

Wednesday with the Word

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The Faith of a Mother: The Witness of Elizabeth and the Prophecy of Zechariah

What is your fondest memory of your mother?

What is your fondest memory as a mother?

What is the fondest memory of your wife as a mother?

Introduction: Elizabeth is a woman of faith and she is also a woman who has had to wait in the face of disgrace (see: Sarah, Rachel and Hannah). During this time in history to not be able to conceive a child was a sign of disgrace. Ironically the brunt of this disgrace was directed towards women as the belief was that it couldn't be the man. It was the woman who had the issue. The text even say, "the woman was barren" but so was the man. Unless there was a fertility test done on both of them how do we know whose issue it was? What we do know is there is a problem here:

Luke 1:5-7

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. **7** But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

- Zachariah was a priest
- Elizabeth was one of the daughters of Aaron
- They were both righteous, walking in "all the commandments and regulations....BLAMELESS!"
- They came from good families
- They had done all the right stuff...they were people of faith and they had been faithful
- BUT
- They had no child
- They were now advanced in years / getting on in years = old

- Barrenness = a punishment for sin or a result of God's forgetting the woman

Revisiting the Case of Hannah

1 Samuel 1:9-18

9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. **10** She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. **11** She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and **remember me, and not forget your servant,** but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazarite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

12 As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.

13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. **14** So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." **15** But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." **17** Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." **18** And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

How do we deal with it when it appears we deserve to be blessed and we are not given that thing we have been praying for God to give us?

How do we deal with waiting on God?

How do you feel when you have to wait on God?

Is it easy to wait on God when God is taking God's time, why or why not?

How do you feel when you think you are doing all the right things to position yourself for a blessing and it doesn't appear to be happening?

Are you waiting on God for anything right now? If so what does it feel like? Are you anxious? Are you wavering at times? Do you find it easy to wait?

Before we proceed let me offer this as a biblical principle, not as a formula, to guide our thinking tonight. One of the ways we deal with waiting is looking at the principles contained in this passage:

Principle: a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

Formula: a procedure to be followed

Philippians 4:4-6

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, **let your requests be made known to God;** **7** and the **peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, **will guard your hearts and minds** through Christ Jesus.

Luke 1 - Back to the Story for Tonight

This Luke passage has a lot to do with waiting on God and dealing with how waiting assaults our faith. The longer we wait there is a tendency for us to begin to struggle with believing that God will. We know that God can but will God do it? Will God answer our prayers the way we want God to answer our prayers? How do we deal with it when we have waited, and waited and waited and now it appears that what we had hoped for has passed us by, we are to advanced in years to maintain that hope, or it is hard to maintain that hope? Do we give up, do we start to doubt, do we let go of the prayer request?

A Praying Preacher

Luke 1:8-13

8 Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, **9** he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. **10** Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. **11** Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. **12** When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. **13** But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.”

Zechariah had been praying. He like Hannah had been praying. Now, he is surprised, terrified “fear overwhelmed him” by the appearance of the angel. The angel says, “your prayer has been answered.” Now here is the question(s):

1. Do you believe what you are praying for?
2. Do you believe God is going to answer your prayer(s)?
3. How do you know you believe it?
4. As God moves you to act on what you believe what does that look like?

Do You Believe? How Do You Know?

Luke 1:11-21

11 Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. **12** When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. **13** But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. **14** You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, **15** for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. **16** He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." **18** Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." **19** The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. **20** But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Why, in the midst of all of this did Zechariah respond this way?

Can you sympathize with Zechariah?

Could this be you?

Is there a penalty associated with not believing what we are praying for?

Back to last week....God blesses Zechariah even in his time of little faith! God will be faithful even when we are faithless!

God Silences the Faithless?

Luke 1:21-23

21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. **22** When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. **23** When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

The penalty for not believing was silence. God shut him up. Why?
Could it have been that God didn't want him speaking against what God was going to do?

I don't know why God put him on mute but I do know that when you are trying to believe God for something that you have to silence those who attack your faith.

There are people who don't believe like you believe.

There are people who don't believe what you believe.

There are people who will not believe with you or for you because of their lack of faith and experience with God.

You have to silence those who would attack your faith.

You have to ignore them and don't allow them to attack your spirit.

God put Zechariah on mute and I want to think that Elizabeth was happy about it. I would think that he had been blaming her for a long time for their situation and condition. All he could do now is go along with the program and write on a tablet....

Baby Time

Luke 1:24

24 After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, **25** "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

Can you feel the relief in this response?

Fast Forward: Luke 1:57-66

Luke 1:57-58

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. **58** Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

In the end God came through. It is time to rejoice now but let us not forget the waiting. Let us not forget what it took for them to get here. Let us not forget what it means to wait on the Lord and fight to hold onto our faith in the midst of the waiting. If we remember the waiting the fact that we have received from God what we have been waiting for will make even more thankful. If we forget the waiting we may undervalue the blessing.

We also see that her neighbors, family and friends are now rejoicing with her. The same people who despised her, talked about her and jeered at her are now cheering with her. While we must silence those who don't have faith in midst of our journey we must never ostracize them. We have to understand they are not going through what we are going through. We can't expect them to understand. When God's comes through we have to invite them to see what God has done as a way of testimony to them and to help them believe in the future. Elizabeth welcome all to the celebration. The believing and the unbelieving because in the end it is our hope that God be praised.

The Redemption of Zechariah by way of his Wife: Speak Up!

Luke 1:59-66

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. **60** But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." **61** They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." **62** Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. **63** He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. **64** Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. **65** Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. **66** All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Momma spoke up! The faith of the mother loosed the tongue of the father. Elizabeth's witness is powerful here. We know that she believed because she wasn't silenced. She was able to talk throughout the pregnancy and even after the birth she was still yet talking to God and testifying to the promise God made to her in her prayers. She had heard God, believed God and acted on what she believed. She stood in the midst of this hostile crowd of men and asserted herself. The unbelieving Zechariah still couldn't talk so he was given a tablet. By now I am sure he wanted to shout and he does in Luke 1:67-79

Luke 1:67

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

When we have to wait on the Lord we have to guard our faith and when God comes through we have to give God the praise!