

Why Christmas Is a Big Deal:

Mixing It Up

Scripture Text: Luke 1.68-79

Advent Reading: Luke 1.68-79, Advent-Peace

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is full-of-examples of God-calling people to do things that appeared to be a little-strange ...or goofy, ...or surprising. I think it just goes-to-show that He doesn't-mind mixin'-it-up!

Maybe He likes to keep us on the edge of our seats; ...maybe He enjoys being unpredictable and mysterious; ...or-maybe we are just so-inhibited by lack-of-faith, ...or small-imaginings, ...or blinded by the world's best-guesses at the way things "should be done" ~ ...that we're caught-off-guard.

But-really! ~ Who are we to ever-question God's plans ~ ...His methods, ...His instructions!?!... And-yet, we do ~ don't we?

And as a result...we tend to let this lack of imagine...lack of faith...or thoughts of should be, affect our peace.

TRANSITION

You and I aren't the first to question God ~ ...we've got a lot of good (and 'bad') company!

Jonah (who decided to run-the-other-way, when God told him to go to Ninevah);

Moses (who argued with God, saying that he was a 'bad' choice to go to Egypt);

Adam & Eve (who liked-the-look of the forbidden-fruit);

Judas (who let his questions turn to uncertainty and uncertainty turn to betrayal);

And John the Baptist's daddy, Zechariah (who just-couldn't get-his-mind wrapped-around what the angel said was gonna-happen)

Lots of people in Scripture had-their-questions... But-don't-ya-think: God wants to move us beyond-the-uncertainty to the point of trusting-Him even-when we have questions!

Let's-be-real, here: there will always be reasons to wonder, ...reasons for uncertainty.

But, isn't that the nature of faith?: ...to believe when it doesn't make total-sense; ...to trust when we can't see the end; ...to know that there's more than what we can see, touch, smell!

If you're waiting for everything to make sense, ...or-for all the loose-ends to be tied-up, ...or, for all questions to get answered ~ ...you will probably miss-the-boat!

If we wait until Jesus splits-the-sky, and comes riding-on-a-cloud, ...we're probably gonna miss it!

Our peace rests in His promises...He came once...and He says He will come again.

But again we have to get out of our own heads!

BODY

I. God's Tool-Bag

Zechariah almost missed-it. He was a priest who worked in the Jerusalem Temple; ...and-one-day - when he was going-about-his priestly-responsibilities – He was in the Temple, burning incense and praying for the people, ...when the angel-Gabriel appeared to him.

While I like-to-think that if-ever an angel-appeared to me. ...I like-to-think that I'd be all-ears!!! But, when the angel told Zechariah that he and his wife would have a baby, ...Zechariah questioned how this could happen!

You can almost hear Zechariah's-blumbering-response to Gabriel's-announcement: "A baby!?!... "Ummm, ...well, ...Elizabeth and I haven't... "Well, ...it's been a long-time since we..., "Uhhh, ...listen, Gabriel, we're old! "Elizabeth-and-me ~ we've long-passed the time of babies and diapers and chasing-a-toddler, ...and playing-pitch on Saturday-afternoons! ~ ...(And I can't-even-imagine trying to keep up with a teen-ager... How old will I be at that point?) "How can this 'baby-thing' be!?!"

For my older friends in the congregation...think of the almost fear that he would have had!

But, Zechariah seems-to-have forgotten the lessons from Abraham and David, ...from Noah and from Moses, ...from Rahab and from Ruth:

God often uses the littlest and the weakest, ...the forgotten and the overlooked, ...the very-young and the very-old, ...the unqualified and the disqualified! And a little-thing like age ~ ...well, it's no obstacle, at-all to God!

And when-it-comes to God's big-plans, ...He often uses unexpected resources.

If you were to look into God's tool-bag, ...you'd find an odd-collection of unlikely-characters!

You'd think that the Almighty, All-powerful, All-sufficient God...
You'd think that He could take-care-of-business all-by-Himself!

Why does He go-and-complicate-things by involving broken, fragile, impotent-people – ...like you –and-me and Zechariah – ...why does He risk success by involving us!?!

We can come-up-with a thousand-and-one excuses for God to move-on and pick-somebody-else ...or better-yet, ...to do it all-by-Himself!

But, for-whatever-reason, ...God chooses to work through folks like Zechariah!... People who are faith-challenged, ...people who are resource-deprived, ...people who, when it comes-down-to-it, ...they know they cannot do it on-their-own!

And I think that is part of the point...they cant do it on their own. Their hope, their peace, their strength, rests in God.

Zechariah listened to this amazing-news that came-from the lips of an angel-of-God; ...and all he could think-about was the “can’ts” and the “impossibilities”: ”create-a-baby... as-old as we are!?!; ...”give birth, at Elizabeth’s-age?; ...”raise-a-baby, at this-point in our lives!?!” ~ Zechariah doubted.

Zechariah questioned God’s plan to use himself-and-Elizabeth in this plan.

From his point-of-view, ...it’s-as-though God reached into His tool-bag, ...and instead of pulling out a hammer, ...he pulled out a rusty-pair-of-pliers ~ ...The mission seemed doomed before it ever got-off-the-ground!

But-ya-know-what? ~ The world may-think the tools in God’s tool-bag are useless ~ ...but God can use those tools to accomplish the greatness of His purposes.

And Zechariah eventually understood this!

Our scripture this morning was The song that he sings as a celebration of God’s surprising-ingenuity ~ ...that He can use an elderly-couple to bring a baby into the world, ...a baby who will serve as the trail-blazer for the Son-of-God!

Once Zechariah accepted God's plan and God's purpose he was able to be at peace and was able to rejoice.

When you look into God's tool-bag, ...when you look at the game-plan that God has-devised, ...when you look-at God's track-record of activity in this world, ...what-you-discover is-that when God does 'big-stuff' (or 'small things'... it doesn't-really-matter!), ...when God sets-a-plan in motion, He almost-always uses human-creatures!

The exception to this rule is Creation ~ ...when God spoke, and stuff started-popping-into-existence.

But, it isn't very-long-at-all before He starts involving people: ...He gets Adam-and-Eve to name the creatures and-to take-care-of the Garden of Eden; ...He tells Noah to build an ark; ...He has Moses lead His people out of Egypt, ...and the prophets to speak His word, ...and an elderly-couple to bear-and-raise the boy who will become the fiery-preacher known-as John-the-Baptist.

God's tool-bag includes people with limitations and excuses and all-kinds-of-reasons why they aren't up-for-the-challenge.

But-in-the-hands-of-God, ...even old, rusty, broken-tools become effective-and-glorious!

Are you at peace with God's purpose in your life?

II. God's Purpose

When the angel first appeared to Zechariah (in-the-Temple), ...he doubted, ...just-couldn't get-his-brain wrapped-around the-thing God was gonna-do.

But-finally... Zechariah sees-that God can use tired, old, worn-out instruments like-himself. And-when his baby-boy is born, Zechariah can't-help-but sing!

The Bible says he was filled with the Holy Spirit and he opened-his-mouth, ...and out-came this wonderful-celebration.

It celebrates the stuff that God has-been-doing. Starting with rapid-fire-bullets of accomplishments: ...God has come, ...God has redeemed His people, ...He has raised a “horn of salvation”, ...He’s been faithful to His ancient promises, ...and God delivers His children from the hands-of-enemies. That’s a pretty-good-list!

And-then Zechariah is moved-to-praise ~ ...not-just because God has given him-and-Elizabeth a precious baby-boy; ...and not-just-because God did what he-thought was impossible – (giving them a baby at their age) – but, he is moved-to-praise God for all-the-stuff God has-been-up-to, down-through the centuries!

I’m guessing-that most-of-us don’t-really-care for history. And, with-all-due-respect to the history-teachers among-us ~ ...the truth-is that for-many-people ...to-delve into a history-lesson is a sure-fire-prescription for sleep!

But-honestly ~ the past gives us a lens through-which we can better-understand the present.

And, when we learn the history of-God’s-activity in this-ole-world, ...then we have a better vantage-point to recognize what He’s up-to-today!

When Zechariah looks into the face of his baby-boy, ...he is moved-to-praise-God for all-that-God has-done to-save, ...and to-redeem, ...and to-rescue, ...and to-accomplish His purposes down through the generations.

This baby-boy ~ that Zechariah names ‘John’ ~ ...he is one-more-piece to a much-larger puzzle-picture.

And that picture is a beautiful-portrait of God’s loving, faithful-activity in this-world ...and in our lives!

Again...why can we be at peace? Because God is on the throne is has a plan and a purpose for our lives and has been working for our reconciliation throughout the age.

Look-again at the things-that Zechariah praises God for:

- 1) that God 'has come',
- 2) that God 'has redeemed',
- 3) that He 'has provided... salvation',
- 4) that He 'has spoken',
- 5) and that He 'has delivered'.

God is an awesome God ~ ...and He deserves our praise for all He has done on our behalf!

The birth of John the Baptist is one-more-example of God working in surprising-ways, ...using unlikely-characters, to accomplish His amazing purposes!

But, all-these-things just-answer the "What?"-question... They remind us of what God has done, ...of what God has been-up-to. But when we talk-about God's purposes, ...it's important to dive a little-deeper than-simply "What?"

We also have to get a clear-view of "Why?" ~ Why has God been doing all-this-stuff?...

Is He just-moving the chess-pieces?

Is He showing-off (like-when the Harlem Globe Trotters do trick-shots)?

Why does God redeem and save and deliver?... Why does God use people to implement His amazing-plans?

Why does God choose the most-unlikely-tools in the tool-bag!?!... Why?

Zechariah's song tells us why ~ ...and in doing-so, we get to see God's-heart.

It's so-important to see God's-heart... and not-just His plans!

It's in His heart to show mercy, ...and to remember His covenant-promises, ...and to rescue His children.

This is what's-in God's heart ~ ...the things that motivate Him to-save and to-redeem, ...to get-involved and to-show that He cares.

III. Our Place

Zechariah's-song celebrates God's heart and God's plans: ...but, he goes-on to talk about our place in God's-work.

God is not a mindless-Pez-dispenser (passing out blessings, like candy, without a thought-about what-we'll-do, in response); ...and we are not sponges that simply-soak-in God's blessings (without a thought-about how those blessings affect-and-impact us).

The-truth-is: The larger purpose to God's-work and God's-activity ~ ...to redeem and to rescue you, ...to save you and to be faithful to you ~ ...God's larger purpose is to draw us into a personal-relationship with Him.

And for-that-to-happen, we have to respond to Him.

What are you gonna-do with all that God has been doing?... What are you gonna-do with His overtures in your direction?...

Will you respond in faith? Will you give Him your allegiance? Will you give Him your heart... your hands... your life?

Zechariah's song begins by celebrating the things that God has done, ...and it rejoices in God's reasons for doing-what He's-done: ...because His heart is filled with mercy and love for us.

But, Zechariah then-sings about God's larger-purpose ~ ...and that-purpose is: that we would be enabled-and-equipped to work-along-with-Him.

God doesn't want to do it all-by-Himself; ...and we are not passive-by-standers.

He wants us to partner-with-Him in His work.

All-this-stuff: ...the salvation and redemption, ...the rescue and God's faithfulness toward us ~ ...all-this-stuff is for the purpose of sweeping our lives up into God's Kingdom-purposes, ...for, Zechariah says that God has done all-these-amazing-things:

“...to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” (Luke 1.74-75)

To have peace. A peace that only comes from trusting in the promises of God and trusting in His plan for our lives.

God doesn't plan for us to be spectators; ...He doesn't plan for His people to be gawkers and by-standers. God wants us to get-in-the-game! He wants us involved in carrying-on His work.

He plans for us to be His ambassadors ~ serving Him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

That's our place. That's our calling. That's our purpose in life ~ to respond to the gracious, awesome-work-of-God with this-kind-of-commitment to live-for-Him, ...and-to serve Him with all-our-heart.

We may feel as-though we don't have much-to-offer. We may think of ourselves as broken, rusty tools, lacking peace. We may not believe that

God can use somebody like ‘me’ because of my limitations, ...and my baggage, ...and my short-comings.

But-then-again, with all our self-doubt, ...we’re a lot like most-of-the-characters in the Bible: ...those who had a thousand-and-one excuses as-to-why God had the wrong-person: ...Moses, ...and Jonah, ...and Jeremiah, ...and Zechariah (to-name just-a-few!).

Here’s the amazing-thing: Just-as God’s glory was visible in the lives of Bible-characters who had lots-of-limitations ~ ...whether they were too-young ...or too old, ...to tired ...or too over-whelmed ~ ...just-as God’s glory shown-brightly through their lives when they obediently-responded-in-faith, ...in-the-same-way, God’s glory shines most-brightly in our lives ~ ... when we get-our-eyes off-of our limitations or problems, and-instead, focus on God’s abilities and the possibilities based-on His work in-and-through feeble-vessels, like-us!

We are in God’s tool-bag ~ ...and He calls-upon-us to serve-Him and His-purposes.

CONCLUSION

If you are wondering what Zechariah’s song-of-celebration has to do with the season of Advent, ...and how it helps us to answer the question of, “Why is Christmas such a big-deal?”...

Here it is: Advent is not-so-much about shopping at Wal-Mart and the mall; ..it’s not-so-much about lists and baking and decorations. Rather, and-Zechariah’s-song reminds us of this in a back-handed-way: ...Advent points us to the One who came and... Advent is a season that urges us to live-a-life that demonstrates readiness for His coming again. A ‘ready life’ is one lived through the power of His Spirit ~ ...through His Spirit, we are empowered to serve Him and His Kingdom in holiness and righteousness. And we can do this in peace, knowing that that God is on the throne and that he uses even the most broken vessels for His glory!

