

Lessons for Life

by John McGregor

The sermon explores the faith journey of Zacharias and Elizabeth, emphasizing the challenges of trials, time, and truth while celebrating the triumph of God's promises fulfilled in their lives.

Duration: 34:33

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 7:37, Galatians 6:9

Topics: "Lessons"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by apologizing for not being present at the previous week's Life Group presentation. He then reads a verse from John 7:37, where Jesus invites anyone who is thirsty to come to him and drink. The sermon focuses on seeking God's face, studying the gifts of the Spirit, and understanding what it means to be a witness and advance God's kingdom. The speaker emphasizes the importance of walking by faith and believing in God, using examples of growing the church and organizing a crusade for Billy Graham.

Transcript

A priest named Zacharias in the division of Abijah, and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren.

They were both advanced in years. Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. The whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to him standing on the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine nor liquor, and be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

It is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children and the disobedient to the attitude of righteousness, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Zacharias said to the angel, How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. The angel answered and said to him, I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

And behold, you shall 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 in their proper time. The people were waiting for Zacharias and were wondering at his delay in the temple, but when he came out he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. He kept making signs to them and remained mute.

When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. After these days Elizabeth, his wife, became pregnant and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 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 from among men. And over to verse 57.

Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and her relatives were heard that the Lord had displayed his great mercy toward her, and they were rejoicing with her. And it happened that on the eighth day when they came to circumcise the child, that they were going to call him Zacharias after his father.

But his mother answered and said, No indeed, he shall be called John. And they said to her, There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name. And he made signs to his father as to what he wanted him to be called.

He asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, His name is John. They were all astonished, and at once his mouth was opened, his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God. Fear came on all those living around them, and all these matters were being talked about on all the hill country of Judea.

All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, What then will this child turn out to be? For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him. And just keep your Bibles open there. Sean, come and join me for a moment.

I tried to share with you last Sunday a little bit about Sean's small group on Thursday, but there's more to it than I realized, so I figured it's easier to get the guy himself. And it reminded me of Leighton Ford preached for Billy Graham one day, and somebody was sitting beside Leighton in the meeting the next night when Billy spoke, and Leighton said, Were you here last night? And he said, No. Why listen to the organ grinder when you can see the real monkey? So yeah, sorry I wasn't here last week.

I was working while everybody was doing their presentation for the life group. I'm going to just talk about what it's about. I'll just read a couple verses to help me explain to you what the whole group is going to be about.

John 7, 37. Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.

But this he spoke of the Spirit, who knows who believed in him were to receive, for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. And we're just going to be studying about spiritual gifts. And

I'm really excited, like as I'm studying about this, God's been kind of revealing stuff to me, and I'm learning as I go too.

And I think the main thing about this group is we're going to be seeking God's face, and we're going to just come to Jesus, and we're going to thirst, and we're going to hunger after him, and we're going to seek his face together. And just like I said, if anyone is thirsty, come to me. And then on top of that, he gives us this promise that from his innermost being, rivers of living water will flow from us.

And he's talking about the Spirit of God. And how exciting is that, that the Spirit of God flows from us, that through us, God reveals himself to other people. And I'll just read another verse, 1 Corinthians 12, 7, I think.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And manifest means to make clear or to reveal. And that's just really exciting, that God reveals himself through us.

God makes himself clear through us. And each one of us, God has given a manifestation for the common good, that we're his sheep, we hear his voice, and God wants to prophesy through us. God wants to speak to his people through us.

There's people here that God has divinely enabled to heal the sick, and to raise the dead, and for signs and wonders and like that. And that's what it's about. We're going to seek God's face, and we're going to study about the gifts of the Spirit.

And we're going to learn what it means to be a witness. We're going to learn what it means to advance his kingdom. And we're going to partner with God.

Not saying that I have arrived there, I'm learning as I go. I'm seeking his face. I'm hungering after him.

And that's what we're just going to do. On Thursday night, seven o'clock, be there. Be square.

Thanks, Sean. See, he said it much better than I did last week. And so, sorry buddy, I wasn't implying that you're the real monkey.

So, I repent of that. In Luke's gospel, as we started off last week, we looked at the introduction and why he had penned the words that the Holy Spirit gave to him. And the next section here deals with Zachariah and Elizabeth.

And so, that's what we want to spend a few moments on together this morning. And I want to just walk through the text and see the things that are of tremendous encouragement and value to you and me today. When you think about this couple, the first thing I'd like you to think about is that they had the challenge of trials.

And their particular trial that's mentioned is childlessness. But many times we just leave it there. But when you think about the challenge of trials, there are all kinds of them.

And there's a great deal to learn from Zacharias and Elizabeth when you think about trials. Anybody here who's never had any trials or difficulties? No, we all understand that, right? And so, we see here the first thing that I would say to you is, even righteous people suffer. And sometimes there's this idea that because we're a Christian, everything should be clear sailing and there should never be any problems.

But this teaches us so clearly that even righteous people suffer. As you look at the text and what it is saying to us about Zacharias and Elizabeth in verse 6, it says that they were righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. That's a tremendous testimony about where they are with God.

And yet, they still know that there are trials in life. And that's true, I believe, in all of our lives at one time or another. And so as you think about this, just notice with me that the trial is not a judgment.

It is not a punishment from God. And sometimes we have the idea that if things are not where we think they should be, there's some kind of punishment or, oh, I've done something wrong, or it's just me. This is kind of my life, and that's how it goes.

But just notice now, these are righteous people who are walking in fulfilling the commandments of God. And so, it's not about that. It's not a judgment.

It's not a punishment. In fact, they are loved and chosen by God. And as you see here, there comes an announcement to them.

An angel comes. And I have a good, vivid Irish imagination, and I can picture Zacharias at the altar of incense doing his priestly duty. And then there stands this angel, and it says he was troubled.

Zacharias was troubled, and he was fearful because of the appearance of the angel. Now angels are messengers sent on special duty from the Lord, and this is Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. And there are some people who say that Jesus is a good man, Jesus is a prophet, Jesus, some people teach, is the Archangel Michael.

There's all kinds of erroneous teaching about who Jesus is. But would you notice with me that as Gabriel comes and makes the announcement about the coming of John the Baptist into the world, he also says that this one, John, will be the forerunner for him who is the King of angels. He's not an angel.

He's the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And as you just ponder, you know, the effect of things as the announcement happens to Zacharias and the troubling and fear that he's experiencing, and then go a step further, it just tells us that in verse 24 that when he had gone back home, Elizabeth became pregnant. But just picture his going home.

Hi Zacharias, I'm so glad you're home. Is there something wrong? What's going on? Just think about the effect when Zacharias writes for her. And in Hebrew, it would be from the wrong side for us.

So get used to it, you Hebrew scholars. How do you think she must have felt when he wrote, an angel came to announce that we are to have a son? You see, the gospel of Luke, as with the other gospels, is about God speaking into human hearts and human lives. And this morning, as you come together to worship, it is the Spirit of God who takes the Word of God and speaks it into our hearts and into our lives and into our circumstances and into our trials.

And you know, when you think as righteous people, others must have looked at them and said, oh my, look at all the problems they have. But when God answers and he speaks into their lives, how powerful is that? How many of you have ever read Pilgrim's Progress? I see those three, four hands. Five, six, nine.

It's a very good book. It was written by a man walking with God, but he was in Bedford jail when John Bunyan wrote it. And he was suffering, but out of that suffering came such a tool that God has blessed over the centuries, and it's become a classic for us to read.

Second thing I want to notice this morning, just in our text, as we think about Zechariah and Elizabeth, is that they faced not only the challenge of trials, but the challenge of time. Time. A long time had gone by since they began praying.

But you know, we read in Galatians 6 and verse 9 a promise from God. This is what it says. For we shall reap in due season, if we faint not.

You see, we tend to think that prayers, our prayers are forgotten or unanswered, but the prayer is not rejected just because the answer is long in coming. You see that? That's one of the powerful things that you see when you look at this couple. They had prayed, yes, and trusted, yes, and walked in righteousness and in his truth, yes.

And that prayer was never rejected just because it was long in coming. And I guess I would say to you, when you think about the child that is spoken of, how sweet it is to know that this child who answers that long time prayer is also the instrument of God. Wonderful.

And in this little section too, we see the nature of true greatness. The angel is speaking to Zacharias, and he's telling him a little bit about what his son is going to be like. And he's saying that he will be great in the sight of God.

Oh, just stop for a minute and think about that. What would you feel as one who's about to become a parent, and you hear the word coming from heaven that says, this child is going to be great in the sight of God? I don't think that Caesar in Rome was too worried about John when he was born. I don't think he took any notice of him when he went into the wilderness to be trained by the Holy Spirit.

But I'll tell you what, he's a man who's greater in the sight of God than all the Caesars put together. That's the measure of true greatness. And I think about how God blesses this couple, not only with the announcement, but some ongoing information.

You see how the Lord is such an encourager? It would have been enough, I think, for me if he had said, listen, you're going to have this child. I would have said, well, you know what I would have said, but the Lord goes on through the angel to say, and this child is going to be great in the sight of God. And this passage also teaches me that it is never too early, no one is ever too young to receive the grace of God.

Because it tells us that John would be filled with the Spirit of God, where? In the womb. How young is that? You see, all the information that the Spirit of God is giving here to Zachariah and Elizabeth. And it goes on to say what a great minister before God he's going to be, because he's going to turn hearts to God.

And sometimes I've pondered, Lord, what is a preacher supposed to be? Is he supposed to be an administrator? Is he supposed to be a counselor? Is he supposed to be a good accountant? And is he supposed to be able to, you know, do everything under the sun? But the call of a good minister is to turn hearts to God, period. Oh, my friends, you see what definition the Scriptures give to us? God was not only touching a couple, but he's preparing to change a nation through this one life. And oh, how I love that thought.

You see, you never know what God is going to do with just one life. We were blessed on Friday. Roberta's not here this morning because she's in Winnipeg, and we have a nice new granddaughter called Morgan.

You never know what God is going to do with one life. And you never know what he's going to do with yours as you're fully surrendered to him. The third thing I want to just look at in the text here, not only the challenge of trials and the challenge of time, but also the challenge of truth.

Zacharias is looking at an angel. How would you feel if somebody stood in front of you right from nowhere to, there they are, and said, I've come from the presence of God, from the face of God, with a message for you? I think sometimes we're pretty hard on Zacharias. But I'll tell you, when God interrupts, he just, wow, there is the reality of eternity standing there in the temple, in the place of worship, and Zacharias is looking right at him.

And I say it's the challenge of truth, because where did Gabriel get his announcement? God gave it to him, and he gave it to Zacharias. And Zacharias says, okay, well, you know, I'm kind of old, and my wife is old. I identify.

How do I know these things are true? And isn't that the question when it comes to the Scriptures? How do I know these things are true? It is really the challenge of truth, isn't it? And I'm sure all of us work with or bump into folk who say, well, I'm glad that that works for you, that you have faith. That's wonderful, but I don't think that that works for me. How do I know that these things are true? And you know, in that moment, I think about the power of unbelief.

That's how we, when we face the challenge of truth, when we fail to believe the Word of God, look at what happens in Zacharias' life. Silence. Silence.

And you see, unbelief is like that. It shuts us down. It closes us up.

It moves us away from stepping and walking by faith. You think about the privilege and the portion of the angels in the very presence of God, looking upon His face, carrying without question that message to a human heart. And in our humanity, there comes a flow of questions.

But the Scriptures say that the just shall live by faith. You think about Hebrews chapter 11, there's a whole chapter of world changers. How did they change the world? By their strength and power? By their ability? No.

By faith. By believing God. By trusting Him.

I have a friend in the central Philippines. His name is Jing Dubrico. He's a district superintendent of district superintendents.

He has 60 alliance districts underneath his watchful eye, could we say. And years ago, when we were preaching together, he got up and in a North American conference, preached a message and said, I want to start to speak to you today about big. Well, he is.

He's big. And especially for a Filipino, he's big. Do you know what his message was about? Belief in God.

And he talked about how at the beginning, there was just that seed planted. And from it, by trusting and walking in faith and believing the Word of God and stepping out with Him, God grew His church there in the Visayas area in the central Philippines around the city of Cebu. There is the challenge of truth.

My friends, this morning I would just say, how are we doing with it? The challenge of truth. Do we allow the world to shut us down because they like to mock the Word of God? Or do we walk by faith, believing in Him? Some time ago, I was asked to go into a city to direct a crusade for Billy Graham. And when I met with the original committee there, they said, we think we could probably get as many as 1,500 people a night together.

And I said, how many does your arena hold? And they said, about 9,000 around the sides, and you can put another 1,000 to 1,500 on the ice floor. So I said, so you reckon we just put the 1,500 seats on the floor? Yeah, I think we could probably fill them, maybe. Then one guy said to me, what do you think? What are you thinking about? And I said, I was just wondering, where are we going to put the overflow? It was one of those God moments, not because of John, but because of Jesus.

Because for a moment we lifted our eyes off of what we knew we could do, and we put them instead on a faithful and loving God and what He could do. Well, friends, I need to hurry along. Let me go to the last thought from the text.

In verses 57 through 66, there's also the challenge of triumph. This baby is born. I mean, Zacharias has been quiet all this while.

How long does that take? Nine months. Nine months, yeah. He's been quiet all that time.

But he knows, because his wife is expecting that child, that what God has said, God will do. And what a triumphant day it must have been for the two of them when John was born. All the reproach of the years is gone.

All the difficulties and slurs and so on that they have felt. All the lies that the devil has thrown at them over the years that would discourage them and pull them down. There they both stand in triumph as the little one is about to be circumcised on the eighth day according to the tradition of his religion.

Do you know, others can't see it because they're going on with tradition. His papa's name is Zacharias. His mama's name was Zacharias.

His papa's name was Zacharias. So the kid would normally be Zacharias. And it's exceptional for mama to speak up because papa can't.

And she says, his name is, and then they look over at Zacharias, and he writes exactly the same thing. His name is John. Faith believes despite the circumstances.

And human wisdom and all of that is set aside in just trusting in the Lord. And healing comes through obedience. There's not just the miracle of a baby that's born through John's coming into the world, but there's a miracle of healing that takes place in Zacharias' life.

Because he is healed that day, as in obedience, he says what the angel told him all those months before. Respect for God comes on all the people around that whole area as you read those last few verses that we looked at. And there's wonder at what God is doing.

Now my friends, we're going to meet the Lord at his table in just a couple of moments. And as we just draw these thoughts to a close this morning, what are you facing? Are you facing the challenge of trials? God does not love you any less than Zacharias and Elizabeth. Are you facing the challenge of time? Have you

prayed for a long time that something would happen? That prayer is not neglected because the answer has been long in coming.

Are you facing the challenge of truth? Can I really believe that God cares about me? You know, I think one of the challenges of truth that I faced, and sometimes still do, is when I think back over the things that I did as a young man on the wrong side of the law with a gun in my hand. How could God love me? And perhaps there are some in our gathering this morning, and that's a real question in your challenge of truth. I know God could love those other people at the church, but me, with the things I've done and who I am, He made you.

He loves you. He has purpose and plan for you. And you know the challenge of triumph I like because Zacharias and Elizabeth didn't say, here he is, look at what we did.

And all the glory goes to God. And when things are going good, it's so easy to take the credit, isn't it? But oh how wonderful to give to Him all the glory. God speaks and we must respond.

And He's speaking to our hearts today. He's saying, when you look at my work in Zacharias and Elizabeth, there's help for you. There's hope for you.

There's healing for you. And as we step by faith and believe in Him, we'll always find Him ever ready to touch us and to change us. Let's just pray for a moment before we come together at the Lord's table.

Dear Father, how we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We may sometimes feel alone in trials, but if we are in Christ Jesus, You never leave us nor forsake us. We may sometimes feel that prayer goes unanswered, but You never neglect the prayers of Your people.

We may sometimes feel that time has gone by in such a long way that it's hopeless, but You are the God of hope and grace. We may sometimes, Lord, take the credit for ourselves, but all the glory belongs to You. Oh, precious Father, this morning as we worship You and thank You, You are the King of kings.

You are the Lord of lords. Lord, we ask that You would just continue to bring Your Word into our lives so that we might be transformed by it in the power of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray.

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