in obeying the law, but childless.

The reason is because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. The word but, at the beginning of verse 7, highlight that this is out of expectation, something somewhat unusual.

[1 : 32] What would you normally expect for someone who are considered to be righteous in God's eyes and blameless in obedience? Chinese greet each other in the new year by saying this.

James, can you help us? So, sin is our heart, xian is wishes, si is things, and chen is fulfilled.

So if you put that together, we actually wish each other whatever we wish for will come true. We might expect the same for someone who finds favor in God's sight.

They will get whatever they wish for, but this couple did not have any child. What do you think about them? Are they really righteous and blameless?

If obeying God will get blessing, they do not have the blessing of child. Is there something wrong about their obedience? Let's look at Zechariah.

[2 : 38] His name, his name after a prophet that written the second last book of the Old Testament. From what we have just read, he is old, and he was called to serve in the temple by burning incense.

And then in verse 11, then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

He was startled and gripped with fear. Fair enough to be startled. I will be somewhat startled if someone appeared in front of me suddenly. But gripped with fear, terrified.

What was the reason of that response? One of the reasons for his fear would have to do with his knowledge attached to his own name and the angel.

His name means God remembers. If I think that God remembers both my good and bad deeds, I would be fearful.

[3 : 43] And in the Old Testament, angels were often sent to execute God's judgment. In Genesis 19, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by an angel.

In Exodus, the angel of God brought Israel out of Egypt, led them through the wild wilderness, and drove out all the people in the promised land for them to settle there.

Many examples of angels carry out God's judgment on individuals and ordinations in the book of Zechariah Zechariah and also in the Old Testament.

His fear may have to do with focusing too much on what someone would call the scary side of God. They see God as an unrelenting punisher of wrong and the all-powerful, sovereign ruler that does not care.

One that allows all the suffering and pain without giving any explanation. However, the Bible also talks about how God sent angels to look after widows and those in trouble like Abraham's servant wife Hagar in Genesis 16.

[4 : 56] Or in Judges 13, Samson's mom was barren and visited by an angel before she conceived him. We pick and choose the image of God that most of the time is not the complete picture of what God really is and we become fearful.

Evangelist and apologist Ref. Zechariah says people always tend to have an idea that malevolence is God's doing. Benevolent is evolutionary wisdom, which means when we have a natural disaster, tragedies, or a climate-like event, those are the acts of God.

But if you have a bumper crops, a beautiful day, a close brush with what should have been death but wasn't, a wonderful joy and pleasure of life are not given such beneficent source.

Even though Zechariah is a priest, he is fearful because he did not see God as how God see himself, see him. Like many of us, he obeys God out of fear, out of routine and tradition.

The fact that they are childless would also contribute to their uncertainty and fear. When I marry Vivian, my wife, we plan to enjoy a couple of years with our kids.

[6 : 28] After that, we try for a whole year without any success. So our GP suggested that we should do some tests started with me. And I remember a very mixed feeling of waiting for that test result about my health.

And in one sense, I want a healthy report so that I was not the source of the problem. But that would mean that all the weight of that problem will fall on Vivian.

And if it's what's me, it's a problem fixable. What if it's not? What other option do we have to have children? Millions of questions went through my mind.

Even though they have concluded that it was Elizabeth's barrenness and her old age, Zechariah would also have questioned whether there's something wrong with him.

We were told he observed all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But we weren't told why. Did he try to fix his problem or that uncertainty about himself by being ridiculous in everything he does?

[7 : 39] Did he do everything blamelessly hoping to win the favor of God in getting a child? In Zechariah, the book, chapter 7, verse 5, the word of the Lord Almighty came to Zechariah the prophet to ask his people when they were performing their religious duty, was it really for the Lord that they are doing them?

Are you not just doing the duty for yourself? I used to approach religion with the same kind of mindset, treating it like a tool to better my life, treating it as a moral compass to live a good life. I still fall back into traps of being religious, having an upright, blameless life, but fearful, not 100% sure whether I have done enough.

Do you sometimes feel the same way? Not sure whether you or what you do are acceptable by God. knowing his state of mind, the angel said to Zechariah back in Luke 1.13, 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 will be a joy and delight to you and many will rejoice because of his birth.

[9 : 07] The angel goes on for another three verses focusing on what his son will become and the great things he will achieve and what he needs to do his whole life.

The message of the angel is clearly about his son who will call John and the Lord that he will serve. But the way Zechariah replied so that deep down he did not believe that God can do the impossible of using him in his old age and giving him a son to bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

Zechariah answered the angel how can I be sure of this? I am old man and my wife is well alone in years. The angel said to him I am Gabriel I stand in the presence of God and have been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news and now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens because you did not believe my words which will come true in there upon the time.

The angel Gabriel took offense of Zechariah's question and the statement about himself and his wife. What was wrong with his reply? How can I be sure of this?

I am an old man and my wife is well along in years. When Gabriel was clearly focusing on the great work that God is going to do through his son and the Lord, Zechariah was focusing on himself and his wife.

[10 : 44] He is beyond doubting or questioning. He had decided that God is not going to give him a son or restore Israel in his lifetime. He asked for proof to counter his unbelief.

Another apologist, Os Guinness, pointed out if people are torn between options, unable to make up their minds, or if they are up in the air over something and unsure which side they should come down on, or if they are furiously debating with themselves or hanging back, waiting up their reservation.

There are nothing if not in two minds. This condition of doubleness is the essence of doubt. But Zacharias seems very resolute with his statement about himself and his wife that it is impossible for them to have a child at their conditions.

Zacharias' unbelief comes from looking at his ability and condition instead of listening to and believes that word of God. He relies on his own understanding about his situation, how he sees himself instead of how God sees him and his wife.

So when the angels are pleased to say that it's going to happen right then, then he asks for proof. He asks for proof, a sign of what is going to happen.

[12:12] So God gave him a sign by taking away his ability to speak until the day all that God has said comes true. He literally becomes what he asked for.

He asked for a sign and God made him mute so he has to keep signing for nine months. God listened to what Zachariah asked of him and he became part of the answer to what he asked. People often ask or question whether the Bible is the truth, whether God's way is a way of life we should adopt and embrace. And Jesus said in John 8, 31, 32, to those who believe him, hold to Jesus' teaching, not making an excuse even before you even tried.

Listen carefully to what the Bible tells us about God and how our relationship with God and with others mean to be. Live it out in your life is a way to know the truth and understand how God can do the impossible in your life.

Life has changed for both Zachariah and Elizabeth after Zachariah encountered God. And new life has started in and among them, growing in Elizabeth's tummy.

[13:40] It's a matter of time before the good news of God will fill. We have just seen how the husband responds. Let's now look at the wife Elizabeth. After this, his wife Elizabeth becomes pregnant and for five months remains in seclusion.

Why Elizabeth remains in seclusion for five months? It will be because she is very cautious and careful about her pregnancy. A general rule for a Chinese couple is not to tell anyone about any pregnancy up to three months until the new life is fully formed and settled within the mom.

But why remains a Christian for five months? For what she said in verse 25, she seems to feel her new situation like Zechariah.

The Lord has done this for me. She seems to be focusing on herself and her own condition. Her pregnancy was great news for new life, but too good to be true for her old age.

In these days, he has shown his favor. She is also concerned about how people see her. She considers herself as a disgrace and says, God now has taken away my disgrace among the people.

[14:59] Having a new life is a great thing, but she was too worried to be seen as someone who had been touched by God. Every encounter with God will result in changes.

The changes are done by God. like a baby growing in a woman's tummy. But it's so easy to be caught up and worry about what is happening and forget that you are part of God's great plan of the salvation to this world.

Two self-focused persons, one is unbelieving, another ashamed of their own condition, seen by God as righteous and blameless in their obedience, because it was what God does in and through us that make us righteous and blameless.

God is never wrong and he never makes mistakes. That is a truth we should hold on to, even though at times we are like Zechariah and Elizabeth, not sure about ourselves or God sees us differently to how we see ourselves.

When it's time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord has shown her great mercy and they shared her joy.

[16:21] On the eighth day, they came to circumcise his crowd and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah. But his mother spoke up and said, No, he is to be called John.

They said to her, There is no one among your relative who has that name. She overcome her shame and shared her joy with others at the birth.

But most importantly, eight days after the birth, she repeated what the angel Gabriel said, He is to be called John. Means God is gracious.

I can imagine Zechariah not able to speak, still has gotten through to her about the significance and the meaning of the birth of their son and the importance of trust and obedience towards the message of God.

She can only rely on Zechariah signing God's message to her to be encouraged and God spoke to her through her muted husband by signs. Then they make signs to his father to find out what he would like to name the child.

[17 : 29] He asked for a writing tablet and to everyone's astonishment. He wrote, His name is John. Immediately, his mouth was opened and his tongue set free and he began to speak and praise God.

Zechariah had nine months to face how he used to live his life and to become ready to receive a new life. God addressed his unbelief, his fear, his self-reliance.

A self-centered priest, a husband of a barren wife, become father of the one who bring back many of people to God and go on before the Lord to make people ready for him.

God's words through the angel did come true at that appointed time. Eight days after a son was born to them, Zechariah wrote on the tablet, his name is John.

He fulfilled the proof that he asked for. He became the answer to all his questions about whether God can do the impossible in using him.

[18 : 42] All the answers to our questions about God is often found in the question and the questioner. His name is John means God is gracious. It is declared three times in this passage, God is gracious to Zechariah and Elizabeth by doing the impossible to give them a son at their old age.

God is gracious to this world and his people, you and me, by coming into this world to deal with the curse that humans brought on themselves. Zechariah, after following God's instruction to declare, God is gracious, become a prophet himself, speaks of God's great works throughout history to raise up a saviour for us, to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him. Zechariah means God remembers. We still need Christmas because it tells us that God remembers us and sees us differently. God enables us us to serve him without fear.

God remembers his promise to his people that is recorded in the Bible and fulfilled in the life of Jesus. Learning and remembering God's word, holding to his teaching, you will know the truth and be able to see what God sees in you and understand how God do the impossible in your life through Jesus.

We still need Christmas to remind us that we treat God like what Zechariah is with did. Unbelieving, self-focused and ashamed, but God never see us in the same way as how we see ourselves.

[20 : 35] In Zechariah 2, verse 8, it says that the God, our Father in heaven, sees us as the apple of his eyes. The apple of his eyes are very dear and close to him.

God's word about how he is going to save us and this world did come true at the appointed time at the first Christmas and continue to do so.

Our gracious God did the impossible by turning disgrace and shame to joy. Gracious God did the impossible, changing unbelieving heart to a heart full of praise.

Towards the end of chapter 1 of Luke, joy and praise is a life that God intends for us to live, not unbelieving and ashamed of ourselves.

So praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a strong king of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he said through his holy prophets of long ago.