

Called to Ministry Class 3
Call of Zechariah Part 2
Luke 1:67-79

One of the things we see in the story of Zechariah and often in our own stories is that the original moment of Calling is not the whole story...but only the beginning. Paul Harvey, the broadcaster, became famous telling stories, that concluded with this punch line...“and now you know...the rest of the story!” Like many a good storyteller, Luke left us hanging in 1:23...Zechariah is speechless but compelled to live for months in silent expectation of the birth of this impossible child!

As many believers have experienced that events and words that can seem extraneous and of little importance can loom as glimpses of God in the rear view mirror of our life, Zechariah is compelled to watch without comment as God unfolds the story. We are tempted at points to decide whether something makes sense or not, whether God has been faithful or not...before the movie is over...sometimes as movies unfold a complex story the full impact of the story is not told until the credits begin to roll...and the rest of the story is told. This is that kind of story!

To use our four part formula of a ‘Call Narrative’ from Dr. Dean Deppe we see...

The entrance of Divine Epiphany in Zechariah’s prophecy 1:67 “Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit”. God showed up in the person of the Holy Spirit...and Zechariah was filled in the same manner we see the Tabernacle filled with the glory of God in Ex 40 and Solomon’s Temple filled in 1 Kings 8...and in the same way his wife Elizabeth is filled in v.41. God shows up in a way that cannot be missed or denied or forgotten. To be filled with the Spirit is an act of divine consecration for ministry, a person or a thing, being set apart by God for a holy use or mission.

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Divine empowerment 1:67 “and prophesied” So filled and empowered Zechariah breaks his silence with words provided by God himself...words of praise and exaltation to Yahweh for his faithfulness not only to Zechariah and Elizabeth but to Israel and the world! Zechariah sees, at least in part, that his life and story are a part of a much larger and The much larger story of Salvation History...the story of God! Zechariah thought that his life had no particular meaning except that he was by birth a priest and perhaps might get the opportunity to represent God’s people in the temple of God and burn incense as the priest for the nation once in his life. It appeared that he would not get to pass this lofty calling to an heir so this was his one and only hope for a life of significance...or so he thought. He had no idea nor any reason to suspect that God had much larger and more significant plans for him...plans that would change the whole world...forever! Empowered by the Spirit of God he speaks!

Endowment with self-consciousness Luke 1:76a...“And you my child shall be called ‘the prophet of the Most High’” as the Spirit of God speaks through him Zechariah comes to understand who his child is...and hence who he is to be as John’s father. This child will be not simply a remarkable person or even a noted priest...he will be nothing less than the last great prophet of God to his people before the Day of the Lord...the Promised return of Yahweh to his people to rescue them from the curse of the exile!

Explanation of the Mission Luke 1:76b...“for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways”. Zechariah’s mission is found in John’s mission. His life cannot be understood apart from the birth and life and ministry of his son...whose life and mission cannot be understood apart from all that has gone before and all that would come after through Jesus whose way he would prepare.

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Now notice what the Spirit of God speaks through Zechariah...in my Bible I find no less than 14 OT references! In the Nicene Creed we say of the Spirit that he 'spoke by the prophets'...by that we mean that the prophets did not make up their own messages...the authority does not belong to the prophet...but to the Lord whose message the prophet is to deliver. It is interesting that the Spirit who spoke through the prophets...knows, remembers and is faithful to Holy Scripture. Notice also that this is written in the form of poetry or song. It is known as the Song of Zechariah or the Benedictus or the Blessing.

Joel 2:28 As God came to rescue his lost people he would fill them with His Spirit...this was a sign that God's rescue had begun...see Peter's understanding in Acts 2:17

Ps 72:18 This is a prayer for the King of Israel and is how most Hebrew prayers begin to this day...Baruch ata Adonai, 'Blessed are you Lord' this is an anticipation that the one whose way John would prepare represented both the return of Yahweh to his people and the arrival of Israel's anointed King or messiah

111:9 This is a hymn of praise to Yahweh as Creator and Redeemer of Israel...who is to be praised because His covenant is forever! His promises do not expire!

18:2 Another hymn of praise for Yahweh as Israel's guardian and protector...sung by Zechariah as he personally witnesses the beginning of God's rescue in the birth of his son, John.

89:17 Again making reference to the horn...a sign of kingly authority and dominion, a reflection on the promise of the reestablishment of the Rule and Reign of God upon the Earth aka The Kingdom of God

132:17 Here in one of the Songs of Ascents, sung by Israel's pilgrims as they make their way to Jerusalem for the three great feasts of Israel, recalling God's mighty deliverance in the Exodus...now anticipating a Second Exodus, the song ties God's deliverance directly to the promised son of David, and calls him the Messiah!

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Ezek 29:21 Ezekiel proclaims judgment against Egypt as God delivers Egypt into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, as a precursor and sign of his commitment to judgment the nations who have opposed Israel and oppressed them...an emblem of which is a 'horn' a king, a messiah

Jer 23:5 Zechariah expresses the hopes of Israel for their coming king and Messiah and Deliverer as he speaks of the coming of the 'Righteous Branch of David who will reign in such a way that God's will is done on earth as in Heaven

Dan 9:24 Zechariah expresses that this is happening according to God's expressed plan revealed and spoken through the prophets...so that not only would the messiah come from the tribe of Judah, but the family of David, and at the exact time God revealed to Daniel...that Time has Come!

Mic 7:20 All of this is being done not simply as a fulfillment to promises made to David and Moses but Abraham and the Patriarchs!

Ps 105:8,9 Again a song of praise to Yahweh, the Covenant Making and Covenant Keeping God of Israel...who is keeping his promises made to the Patriarchs at the outset of the Story of God's Rescue and Redemption

106:45 This Covenant can sometimes seem forgotten in the harriedness of life, it can seem that God has become so distant that there is no obvious commitment of God to keeping his own promises...the persecution of Christians like in the mall in Kenya, the bombing of Christian churches by Muslims all over the world, surely must call into question...Is God really there? Does he really care for us? How is he or will he defend us from our enemies? This is a declaration that God is faithful to do all of these things...and a recognition that in the birth of John, Yahweh is doing all of these things...but recall that John himself as he sits in Herod's prison is forced to wonder about these very matters and is then martyred.

Ezek 16:60 God made and reaffirmed his promise to restore his blessing to Israel after the exile...Zechariah declares in his prophecy that God is doing that in John's birth and what will follow.

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Mal 3:1 and one that is not listed in my study Bible which forms the background for John's and ultimately Jesus' ministry is Is 40:1ff. Yahweh has promised to prepare the way of His return in glory to the Temple by sending a messenger or angel (same word malak in Hebrew angelos in Greek) Hence Malachi means my messenger or my angel. Malachi speaks of the coming of one who will be the messenger of the covenant. See Is 40:1ff this is the first of the 'Gospel' texts of God's return to dwell in and with Israel in their midst again...in Is 40:9 we read the word Gospel often translated good news or glad tidings...announcing the return of Yahweh to Israel and the restoring of His blessing and the judgment of their enemies.

Because of who God is...believers can and should know that our lives are not random dust in the wind as the old rock song by Kansas declared. We have been made by God, for God, and for God's glory. Our lives have purpose and significance as we find and understand our part in the larger story of God and His rescue and restoration of His lost Creation. Our lives and stories are important because of the Author. Our lives find their meaning and our direction in the hand of the Author, who reveals himself in ways we can understand, in ways we can see. God shows us who he is and who we are and are supposed to be or better, are called to be. God also works with us as He did with Zechariah not all at once but sometimes in glimpses that come at different points and different times...so that our lives can feel to us as if we live them in chapters and seasons. We find that God sends experiences that often God intends not just for us, but for someone else and together as we see that our experiences of God in our lives and the evident connection between what God has done in one of our lives, but also intends as a witness to someone else, we like the Psalmist are moved to worship and praise.

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Recall Ps 50:15 the verse that transformed the life of Robinson Crusoe...he learned faith and the faithfulness of God from that verse as the path of the Christian life. If you haven't read this novel by Daniel Defoe, I recommend it you as one of the most overtly Christian novels I have read. Crusoe learned that when he got in trouble he would call on God. God would show up and rescue him. He would be moved to worship and give thanks to God...this he learned as the rhythm of the life of faith.