

My high-school athletic coaches were (I am sure) just like yours. They always tried to motivate us with fear and shame. They always seemed to have a powerful voice that was only heard when we did something wrong. “*Hofman! Run on the ball of your feet – not your heels!*” (I was a long-distance runner.) “*Push it... push it!... More tenacity! More... more... more!*” Red in the cheeks and veins in his neck popping, my coach would scream or blow his whistle. I never really knew him outside of track practice, so I only knew him as an angry man. (Oh! Wait!) Coach Standiford was also our school’s driver education teacher... (And do you know what?) I got to see his red cheeks... tightened jaw... and bulging veins – THERE... too!.

Many people have a similar view of God. They believe He’s a grumpy old man who has to get his way... and that when He doesn’t... He will shame... guilt... and scare people to get them in line. ... Although most wouldn’t say it out loud... deep down many believers think of God as “*the God who is out to get me.*” ... That God is waiting for us to mess up so He can meet His divine quota for punishing sin. ... Perhaps this comes from a particular teaching or from a bad experience with a church or a Christian... but either way... this is how many functionally view God.

But when we open the Bible... we encounter a very different God. (The God Who delights. The God Who sings. The God Who pursues. The God who saves.

Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ *The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save;*

he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

We have a powerful reminder (today) of this correct image of God. We will see how merciful He really is. ... He always keeps His promises – even when we have been very unfaithful to Him.

On the day Elizabeth gave birth... (her husband) Zacharias could neither speak nor hear... because he had initially doubted the angel (Gabriel's) message. ... Zecharias had not responded to Gabriel's announcement with faith in the miraculous intervention of God... and as a result... Zecharias had been made mute. For nine months (a time in which Elizabeth basked with joy in the wondrous news) Zecharias had been in seclusion from others (because he could not communicate)... a time in which he had to live and work through his failure of faith.

I did not point something out when we covered all this earlier in Luke 1:20. But I want to mention it now. ... *Zecharias's punishment of silence* paralleled the nation of Israel at that time. ... (You see) they too had failed to obey... and consequently had heard no new message from God and produced not one word from a prophet for *four hundred years*. ... With the birth of John... however... the infant cry of a prophet pierced the silence. In time... he would bring the word of God to His covenant people and call them to repentance. God is mercifully pursuing His undeserving people.

The birth of a baby boy in Israel was a very joyous occasion. William Barclay writes:

As the time approached for the baby to be born, friends of the family and musicians would congregate near the home. When the baby was

born, everyone would be informed of whether it was a boy or a girl. If it was a boy, the musicians would start playing their instruments and the people would sing. There was great rejoicing.

On the other hand, if it was a girl, the musicians would leave in silence. There was a saying, 'The birth of a male child causes universal joy, but the birth of a female child causes universal sorrow.'"

Those same sentiments continue today as mothers are aborting their babies if they find out they are carrying a girl... especially in countries like China... India... and even in the United States. ... Let me say right here that I am the father of two daughters. I thank God for my girls and I'm very proud to be their father.

Elizabeth has given birth to a boy and there was great joy. She not only had a baby... but it was also (her culture's preference) - a boy. ... This was no surprise to her... however... because the angel Gabriel told her husband that she would have a boy and his name would be John. ... She was already dressing up her nursery with blue instead of pink. What God had promised... came to pass.

Luke 1:57

The promise was fulfilled just as God said it would be. ... And He was not late in fulfilling His promise. God is punctual. ... (LISTEN!)... God keeps His Word - no matter how incredible His promise may be. ... For this woman to have a baby in her old age... would require a miracle. ... God did keep His Word.

Our responsibility as Christians is to trust in the Lord... His Word... and to be patient in waiting for Him to fulfill His Word. ... Zecharias and Elizabeth had to wait patiently for the child to be born in God's time.

In the same manner... we need to learn to wait on God and His timing. Even though it is hard sometimes... give God the opportunity to lead... guide... direct your life... answer your prayers... and provide for your needs... with His Own timing. ... The promise of the Rapture and the Second Coming may seem incredible... but He is going to return V E R Y soon and remove the Christians from this planet. ... We are to patiently wait for His coming and serve Him until He returns.

If you are sick... single... stressed... or strained financially... give the Lord time to answer your prayers and work in your life. ... Don't rush the Lord. God is powerful enough to do that which seems absolutely impossible. Never underestimate His power and the power of His Word.

Luke 1:58

Several Bible commentators pointed out to that – from the wording of this verse... it seems that no one had known about Elizabeth's pregnancy. Apparently both Zecharias AND Elizabeth were in seclusion of some sort. Elizabeth hid the fact that she was pregnant from many of her friends and family – who only now learned about it. ... So when the neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very kind to her - they rejoiced.

It is not very difficult to assume that among the neighbors and relatives were those who had heaped reproach upon Elisabeth for her barrenness. (They must have been eating crow...) So the birth of John the Baptist was a special blessing to Elisabeth in that it stopped the painful reproach she had been experiencing for many years. ... But in spite of the great rejoicing at the birth of John the Baptist... there arose a great dispute about the new baby.

Luke 1:59-61

A Jewish boy was circumcised the eighth day after his birth. It was a special day when friends and relatives would assemble for the occasion... and the child would be named then. ... The crowd protests the choice... complaining that no one in Zecharias's family bears this name. ... Such a naming is not customary!

It looks like the relatives and friends are poking their nose into business that does not belong to them. Notice it says, "*THEY called him Zacharias.*" This was NOT the sentiment of Elisabeth or Zacharias at all. ... Elisabeth takes a strong stand against the crowd here. ... This was not easy because these folks were her friends and family. ... She puts the brakes on the crowd's name and basically says, "*No, his name will not be Zacharias. His name will be John.*"

Elisabeth is complying with God's instructions even though this group disregards her opinions and stands against her. But she does not cave into peer- pressure... or the popular practice of the day of naming the baby after someone in the family.

Elisabeth surprised the crowd using the strong negative particle οὐχί (*ouchi*) "NO!" Rather... the child's name is John. ... She showed her obedience to Gabriel's telling Zecharias that they are to name him John (in verse 13 of this same chapter.)

Since Elisabeth offers the name and Zecharias is mute... the crowd may be thinking that Elisabeth is picking a name without Zecharias's consent... and so they wish to appeal the choice to the father.

Luke 1:62-63

Verse 62 said that they made signs to his father (Zecharias) – But why? Zecharias was mute – not **deaf**! ... Or was he also deaf? I believe that he was... and this is why I have been saying that. The Greek word that is used (κ ο φ ω ζ) is sometimes translated “mute”... sometimes translated “deaf”... and sometimes it means both (like when idols are described – they are deaf and mute.) But there was no reason for the friends and family to use signs to communicate with him – unless he was deaf AND mute.

Even though Zecharias had failed before... God gave him a *second chance* at faith. ... He gives the same to us today. “This was a return from the point of unbelief, and the exercise of will in the appointed way.”

Zechariah’s reply is emphatic. His name *is* (ἐστίν, *estin*) John. ... Zechariah does not say it *shall be* John. I want you to notice Zecharias’ emphatic response. Elizabeth said “*his name shall be John...*” in verse 60. But Zecharias said: “*His name is John.*” (You see) for Zechariah... the child had a name from the time of the angel’s announcement. There was no choice for him. His reply indicates obedience and submission to God’s message. He now shows a faith that had been missing (earlier.)

The Lord expects the same obedience from us, too. He wants our obedience... even in those areas that may seem small or insignificant. Our obedience is a big deal to the Lord.

Our convictions (our faith in Christ and His Word) will be challenged. No doctrine... no conviction... no truth of our faith will be left unchallenged. Not only will skeptics dispute our faith... but sometimes... (as seen here)... our closest friends and relatives will also oppose us. ... That does not discredit our faith (however) and it should not silence the declaration of our faith.

Let us be like Elizabeth and speak up for the truth no matter how outnumbered we may be. ... May we stand up for what is right... even if we stand alone.

If your passion is to be popular or accepted by a worldly group of people... you will have difficulty standing for Christ. The craving for acceptance indicates its importance to you. The priority you place on popularity... or the acceptance of the crowd reveals the influence of your peers on your life. If you are going to learn to stand alone for Christ... then the opinion of God must – must - must (!) be more important to you than the opinions of men. Pleasing the Lord needs to take precedence over pleasing people. You have to come to a point where you learn to die to yourself and make the Lord your only master. You can't have two. ... [P A U S E] ...

“John” - *Yohanan* (which means “the Lord has given grace”) was a most fitting name for the forerunner of the Savior. The fact that God selected the name “John” depicts that God was breaking 400 years of silence with Israel... He was INDEED giving grace to His rebellious people. God initiated John's coming... John's mission... John's power... and John's name. This messenger from God would warn the nation of their impending judgment and doom – unless they repented. God wanted them to turn from their darkness and sin... and urged them to do so.

But there is another point that I would like to draw from our narrative (here.) ... This crowd at John's circumcision is typical of the world today. How many times have servants of the Lord and the work of the Lord been given the wrong names or incorrectly labeled by the world? ... Those who are wicked have difficulty in calling that which is right or wrong by its correct

name. ... People who are wicked tend to call that which is evil – good... and that which is good... is considered as evil.

If a Christian has convictions and won't compromise with sin... he is considered as snooty... stuck-up... and judgmental. If he takes a stand against premarital sex and drunkenness... he is considered narrow minded... out of touch... or from another planet. ... If he stands against abortion... he is accused of being a dangerous nut and violating someone's rights. ... If he stands against homosexuality... he is accused of being intolerant... a bigot... and promoting hate crimes. ... Yet homosexual and racially motivated rioters are allowed to show extreme violence... disregard law and order... and burn and destroy - without repercussion.

Sinful living is mislabeled by society. Homosexuality is not called an "abomination"... but an alternate lifestyle. Adultery is not labeled as sin... but as "a temporary fling." When a nation or an individual rejects the Word of God and the authority of Scripture (when people fail to recognize evil as "evil")... that nation or person loses their common sense and invites God's discipline.

There is another reaction to Zechariah's confirmation of John's name. His speech returns immediately following his reply. The sign accomplished its divinely given task, so the handicap disappears as the angel promised. God's word comes to pass.

Luke 1:64

The old priest's last word had been one of doubt; his first word now was one of delight. Then he had wanted a sign; now he wanted to sing.

Think of the spiritual voltage here! ... Zechariah has endured nine months of speechless frustration... and during the last three a young woman kept talking and asking questions by making signs to him... and he could only respond by scribbling answers on his writing pad. ... Now all that pent-up frustration poured out in loud... emotional praise.

Obedience brought liberation and it will do the same for you. ... Obedience breaks the shackles of sin and disobedience. ... God lifted the shackles of chastisement from Zacharias. ... When you submit to God's authority and Word... He will break the shackles of your sin, too. ... Victory over sinful habits will help you to be what God wants you to be.

Luke 1:65-66

The gossip network covering the region of Judea lit up like a Christmas tree! This baby's birth to an elderly couple... their strange insistence on an unusual name... the supernatural muteness and then the instantaneous cure caused wonder to fall upon the whole neighborhood. ... Unusual news travels fast... and as the story spread... everyone reflected on these events. ... Certainly this was a special child with a special destiny. ... It was obvious to everyone that the hand of the Lord was on John in a special way.

Fear fell upon all as they realized that God was in their midst. People who were struck by this fear glorified God and were inspired to worship Him with renewed passion. It was a healthy fear. Why do I say that...? Because they pondered their significance... wondering particularly what these incidents might indicate (with respect to the character and future role of this child.) ... They said, *What then will this child turn out to be?* Their hopes

ran high. ... They experienced a healthy “awe” (or “fear”) in the presence of divine activity. They could sense God was at work... and an exhilarating reverence coursed through their souls. This resulted in ongoing spiritual conversations ... [P A U S E] ...

Our passage today stresses that God’s word comes to pass. Zechariah pictures one who learns his lesson and submits in trust to God’s promise. His period of pain and reflection led him to realize that God does what He says.

You may be waiting patiently for God to work. If the truth were known... perhaps you are waiting *impatiently* for God to work. But you are waiting. Perhaps you are holding onto a promise from God... a message of hope you once found in His Word. ... And clinging to this promise has kept you from falling into a dark abyss of despair.

Let me encourage you to keep a tight grip on that promise. ... Would any of His promises to you include *that He will never leave you nor forsake you...*? Do you cling to Romans 8:38 “*All things work together for good to those who are in Christ Jesus...*”? Hold onto such promises... just like the remnant of Israel clung to the closing words of Malachi’s oracle through four hundred years of dark silence.

Godly men and women waited on the Lord’s perfect timing, trusting His Word: “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5). They waited and watched for the appearing of the forerunner, knowing the dawn of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2) would soon dispel the darkness.

It is said that the night is darkest just before the dawn. The “days of Herod, king of Judea” (Luke 1:5) could not have been darker. Then ... “the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son” (1:57). What glorious news!

Sometime later... Zacharias composed a prophetic psalm... one that is dripping with Old Testament quotations and allusions. ... Tradition has given this hymn the title “*Benedictus*,” as that is the first word in the Latin translation. ... Zacharias’s “Benedictus” is a hymn of praise on behalf of the nation. He acknowledges that God is faithful to an unfaithful people.

Luke 1:57-80

Just outside Carlsbad, CA, a chaotic scene unfolded as several cars stopped in the middle of the I-5 freeway to grab money that spilled out. At 9:15 a.m., the back doors of an armored truck popped open and bags of \$1 and \$20 notes burst open across the Interstate. One patrol officer described the scene as “free-floating bills all over the freeway.”

Some motorists thought it was "Free money" and were grabbing handfuls of cash and celebrating their good fortune. Others posted stories on social media platforms, sharing with their followers their good luck.

While some returned their bounty, others drove away from the scene. The authorities warned that they would be watching the videos posted online and all the money had to be returned within 48 hours to avoid criminal charges. Imagine the disappointment of those who thought they had easy money.

It is easy to have our hope and affections set on the wrong things. But believing that God will fulfill His promises to us will never disappoint us.

Keep a tight grip on His promises to you.