



PART FOUR – ZECHARIAH: FROM SILENCE TO SONG

By Pastor Ricky Stephen

Luke 1:67-80

I. WAITING IN THE DARK

Sometimes all you can do is wait.

Christmas Eve stands as a symbol for waiting on the Lord. We sit in the dark and wait for the dawn to break.

Zechariah was a priest in difficult times. Questions about whether the Exile of Israel was over haunted the first century. Numerous political and religious groups had differing opinions on what should be done. Worse yet, Zechariah’s personal life was filled with the disappointment of not having a child.

II. FAITHFUL AND FAITHLESS

Fleming Rutledge likes to say, “Advent starts in the dark.”¹ God’s light breaks in where there is darkness. Zechariah embodies this darkness. Years of waiting shaped his response when an angel appeared, announcing that his prayer would be answered and he would have a child.

Custom dictated awe and obedience before God’s messengers. Isaiah said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). Mary responded, “May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38). Zechariah asks, “How can I be sure of this?” (Luke 1:18) His doubt comes not from wickedness but from long seasons of unanswered prayers. Luke tells us he (Zechariah) and his wife were righteous, observing God’s commands blamelessly (Luke 1:6).

Zechariah was faithful—righteous in God’s eyes. But in a sense, he was faithless—he did not believe God would come through for him.

Faith is a multifaceted word. It describes intellectual belief, our instinctual responses in our feelings, and the way we act. Our focus is often on belief and feelings. Hebrews 11:1 calls it, “*confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*” Zechariah does not look confident or assured. But God does not count Zechariah out for his doubt. For his faithfulness, Zechariah is righteous in God’s eyes.

Faith is dependent on the thought there is someone or something higher than you in the universe. It is confidence, confidence you don’t know it all. It is assurance, assurance you can’t see the whole picture.

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Confidence and assurance there is a God out there more stubborn than you are. A God whose got a good for you whether you feel like you totally believe it or not.

III. WAIT, WATCH AND LISTEN

For his doubt, Zechariah receives a rebuke. In our world, we might think this means he's 'in trouble.' But God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). When Zechariah asked, "How will I know?" the angel gave him a sign—the sign of silence:

"...I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God...And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

Luke 1:19-20

Speechlessness is a common response to God's glory. When angels appeared or people saw visions of God's throne, they were often left silent (Ezekiel 1:28; Daniel 10:15; Job 40:4; Isaiah 6:5; Revelation 1:17; 8:1). Zechariah's silence echoes Ezekiel, whom God told: "I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth...when I speak to you, you shall say..." This is what the Sovereign LORD says" (Ezekiel 3:26-27).

When God is about to act, sometimes, all we can do is wait, watch, and listen.

Silence is a response to true excellence and beauty. At a concert's climax, applause can feel inadequate; sometimes the proper response is breathless, attentive quiet. In the life of faithful obedience, sometimes we are talking loudly in the back during God's concert.

Maybe the angel isn't being a jerk to Zechariah. Maybe this discipline, like most of God's discipline, is a gift. He's telling Zechariah to 'be still and know He is God' (Ps. 46:10)

A.W. Tozer wrote *The Pursuit of God* in 1948, frustrated with the shallowness of his experience of Christians. His words ring as true today as ever:

"Whoever will listen will hear Heaven speaking. This is definitely not the hour when [we] take kindly to an exhortation to listen, for listening is not today a part of popular religion. We are at the opposite end of the pole from there. Religion has accepted the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity and bluster make [us] dear to God. But we may take heart. To a people caught in the tempest of the last great conflict God

says, 'Be still and know that I am God', and still He says it, as if He means to tell us that our strength and safety lie not in noise but in silence."²

Following Jesus creates tension: between waiting and acting, silence and speech, pursuing God and being pursued. The Psalms and prophets call us to quiet expectancy (Psalm 27:14; 37:7; 40:1; 62:5; Isaiah 40:31; Micah 7:7). Jeremiah reminds us, even in suffering, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (Lamentations 3:26).

Zechariah's silence shows us that doubt can coexist with faith. In the waiting, God acts, sometimes gently, sometimes miraculously. When the dawn finally rises, His work is more beautiful than we could have imagined—if we were quiet and attentive enough to notice.

IV. THE WARM GLOW OF GOD'S SOFT HEART

From the silence, a song arises. The one who doubted the angel is now, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, singing in unison with God's own voice.

We often think being *filled with the Spirit* happens spontaneously. Zechariah's song shows what he has done in his silence to prepare to sing.

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a. In Silence, Meditate on Scripture

Zechariah has clearly been reviewing Israel's history. He references passages throughout the Scriptures in his song:

- "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David" (Luke 1:69; 2 Sam. 22:3; 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Ps. 132:17).
- "...as he said through his holy prophets of long ago" (Luke 1:70; Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 5:2).
- "...to show the mercy promised to our fathers" (Luke 1:72; Exod. 6:5-8; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 105:8-10).
- "...you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High...to give his people the knowledge of salvation" (Luke 1:76-77; Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6; Isa. 40:3).

In quiet, we seek Scripture not just for commands, but for God's character and promises. Meditation in silence lets God's words sink into our hearts, shaping how we see the world. Zechariah is absorbing images, theology, and promises, not just reading them.

b. In Silence, Wait for God's Action

Zechariah's song is God-focused. The verbs—redeemed, raised up, remembered, rescued, enabled, guided—point to God's action, not ours. Psalm 130 captures this posture:

*"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.*

*I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the
morning..."*
Ps. 130:5-6

Waiting is active, like a soldier standing at attention. God doesn't need our gifts, yet chooses to use us. John Milton captures this:

*"...God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."³*

The soldier who waits for orders is still obedient. The soldier following their own orders is AWOL. Silence is space to make sure our actions align with God's action. It gives God space to help us live the way He wants us to.

A new year is an opportunity to revisit our commitments prayerfully and ask God if they are what He wants us to do.

c. In Silence, Open Yourself to God's Tender Hear

Zechariah concludes:

*"...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which
the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine
on those living in darkness...to guide our feet into
the path of peace."*

Luke 1:78-79

This *because of* reveals what Zechariah has learned: God's soft, compassionate heart drives His action. The Greek combines mercy and compassion—literally, gut-wrenching care for the suffering. Christmas is the ultimate display: God with skin soft enough to pierce, lungs that will burn on the cross, a heart tender toward us while we still have nothing to offer (Romans 5:8).

Being held in silence, when we have nothing to give, shatters self-reliance. Zechariah's forced silence made room for this revelation. When dawn finally breaks, the gift of God's tender mercy shines brighter than we could have imagined.

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Dallas Willard puts it beautifully:

"...we must understand that God does not "love" us without liking us--through gritted teeth--as "Christian" love is sometimes thought to do. Rather, out of the eternal freshness of his perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all his creatures is the natural outflow of what he is to the core--which we vainly try to capture with our tired but indispensable old word love."⁴

Zechariah's silence teaches us that in quiet, waiting, and reflection, God's mercy becomes tangible, and our songs rise in harmony with His.

V. THE ONCE AND COMING DAWN

We light our trees in the dark and wait for Christ to come. Some wander sleepless, in anguish or anticipation. Some may hear angels and doubt them. Some may hold what they never dreamed.

All of us will see the dawn break, because of God's soft heart. We remember the child in the manger, guiding our feet in the path of peace. Yet the call remains - to wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning.

The Dayspring will come from heaven, because of God's tender mercy, to shine on those living in darkness and guide our feet in peace.

Endnotes

1. Fleming Rutledge. (4 Sept 2018). Advent: the Once and Future Coming of Jesus. Eerdmans.
2. A.W. Tozer. (01 April 2015). The Pursuit of God. Moody Publishers, Ch.6 at pg. 80.
3. John Milton. (1921). Sonnet 19: When I Consider How My Light Is Spent - From *The Sonnets of Milton: With Introduction & Notes*. (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and Co.) Public Domain.
4. Dallas Willard. (24 Mar 1998). The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God. pg. 64

NOTES



Open Up:

- When have you had a season of prolonged waiting? What did waiting for something you couldn't control teach you?

Dig In:

Read Zechariah's dialogue with the angel (Luke 1:11-20)

- What is your relationship with doubt? Where do you find your doubts are greatest?
- What comfort do you take in Zechariah not being counted out for his doubt?
- How can silence be helpful in practice in a life of faith?
- In what ways can you incorporate silence into your life?

Prayer:

Give space for people to share both their doubts and what they are waiting on from God right now. Pray into these things.