



The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

¹⁸Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this for certain^a? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years^b.” ¹⁹The angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God^c, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news^d. ²⁰And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words^e, which will be fulfilled in their proper time^f.”

^a 1:18 **How will I know this for certain.** Is it wrong to question God? Certainly not, but there is more than simple questioning going on here. This is doubt. This is unbelief. How often do you ask God for something and have an angel show up in the room with the answer?

^b 1:18 **I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.** Does this angelic announcement to an elderly couple sound familiar? Should we wonder at the discipline meted out when Zacharias was talking to an angel just like father Abraham did? Zacharias had the advantage of biblical hindsight that father Abraham did not have.

The problem was that Zacharias thought his identity was based on human standards. When you find your identity in human labels (old, divorced, clinically depressed...) you have an excuse to doubt God.

^c 1:19 **I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.** The angel Gabriel appears in Scripture at strategic times and places. He was sent to Daniel to explain his end times vision (Daniel 8:16) and to encourage him (Daniel 9:21). He was sent with birth announcements to Zacharias in this text and later to Mary (1:26). Notice that Gabriel identified himself right after Zacharias identified himself. Gabriel stands in the presence of God. Is this a better position than that of the priest in the temple?

Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “SEE,” He says, “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.” But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. Hebrews 8:1-6

^d 1:19 **I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.** What a contrast. The angel says, “Good news: God says you’re gonna be a Daddy.” Zacharias says, “Bad news: We’re too old for that.” You have to believe angels unless they are contradicting the word of God (Galatians 1:8).

^e 1:20 **you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words.** Zacharias was not struck dead as he might have feared, for he was doing what God had commanded priests to do. The reason for the stern discipline he received from the Lord is that he questioned a direct message from God. Abraham and Sarah doubted to be sure, but Zacharias was working with a couple thousand more years of revelation from God than Abraham had.

^f 1:20 **which will be fulfilled in their proper time.** The word translated “time” refers to specific time period. In other words, God did not leave this prophecy open-ended. And this would not be just any time, but the “proper time.”

The Gospel of Luke
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²¹The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple^a.
²²But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them^b; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute^c. ²³When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home^d.
²⁴After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months^e, saying, ²⁵“This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me^f, to take away my disgrace among men^g.”^h

^a 1:21 **The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple.** Note the picturesque language (imperfect tense) of people who *were waiting* and *were wondering*. There was a nervousness about the temple because the fellow at the heart of the action had not returned. Because of the history of disasters during priestly service, even the daily ministry in the Holy Place must not have been considered mundane. This trip was taking longer than normal and, based on Luke’s use of a word often translated “marveled,” the people were more than simply curious.

^b 1:22 **when he came out, he was unable to speak to them.** This may have been the point at which the people were accustomed to hearing the priestly benediction:

The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace. Number 6:24-26

But the priest could not pronounce it this time. It is possible, based on the signs people used to communicate with him after John’s birth (1:62), that Zacharias also had his hearing temporarily taken from him.

^c 1:22 **they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.** The Moses-like glow on Zacharias’ face must have communicated as much as his novice sign language.

^d 1:23 **When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.** We do learn something about the character of this man here. He became disabled because of the hazards of his job, but he stayed until his duty was done.

^e 1:24 **After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months.** God keeps His word whether we believe it or not. In our day we tend to interpret this as her reasonable desire for privacy. Our culture might even put shame on her. This was very different. While we are not told why she secluded herself, it must have made quite a splash when she went back into the marketplace the first time.

^f 1:25 **This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me.** Even though Zacharias was prevented from giving the blessing, “The Lord make His face shine on you,” that blessing had come to Elizabeth.

^g 1:25 **take away my disgrace among men.** Compare the favor of God and disgrace before men in verse 25. The reason the fear of man is such a snare for us is that we focus on the way people think and ignore what God thinks. The pregnancy of the old lady was the end of her shame, not the start of it.

^h 1:18-25 This is an uneasy lesson because most of us, like Zacharias, are also a little skeptical about God coming through for us. Sure, He did it for the big names, but that was in another century. Doubt is a particular evil because it calls into question the very character of God. That is why James called the doubter a “doubled-minded” and “unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). But God does answer prayer and He does act on behalf of His people. Here are some reasons you should believe God instead of doubting Him:

1. You know His character. Was this priest catechized in the character and power of God? If you do not know God’s character it is not because you are untaught. Even the youngest Christian knows Genesis 1:1. What does it mean to call out in prayer to the almighty maker of heaven and earth?

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2. Your identity is not defined by your limits but by who you are in Christ. Zacharias put forward all the human reasons God could do what He always does. He specializes in working through the weak because that makes Him look good. What is your excuse?
 3. His delay in answering your prayers reveals more about you than it does about Him. After so long do you really think patient endurance is in order? Are you getting to the point where you would be surprised if He acted? This is similar to the incident Luke recorded in Acts 12 when the church was praying for Peter, who was in jail, and did not believe when he came to the door.
 4. You have been given promises by someone who has never lied. God spoke through an angel here. That is out of the ordinary. But you have the completed Scriptures. And you probably read them—at least in church. Doubting God when He has just given you a promise is worse than doubting low pressure centers during a hurricane. Pay attention to what you study in God's word. Pay attention in church and Bible study. So often God brings us a message and then checks to see if we were listening.
 5. You are in a position to show others who your God is. Harsh judgment? What if Zacharias had taken his excuses outside the temple?

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