

In His Time

Luke 1:5-25 New American Standard Bible

John the Baptist's Birth Foretold

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 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ And yet they had no child, because Elizabeth was infertile, and they were both advanced in years.

⁸ Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹ Now an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² Zechariah was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped 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 name him John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice over his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF FATHERS BACK TO THEIR CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in her years." ¹⁹ The angel answered and said to 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. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."

²¹ And meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² But 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 repeatedly made signs to them, and remained speechless. ²³ When the days of his priestly service were concluded, he went back home.

²⁴ Now after these days his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵ "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among people."

Introduction

Around this time of the year, we hear about the greatest story of Christ's birth in a manger. It is recorded in two gospels: Matthew and Luke. Under the manger story, though, one story is often buried. The story of another child whose name was John known as the Baptist. In fact, in my 30 years of ministry, I myself rarely preached on John's birth. So, bear with me this morning as I dig out his birth story from dust and share it with you.

Content

Luke the writer begins his gospel account as follows in Chapter 1:

1 Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Luke the physician was a thorough person. Before he wrote down the account of Jesus' life and ministry, he had carefully investigated everything from the beginning interviewing many eyewitnesses. Then, he began with the story of a childless couple: Zechariah, the husband, and Elizabeth, the wife. From their story, I am going to draw three lessons in our walk with God. *Do not judge by the look. Wait for God's time. Align your perspective with God's value system.*

Do not judge by the look.

⁶ They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ And yet they had no child,...

To this rather unknown married couple, the Bible gives a high compliment: they were both righteous before God, keeping all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. Yet, they were childless.

Back in those days, when a married woman failed to birth a child, folks would suspect that something was wrong with the wife, first, then, the husband, or both. Such understanding was rooted in people's mentality that God blesses the righteous. And vice versa. E.g. There was a man born blind (John 9:1). The disciples asked Jesus. Whose fault is that? Their actual words were: "Rabbi, who **sinned**, this man or his parents, that he would

be born blind?” (John 9:2). Jesus answered, “*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him* (John 9:3).

What Jesus is teaching here is this: Do not judge anyone’s misfortune or yours based on the outside look. Even though a person is very righteous before God, keeping all commandments of God, that person may lack in his or her life something we call blessings such as health or children. Keep in mind: someone’s ill-fated life may have nothing to do with what you may think it is. Furthermore, you never know how their life will unfold later as the display of God’s work. Do not judge anyone’s life by the outside look.

Wait for God’s time.

For your prayer has been heard (v. 13). ---For years, Zechariah the husband had been praying for his wife to bear a child. It eventually came true, but not at the time when they wanted but at a much later time. At a time when they almost had given up on their hope. Here’s a lesson for our prayer life: although God says yes to your prayer request, it may take time to come true, so learn to patiently wait for God’s time. Your prayers will be answered, not in human time (chronos), but in God’s time, (kairos).

A quick review on the types of answers to our prayers. There are three: Yes, No, or Wait. It is relatively easy to explain the Yes’s and No’s. The tricky one is the Wait’s. For instance, Zechariah and Elizabeth had to wait for a long time. To the point where they became old. Beyond the child-bearing age. The Scripture doesn’t specify how old they were, but Zechariah said to the angel, “*I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in her years* (v. 18).”

So, don’t give up on your prayers after praying only a year or two. Consider Zechariah and his wife’s case one more time. Although it was clearly God’s will for them to have a son, but the son had to be born in God’s time, not theirs. Our time is Now. God’s time maybe later.

Recently, I have been pondering a Word of God: *Commit your way to the Lord and trust in Him* (Psalm 37:5). I know God has heard my prayer. But I am learning to wait patiently for the answer. With faith and trust in Him. One thing is for sure. God knows what the best for me is. He knows what He is doing. E.g. A captain of a boat turns the boat in the nick of time to prevent the collision with a rock in the sea. God’s time is always perfect. Never too early. Never too late. In His time, He will answer your prayers. Just in the nick of time.

Align Your Perspective with God's Value System.

¹⁵ *For he will be great in the sight of the Lord;*---Note here, in verse 15, the angel prophesied that John the Baptist would be great in God's sight. So great that even Jesus testified to it: *I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*" (Luke 7:28). Let's check it out if you would agree with the angel and Jesus on this account.

Let's compare two individuals here. John the Baptist and King Herod Antipas (the son of King Herod in Luke 1) who executed John. Who was greater between the two? In view of the world, King Herod was greater than John the Baptist. In God's perspective, however, John was greater than King Herod. Consider the way John the Baptist died. Few of us would call it a blessing the way he died. In fact, he was executed, to be exact, beheaded. Unfairly. With no proper trial! He was even buried with his head missing! All because of one woman's (Herodias) wrath over his comment on her unlawful marriage to her brother-in-law (Matthew 14:8).

In human eyes, John died in a very undignified way. How come, then, God calls him great in His sight? *Among those born of women no one was greater than John?* Jesus says. We need to align our value systems with God's not with the world's. In the world, John's life was a big failure. Even a pity. But God calls it a success, and among those born of women no one was greater than he. Whose value system would you follow? E.g. *Blessed are those who are poor, who are hungry, who weep now, are you if people hate you on account of the Son of Man* (The Beatitudes in Luke 6:20-22).

Conclusion

One man lost his four children in a tragic boat accident. Would you judge that something must have been wrong with his family? Save your judgment until later.

For those who wait for their prayers answered, here's a beautiful promise of God: *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* (Romans 8:28). Commit your way to the Lord. Wait for Him and trust in Him. God makes all things beautiful in His time.

Use God's standards for success or failure of your life. Not the worldly standards. What really matters is whether you fulfill God's purpose and plan in your life. Learn to look at your life as God does. Do not follow or listen to the worldly values. Consider John the Baptist. Amen.