

God Has a Purpose—Both for History and for You

Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife well advanced in years.”

The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. And I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And now you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things happen, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their season.”

The people waited for Zechariah, and wondered why he waited so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he made signs to them and remained speechless.

As soon as the days of his service were fulfilled, he departed to his own home. After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, “Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men” (Luke 1:18-25).

God is a sovereign God. He rules over all times, nations, languages, cultures, races, classes and genders of people. He is working out everything in history according to His plan.

In the New Testament, we learn that God “made from one blood every nation of men to live on the entire face of the earth, having appointed fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Like Elizabeth and Zechariah, you are alive right now at this particular moment because God has something specific for you to accomplish as part of His infinite wisdom and plan. We can start by faithfully worshipping and patiently trusting him as Zechariah and

Elizabeth did, while never giving up praying for the desires of our heart.

The angel tells Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard" (Luke 1:13b). For decades, Zechariah and Elizabeth have been asking God for a child. What have you stopped praying about? God always answers prayer with one of three responses: yes, no or later. Perhaps some people believed God was ignoring Zechariah, but the man kept praying, loving, serving, worshipping God and adoring his wife. God hadn't answered "yes" just yet. God hadn't answered "no" yet, either. God kept answering "later" until finally the day arrived when the answer was "yes." We learn from their example that we should keep praying even when it seems like it's not working.

Elizabeth's words of praise close out this first scene: "Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people" (Luke 1:25). This is a beautiful summary of the doctrine of expiation, one of the most precious doctrines for Christians. We all have things in our lives that we feel dirtied, disgraced, defiled and discouraged by.

The word "reproach" refers to the public shame or disgrace and even reviling that Elizabeth tragically endured because of her barrenness. Practically, this meant she suffered emotional, verbal and spiritual abuse for decades as the other religious, smug, ungracious women would have considered her cursed by God because she was childless. Had Elizabeth sinned? No. Had she done anything wrong? No. She wasn't perfect, but we are told that she loved and served the Lord and was by all accounts a very godly person. Was God cursing her? No. He was just working out His providential plan in His preferred time. His answer to her prayers was "later," and later finally came.

Like Elizabeth, victims who have been sexually, emotionally, mentally, physically or verbally abused can come to God, who takes away our reproach, shame and disgrace. He takes all of

that from us and places it on Himself. When Jesus went to the cross, He endured the cross, scorning its shame for us (Heb. 12:2).

Dear friend, Jesus wants to lift from you today all of your shame and cleanse you completely. He wants to take away your reproach so you can worship, celebrate and enjoy him like Elizabeth, knowing of God's love. He wants to lift that burden so you can lift your voice to worship Him with gladness and freedom.

Have you truly given your shame to Jesus so He could remove that burden of condemnation from you forever? Why not do that right now in prayer by raising your hands and releasing that shame to Him? {eoa}

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