

Truth-3: Spirit-Filled **Living a Spirit-Filled Life, Useful to God: is Not Easy** **Luke 1:5-80**

Today we are looking at Christmas through the lens of the Holy Spirit. We see another way God teaches us about the Spirit's work, using the lives of everyday people surrounding Christ's birth.

First we saw Simeon Illustrating *Spirit-Guided Living*.

Then, we saw Mary illustrating *Un-Common Living Prompted by the Spirit*.

Now we come to Zacharias & Elizabeth where we find them illustrating that *Living a Spirit-Filled Life, Useful to God: is Not Easy*.

Before us this morning is an astounding section of Scripture. As we open to Luke 1, we are opening to the third Gospel. Like each of the other Gospels, Luke has a unique perspective on Christ.

JESUS CHRIST: THE PERFECT KING, SERVANT & MAN

In Matthew Jesus Christ is presented as the Perfect King. From Christ's genealogy to the Wisemen coming to announce Him to Herod: Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the Perfect King.

In Mark Jesus Christ is presented as the Perfect Servant. From His lack of genealogy to His non-stop powerful actions: Mark emphasizes that Jesus is the Perfect Servant.

In Luke Jesus Christ is presented as the Perfect Man. From Luke's portrayal we see Christ's compassionate care of the weak, poor, sick, and oppressed: Luke emphasizes that Jesus is the Perfect Man.

So how does God open Luke's portrait of Christ's perfect humanity? Amazingly, God starts with an entire chapter about the earthly family surrounding Christ's birth; and we get to meet the relatives of Jesus. Luke chapter 1 opens with a glimpse into the lives of Zacharias, Elizabeth & John in verses 5-80, where family insights fill this account.

Before we look at the entire scope of their lives, note with me one common denominator that God wrote down for us. I like to call Zacharias & Elizabeth:

THE FIRST SPIRIT-FILLED FAMILY

Look at **Luke 1:15** and in your Bible circle these five amazing words: "filled with the Holy Spirit". Who was being described here? John, the son of Zacharias & Elizabeth, was promised to be filled by God's Spirit from his mother's womb. That is an amazing element of God's working that we seldom see recorded in Scripture, but that God promised here. So John the Baptist was recorded as being "filled with the Spirit".

Now, move on down to **Luke 1:41** and in your Bible circle these five amazing words: “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Who was being described here? This time it is Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist who is filled with God’s Spirit. She goes on to praise God as the baby John leaped within her womb at the sound of Mary’s greeting.

Now, move on down to **Luke 1:67** and in your Bible circle these five amazing words: “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Who was being described here? This time it is Zacharias, father of John the Baptist who is filled with God’s Spirit. He goes on to give one of the most powerful hymns of praise to God ever written. Zacharias overflows with a lesson about Christ's coming from no less than eight¹ different Old Testament passages he knew and had carefully studied.

There you have it, in one chapter we find the first and only time that every member of one family is described as being “filled with the Holy Spirit”, and that is why this passage is so special. Here we have a description of what God points out for us in a Spirit-filled family. What we find is not what we would expect.

What does God point out that He notices, and is pleased by in this Spirit-filled family? Each detail written down in Luke, was placed there by God, Luke was only the human author; but God chose what He wanted recorded, and guided every word of this book.

Here is the amazing lesson for us from these verses in Luke 1:

LIVING A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE, USEFUL TO GOD IS NOT EASY.

What does that mean? “Useful to God” means that God sees, honors, blesses, and rewards with endless honor that person.

Anything in our lives that is not pleasing to God will vanish away, turn to smoke & ashes, and be forgotten. Most people do not use God’s standard for significance, and therefore their lives will amount to nothing.

What’s interesting is that out of all the thousands of Levites serving in the Temple in the First Century, Zacharias is one of the only ones we know by name. So we have been given a special God-given insight.

TRUTH-1: GOD KNEW WHERE TO FIND ZACHARIAS

God does not require that we have a big, flashy, well-known life to be significant to Him.

God says that all that matters is: what **He sees**, what **He thinks**, and how **He is pleased with our lives**.

So as we read Luke we see this is not a flashy, outgoing couple. They are dutifully, behind the scenes in their lives. Zacharias & Elizabeth were just a tiny, almost insignificant part of a community of thousands of Levitical priests, grouped into 24 teams that took their turns on duty at the Temple of God.

Zacharias was one of 24,000 priests who served 2 weeks each year by rotation. As an aged man, it was a supreme honor given once in a lifetime to serve at the altar of incense.

¹ Zacharias quotes or alludes to in v. 68 (Psalm 106:48; Exod. 3:16); in v. 69 (2 Sam. 22:3); in v. 70 (Gen. 49:10); in v. 72 (Lev. 26:42; Gen. 22:16-18); in v. 76 (Psalm 83:18); and in v. 78 (Isaiah 9:2).

The incense was offered daily before the morning sacrifice at about 9 AM, and after the evening sacrifice, about 3 PM in the afternoon. It was probably the evening offering that was assigned to Zacharias.

Application: *God knows your address.* You can be plain, unknown to most people in the world, never achieving public fame, live as an ordinary person, having a non-descript life: ***and still be living a Spirit-filled life, useful to God.***

Please stand with me as we read what God wants us to know about Zacharias in Luke 1:5-17 (NKJV):

v. 5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God **in the order of his division**, 9 **according to the custom of the priesthood**, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Pray

TRUTH-2: GOD'S SPIRIT CONTROLS THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MY LIFE

Next God explains to us that these ordinary people were also old, and almost looked down upon by most of society.

In Israel almost the greatest visible blessing possible for most people would be having a son. Even daughters were better then, than not having any children.

The word God used for Elizabeth's childless condition was harsh: it was the word "barren". Barrenness is a condition as well as a feeling.

Barren sounds like how it felt: windswept, empty, lifeless, and deserted.

To be barren, childless, and without a son meant that your family named ended, the family line stopped, and there was no future.

Application: *God is in charge of your circumstances.* You can be hopelessly headed towards nothing, as far as the world can see things: ***and still be living a significant life, useful to God.***

WHAT DID ZACHARIAS & ELIZABETH KNOW ABOUT GOD?

Think about what they knew.

That is my first step as I study. Examining just what they could have known about God. Here is just one thing that Zacharias would have surely known. It was one of the greatest statements in the Old Testament about how to be famous in God's sight. Jeremiah wrote these words in the book of the Old Testament that has more words than any other book of the Bible. It is the longest message from God. Tucked inside the longest book (by words) of the Bible is this amazing truth:

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NKJV) Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 **But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me,** That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord.

Application: God used this couple because they sought to know God personally. Think back to what we saw earlier. Of all the tens of thousands of priests living and working in the Temple, surrounding Christ's birth: how many do we know by name? How many do we know their wife's name? How many do we know their child's name? So why are these two lifted above the crowd? Because:

TRUTH-3: GOD'S SPIRIT EMPOWERED THEM TO EXPERIENCE GOD

Here is a couple who lived around a group of people who were religious professionals.

They knew what they were doing and did it professionally day-in and day-out. As we see from Christ's ministry, and His run-ins with the priests & the Sadducees: many of Zacharias' fellow priests were over familiar with God.

What a sobering warning for us this Christmas. Are we experiencing God through His Son Jesus Christ, by the illuminating power of the Spirit?

Who were these priests? The priests looked back 15 centuries to being of the Tribe of Levi, and descendants of Aaron through Zadok. But by Christ's time this personal devotion had waned for the most part.

- They lived in the presence of God.
- They saw all day long the symbols and pictures of salvation.
- They held the Holy revelation of God's Word.
- They sang each day from the Psalms.
- They recited, memorized, and discussed the Word of the Lord.
- They wore the clothing that reminded them in every way of God.
- They only held God's Word in their hands – not in their souls.
- God was only near in their mouths – and not in their hearts.

GOD SAW GENUINE HEARTS IN ZACHARIAS & ELIZABETH

So many of the priests allowed all that exposure to God to end up only in their head, not in their hearts. But not Zacharias, God saw his heart. He sought God.

So many of the priests did not choose to let those truths invade and take over their hearts and wills. But not Zacharias, God saw his heart.

So many of the priests had the spiritual skin of their lives, overexposed to the Light of God's truth, and had developed the deadliest cancer of all – spiritual indifference.

Remember what Jesus said about people over-exposed to His truth?

Matthew 15:8 *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.”*

Think of the dangerous place these priests, that surrounded Zacharias, found themselves in.

Every day as they dressed in their priestly vestments the sacred anointing oils made with the secret and unique formula mandated by God, causing them to smell like no one else on earth ever could as they approached the Lord.

Every day their hands and clothes were deeply filled with the indelible scent of incense as the fragrant smoke rose before God as a picture of their prayers of worship.

Every day they came home with blood stained clothes from the substitutionary sacrificial animals they offered according to God's Word.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were a priest and his wife. They lived and worked in the shadow of the Temple of God. They were of the priestly family, able to trace their family tree all the way back to Aaron and the Tribal genealogy of Levi.

From their earliest days they had known about the Lord. They had grown up much like many Americans of past generations—surrounded by the truth, seeing and hearing it in many ways and places.

Application: But one thing about them was extraordinary—they *actually believed all that truth about God*. He was real to them and they loved Him and served Him as best they could.

TRUTH-4: GOD'S SPIRIT ONLY USES LISTENING PEOPLE

Luke reminds us in v. 6 with those words about this couple “walking in all the commandments”. John's parents were Zacharias and Elisabeth. Zacharias means “God remembers,” and Elisabeth means “His oath.” Together their names mean, “God remembers His oath.” And so God talked to a priest who had been listening to His voice in His Word. Zacharias had faith in God's Word and a heart for God's truth.

God had made a promise to David that one of his descendants would have an eternal reign. Luke sets the stage for us to see that Christ is that descendant. “God remembers His oath!” God breaks through into human history after 400 years of silence.

Application: Are you listening to God speaking through His Word, so He can also use you in an extraordinary way? Have you carved out a place in your daily routine for God's Word, prayer, and worshipful ministry? God wants to use those who LISTEN to Him.

TRUTH-5: GOD'S SPIRIT USUALLY USES ACTIVE PEOPLE.

God reminds us in v. 8 with those words about this couple “while he was serving as priest”, that

If you look closely you may notice that God often speaks to His people and calls them while they are busy doing what God called them to do in their daily tasks.

Moses and David were called from the fields caring for sheep; Gideon was called while threshing wheat; Peter and his partners were called while mending nets; and Paul as he was on a business trip out of town. It is hard to steer a car that is not moving; when we get to work at what we are called to do—God starts to direct us into further and wider fields of ministry.

So it was on this day for Zacharias, while placing fresh incense upon the altar before the great curtain of the Holy of Holies towering 60 feet into the air above: that Gabriel appeared with a message from God. After four hundred years – God’s silence was broken. God had remembered His oath.

Application: Are you doing what God called you to do? Whether we eat, drink, teach, sell, nurse, build, make or whatever we do, DO all to the Glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31. God wants to use ACTIVE people for His Glory.

TRUTH-6: GOD’S SPIRIT OFTEN USES STRUGGLING PEOPLE

In v. 13 with those words about this couple “your prayer is heard” we see that part of this couple’s life is that they had ordinary problems. Most of us think that we have extraordinary problems. But the more you step back and look beyond the circle of your own life and problems—you find that what we face is what Paul describes as what “is common to man” and what James calls “like passions”. Life is hard, all people have problems and the key is only what we will do with those problems.

Zacharias & Elisabeth are such a model of how to go on in spite of what others would call extraordinary challenges. This couple lived in a world that measured God’s blessing and your personal worth by whether or not you had a son.

They never did. They spent their entire married life waiting for a child, waiting for a son, living and finally giving up on ever being able to have a child. If we think about it, there are so many lessons God can teach us from their lives.

No matter what they faced they kept on serving the Lord and growing. Even in the weeks of silence—Zacharias kept on in the Word so that when he at last could speak God's Word flowed from his heart.

Application: Are you struggling with something? Do you feel that you have an impossible challenge, an unmovable obstacle in your life? Let God HEAR your prayer. He wants to use struggling people.

TRUTH-7: GOD’S SPIRIT ALWAYS USES SURRENDERED PEOPLE.

After Zacharias hears the good news of his son of promise, John the Baptist, he waits in muted silence for his unbelief.

After 40 weeks of waiting (and studying God's Word) John is born and his dad speaks. What was ZACHARIAS doing while he had no voice?

This song that Zechariah sings summarizes the ministry of John pointing to Jesus.

This song introduces the Coming One – Jesus, and explains why He came. But this song also reflects the notes from Zacharias’ 40-week Bible study conducted as he waited in mute silence

for his son's birth. Here are all the places Zacharias found promises of Christ's coming. First he quotes from Psalms 18, 23, 32, 34, 83, 106, and 132. Plus he uses extensive quotations from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi!

Application: It would appear that he spent much of the time while he was set aside, handicapped as it were, studying God's Word! If you are incapacitated, crippled, handicapped, out of circulation, laid aside, out of work, and so on—***you can waste the time or turn it to gold.*** The choice is yours!

INVITE GOD'S SPIRIT TO USE YOU THIS CHRISTMAS

Look back over those words we just read. There are several clear statements of what Christ's coming would make possible in the lives of those who come to Him:

Only Jesus can **“visit and redeem” anyone who calls out to Him.** Think about it, who else would even hear anyone, anywhere calling out? Only Jesus would be able to respond anywhere at anytime v. 68.

Only Jesus can be the “horn” or power “of salvation”. Jesus is the power of God unto salvation. That Greek word for power is where we get the English word dynamite v. 69.

Only Jesus can **“save” anyone, anywhere** v. 71; and v. 72 “perform the mercy promised” to anyone, anywhere.

Only Jesus can v. 74 **“deliver” anyone, anywhere from “fear”.**

Only Jesus can make us to be “in holiness and righteousness before Him” v. 75.

Only Jesus gives the “knowledge of salvation” v. 77 to anyone, anywhere that responds to the Gospel; and **only Jesus can grant instantaneously the “remission” of their sins.**

Finally, in v. 79, only Jesus can give “light” to anyone in the shadow of death; and **only Jesus can guide anyone, anywhere no matter what they have done in their life, “into the way of peace”.**

This Christmas we all need to pause and connect to God by prayer, and ask Him to do some extraordinary work through us also!