

When God Says ‘No’

To Know Christ and Make Christ Known Series

Luke 1:5-7; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; August 25, 2013

‘No’ Problem

Has God ever told you ‘no’ to a good request? At least, as far as you could tell?

Today, we want to look at Luke 1:5-7 in light of the common experience of not getting what we want or ask for, even when what we want and ask for is said to be a good thing by God Himself. This experience of God saying ‘no’ to a good thing can be a very difficult trial in our lives. How we respond is very important.

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, 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 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. (Luke 1:5-7, NASB)

A Couple Extraordinaire

What does this text tell us?

⁵ *In the days of Herod, king of Judea,*

- This Herod is Herod the Great. (Calvin)
- Herod is Herod I (37-4 BC) – capable, crafty and cruel; a terrible tyrant; baby killer; diabolical monster. (Hendriksen)
- Judea may indicate all the land of the Jews. (Hendriksen)
- Contrast between the Terrible Tyrant and the Pious Priest. (Hendriksen)
- Herod ruled for Rome as the Jewish “King” commissioned by Mark Antony and the Roman Senate. (Bock)
- This happened near the end of Herod’s rule around 4 BC. (Bock)

there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah;

- Mark portrays the Eternal King, Matthew the Great Prophet and Luke the Sympathetic High Priest (beginning the narrative with a priest in the Temple). (Hendriksen)
- Zechariah means ‘Jehovah has remembered.’ (Hendriksen)
- “Yahweh has remembered again” (Bock)
- Only 4 divisions returned from Babylon. (Hendriksen)
- Priests served on a roster, twice a year, one week at a time; 24 divisions of priests (1 Chron 24:1-6, 10; Ezra 2:36-39); Abijah was the 8th division. (Morris)

and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

- A priest was required to marry an Israelite virgin (Lev 21:14); to marry a wife of priestly stock was a special blessing. (Morris)
- Because of their equal marriage, he would be respected among his own rank. (Calvin)
- Elisabeth means ‘God or My God is an oath.’ = the Absolutely Reliable One! (Hendriksen)
- Note the thorough agreement between husband and wife. (Hendriksen)
- Such a [marriage] union was a sign of special privilege. (Bock)
- “My God is the one by whom I swear” or “My God is fortune” – both indicating trust in God (Bock)

⁶ *They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.*

- They served God faithfully, not that they were sinless. (Morris)
- The righteous are those who regulate their daily life by the commandments of the law. (Calvin)
- Requirements or ordinances relates to exercises of piety, divine worship and duties of charity. (Calvin)
- A full observance of the law does bring life. (Calvin)
- This reference to righteousness must be understood in light of the covenant to forgive their sins and depends on the gracious forbearance of God. (Calvin)
- Their whole life was devoted to righteousness in gracious covenant with God, like a house resting on its foundation. (Calvin)
- Two kinds of righteousness: righteousness by imputation (justification) and righteousness by impartation (sanctification). (Hendriksen)
- Ephesians 2:8-9 must never be separated from Ephesians 2:10. (Hendriksen)
- “Is it not true that with God honest intention is equal to action?” (see 1 Kgs 8:18) (Hendriksen)
- “A person who observes both the commandment and the statute is interested not only in the underlying principle but also in its application to concrete life situations.” (Hendriksen)
- This couple had the right heritage and a commendable spirituality. (Bock)
- Their life was a ‘moral righteousness that conforms to God’s standards. (Bock)
- This is not Paul’s positional righteousness but a righteousness from the perspective of God’s law – a concrete and visible righteousness as seen in consistent acts. (Bock)
- They faithfully and consistently obeyed God by ‘following after God’s commandments’ (Deut 28:9) (Bock)
- Luke loves to note obedience to the Law and faithfulness to the temple. (Bock)
- This couple’s righteousness covered the full range of God’s commandments. (Bock)
- They were a spiritually exemplary couple. (Bock)
- ‘lived’ = travel

⁷ *But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.*

- Their faithfulness made their childlessness hard to understand since people believed that God would bless faithful servants by giving them children. And since they were old, they would not have expected a change in the situation. (Morris)
- There was no retiring age for priests. (Morris)
- Barren = our word, *sterile*
- How do we reconcile ‘blameless’ and ‘barren’?
- “Barrenness was about the worst thing that could happen to a married woman. (see Rachel in Gen. 30:1; Hannah in 1 Sam 1:6) (Hendriksen)
- Fertility was one of the blessings of obedience to God promised to Israel (Deut 7:14; Ps 113:9). (Hendriksen)
- People drew the wrong conclusion that any case of barrenness was an infallible sign of God’s disfavor. (Hendriksen)
- “Tragic Situation: A Childless Couple” (Bock)
- Despite their blamelessness, they were barren. (Bock)
- “The absence of children was generally seen as a reproach in Judaism and in the OT.” (Bock)
- But their barrenness was not the result of judgment or sin. (Bock)
- But God had something special in mind as in regard to Isaac (Gen 18:11) and Samson (Jud 13:2, 5) and Samuel (1 Sam 1-2). (Bock)
- “The age factor makes this account parallel to the Abraham-Sarah-Isaac account.” (Bock)

The inability to have children, at least for a period of time, is seen many times in the Biblical story:

The Bible depicts the problem of temporary infertility in several stories:

- God promised Abraham and Sarah a child, but she did not bear a son, Isaac, until age 90 (Genesis 11:30).
- Isaac, Rebekah’s husband, prayed fervently, and God answered, resulting in the births of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:21).
- Rachel prayed, and at long last God “opened her womb.” She bore two sons, Joseph and Benjamin (Genesis 30:1; 35:18).
- Manoah’s wife, who was infertile for a time, gave birth to Samson (Judges 13:2).
- Elizabeth in her old age gave birth to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (Luke 1:7, 36). (GotQuestions.org)

In our day, the inability to have children is also an issue for many people.

According to the American Society of Reproductive Medicine³⁴:

- 1 in 8 couples have fertility issues – that’s more than 7.3 million people in the United States
- There is a 50/50 chance the fertility problem lies with either the man or the woman. It’s a common misconception that the problem always lie with the woman
- At the age of 30, a woman has a 20 percent chance per month of conceiving. At the age of 40, her chances drop to 5 percent per month

- Eighty-five to 90 percent of infertility cases are treated with conventional therapies, such as drugs or surgery. IVF and similar treatments only account for less than three percent of infertility services
- After one year of regular, unprotected sex, if a couple has still not conceived, they should seek medical attention. If the woman is over the age of 35, and the couple has been trying for six months, then they should seek medical attention. (Foxnews.com)

In Biblical times, there was a ‘stigma’ that came with the inability to have children which was based on wrong conclusions and this continues today.

“Yesterday, while talking with a friend about my experience with infertility , I was reminded of some of the emotions that surfaced during that struggle:

- Shock
- Devastation
- Demoralization
- Aloneness
- Jealousy
- Confusion
- Stress
- Shame

(Makeroomformommy.wordpress.com)

“With all of the pressure around us: friends, families, even spouses, our careers, the media... We judge ourselves. We wonder what went wrong, how we could have done something differently. We wonder about what we did to deserve this. We second-guess our life choices and we doubt the abilities of our own bodies. We see ourselves as failures. We feel broken. We worry about what other people think of us. We carry the stigma of not being able to do one of the most basic human functions, and we carry that with us *every single day*. (The Stigma of Infertility, infertilityvoice.com)

Whether we have experienced God saying ‘no’ to having children or not, we probably have experienced God saying ‘no’ to things, even good things like:

- Healing of severe pain
- Employment
- Marriage
- Dream job
- Financial independence
- etc

What do we *think and do* when something like this happens to us?

‘No’ Does Not Equal ‘No Acceptance/Love/Care’

What are the implications of this passage for our understanding of God and His ways in our lives?

1. The presence of a wicked Ruler does not mean that God is not at work.
2. Piety and problems can co-exist and usually do co-exist in God's present economy.
3. We probably cannot underestimate the power of a godly marriage for spiritual growth and faithfulness even in the toughest of times nor can we underestimate the fruit of the opposite.
4. God can call a life committed to please Him in obedience to His Word, though imperfect, yet trusting in God's grace 'righteous' and 'blameless.'
5. Human opinion is not divine opinion: We can wrongly consider those who are cursed by God to be blessed by God and those who are blessed by God to be cursed by God.
6. God loves to bring 'something' out of nothing and so He often orchestrates the 'nothing' or 'wilderness' situation.
7. We are not to gauge God's love by His providence but by His promises to us in Christ.
8. God's lesser promises are always kept in relationship to the greatest promises: to save us from sin and satisfy us in God through Jesus!

When God Says 'No'

In the movie, *Facing the Giants*, Coach Grant Taylor asks his wife: "If God doesn't give us children, will you still love Him?" At that point in the movie, she doesn't answer. But later, after a disappointing visit to the doctor, she says: "I will love you, Lord."

As in the movie and in this story of Zacharias and Elizabeth, at some point, God may say 'yes' after saying 'no,' but then again, He may not; either way, for whatever season – years or lifetime, we have to know what to do when God says 'no.'

So what do we do when God says 'no' or seems to say 'no' to what appears to be a good thing?

When God says 'no' ...

1. Believe that, because of Jesus and His righteousness, (1) God will withhold no good thing from you *unless* He has something better to give you and (2) that *He is* loving you faithfully and perfectly! (Psalm 84:11; Psalm 119:75; Romans 8:32-37; 1 John 4:18)
2. Give yourself to God's Word. (Psalm 119:109-110)
3. Keep seeking to trust and obey. (Psalm 37:34; Matthew 26:39)
4. Ignore the wrong conclusions of men (including your own heart) and hang on to God's promises. (Psalm 71:7-12; Psalm 73:25-28)
5. Keep praying for it unless it becomes clear it is not to be or it is not the right thing to pray for and God has another plan for you. (Luke 11:5-13; Matthew 7:7-11)
6. Wait and watch (for idolatry) with an open hand. (Matthew 26:39; James 4:1-4)

7. Look to Jesus for all you need and desire and set your hope on Him for the life to come. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Hebrews 12:1-17)

Look to Jesus (Person, life, death, resurrection, reign).

Trust Him for salvation from sin (pardon, perfection).

Trust Him for satisfaction in God (help, happiness).