

You Will Be Silent Until... (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

¹⁸And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” ²¹And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²²And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵“Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.” (Luk 1:18–25)

The Outline

- A. This is now the second part to the message I began last time dealing with this text. The announcement and promise of a son to be born to Zechariah has now been fully delivered by the angel in vv. 13-17. And as we move into v. 18, Zechariah speaks—he responds to all he has seen and heard with unbelief. And, consequently, it’s the last we’ll hear from him for 9 months, which in our text equates to 46 verses (until v. 64).
 1. I made the case last time that Zechariah has gotten caught in the drift of doubt. If I left you with any questions or concerns, hopefully those things will be clarified a bit more as we progress now into part 2.
- B. We continue to follow these verses through three headings:
 1. The Drift of Doubt (v. 18)
 2. The Discipline of Grace (vv. 19-23)
 3. The Destiny of the Saints (vv. 24-25)
- C. If you missed last time, I am not too concerned to give a review here. For as we move into v. 19 and investigate more closely Gabriel’s response to Zechariah, it will serve both as a brief overview of the last message and as a means of moving us forward into this week’s message.

(2) The Discipline of Grace (vv. 19-23)

- A. Before we fully engage this second heading, The Discipline of Grace, let's at least read v. 18 once more that we might more clearly see its connection to all that follows: "And Zechariah said to the angel, 'How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.'"
1. This question seems to come down essentially to a demand that God give some proof to Zechariah before he'd be willing to believe. "This sounds too impossible. You show me a sign and maybe then I'll believe. Your word isn't enough."

The Angel Responds

- A. Now we come to v. 19 and the angel responds: "And the angel answered him, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.'"
1. It is quite profound where Gabriel goes here. No sign, no proof. All he does is identify himself and his mission. "How shall you know this?! How?!..."
 - a. "I am Gabriel." He first directs his attention to the dignity of the one standing before him. "Don't you know who I am? Haven't you read Daniel?"
 - b. And, if that is not enough, he adds: "I stand in the presence of God." And even more: it is God who "sent [me] to speak to you and to bring you this good news." You might be bold enough to question me, but surely not Him? God sent me. He's the co-signer on this promise. That should be enough!
 2. While this answer seems a bit rough, if you're a parent you get this, right? There are times where the only way to end a debate with my 3 year old is: "Because I am your Daddy. We're not going to debate whether you have to wear your coat in 40 degree weather. I'm 3 times your size and ten times your age. And God has put me in your life to lead you."
- B. Regarding Gabriel's response in this verse, there are many things we could make note of. I'll share just a couple:
1. First, note that Gabriel is "sent" by God to speak to Zechariah. Here we are brought to face that wonderful truth that the angels of God are actually sent by Him to serve us! As the author of Hebrews writes: "[Angels are] all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14). Imagine this?! They are vastly superior to us in every way it would seem and yet God makes them subservient to us—they are sent out to serve us. How God loves us and is always ready to help us!
 2. A second thing to note is how Gabriel describes what he was sent by God to do: "...to bring you this good news."

- a. Here the underlying verb in the Greek is that same word that comes to be used characteristically for the preaching of the good news of the gospel. It's as if this news concerning John the Baptist is to be understood as the first discernible ray of light fanning up over the dark horizon before the "sunrise...from on high" (Luk 1:78) fully emerges in the person of Jesus. This is gospel here! This child, John, will be for the "joy and gladness" of Zechariah and of "many" (v. 14).
 - i. But this service, this gospel proclamation, is met by Zechariah not with joy, but with incredulity: "How shall I know this?" "I will not rejoice in these words until I get some proof!" O the stubbornness of unbelief that naturally resides in the heart of man! God would give us help and service, joy and gladness, gospel grace and yet we turn it back on Him!

The Discipline of Silence

- A. We continue with Gabriel's response now and come to v. 20. Things get even more serious at this point: "And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."
 - 1. We're given the discipline: "you will be silent...unable to speak...mute" (vv. 20, 22). And we're given the grounds: "because you did not believe my words"—unbelief.

But Still of Grace

- A. But we're also given grace. Where am I seeing this?
 - 1. First, this silence, while discipline, is at the same time a sign. It might not have been the sign Zechariah wanted, but it is a sign nonetheless.
 - a. It is a sign so significant, in fact, that when he comes out of the Holy Place, the crowd that had been waiting outside knew he'd seen a vision. "And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple" (v. 22a). They knew God had shown something to Him.
 - i. Zechariah, while disciplined, was given the grace of a sign that he might know God had indeed spoken to him!
 - 2. Second, notice with me those wonderful words at the end of this verse: "...because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."
 - a. He may be silenced but he will still be carried along by grace. God doesn't need us to fulfill His plan. It marches forward anyways. And though it marches forward, in one sense, without the help of Zechariah, surely it marches forward for the good of Zechariah. He is not silenced because God

is done with him. He is silenced so that he might sit back and watch how God alone will work now to save Him!

- i. He may be knocked out of the raft of self-sufficiency but he falls headlong into the crystal current of God's mercy. He is not expelled from the theater of God's redemption, but given front row seats. He is to be both silenced and saved!
- B. O what a principle is forged for God's children here! Some of us feel silenced, we feel benched, we think God is done with us. But He is not done, He is instructing. ["The Lord disciplines the one he loves" \(Heb 12:6a\)](#). This is not Him taking us out of the game, this is how He gets us in the game! We have to learn this vital principle or the Christian life cannot begin: not I, but God. When this is perceived, then we are ready, not only to be saved, but to do the work of the ministry!

The Heart of Doubt

- A. A question emerges at this point that can't be set aside: "Why does God respond much tougher here with Zechariah than He does with others in Scripture that seem to be asking very similar questions?"
1. Men like Abraham, Gideon, and others have asked similar questions of God and received not rebuke, but help in their doubting.
 2. And, while we could consider these, there is an even more pertinent example in the context of Luke's gospel. Remembering that Luke is clearly juxtaposing the stories of John the Baptist and Jesus in these first 2 chapters, it is important to see that Zechariah's question, isn't all that different in form from the question Mary asks when Gabriel informs her that she will conceive the Christ, the very Son of God.
 - a. In both cases we have the angelic appearance and announcement of a coming son. In both cases we're given the human response. We've seen Zechariah's, and now we see Mary's: ["How will this be, since I am a virgin?" \(v. 34\)](#).
 - i. Yet, with Mary, the response is different and much more amiable. There is no rebuke or discipline, but help and explanation: ["And the angel answered her: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you..." \(v. 35\)](#).
- B. Why? What accounts for such contrasting responses? The difference, it seems, lies in the unseen realm of the heart. Though the questions might be similar on the surface, the hearts beneath them are worlds (even ages) apart!

The heart of Mary is revealed in how she responds to Gabriel's explanation: ["Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" \(v. 38\)](#). The word was good enough for her.

- a. This sheds light on her original question: “How?” If it does represent a struggle with doubt, it is a doubt of a different kind than Zechariah’s. She is not so much interrogating God but inquiring of Him. God is happy to help the heart that is willing and ready to believe. When He shares with her how, her heart is not incredulous but ready to embrace it.
 - 2. This I think is the essential difference. Are we struggling with God from faith to faith or from doubt to doubt? There is a humble doubt that comes under God and begs: “I believe, help me with my unbelief!” But then there is a proud doubt that stands over God and demands: “I doubt, prove it to me or I won’t believe!”
 - a. With the former, God has no problem giving assurance and signs. With the latter, while they demand signs, even if a sign comes it is never enough.
- C. Judging by Gabriel’s response of rebuke, Zechariah’s heart seems to be trending towards the latter side of this spectrum. When in such a place it is not intellectual proof that one needs but existential humbling, not more evidence but brokenness. The heart has to be broken open that it might be ready to receive the words of God by faith. (This is how I was converted!)
 - 1. And, in His mercy, this is precisely what God does: “You will be silent.” It is simultaneously the sign that Zechariah sought and the humbling that Zechariah needed!

From a Story to The Story!

- A. Noticing the contrast between Zechariah and Mary at this point led me to some intriguing considerations. If I know Luke, if I know God, I think we are to discern something more going on in the conscious paralleling of narratives in these first 2 chapters.
 - 1. When God tells 1 story, He’s always telling 2. Whenever He’s telling a story, He’s always telling The Story. The Bible is composed of many individual narratives, but they are all a part of 1 grand metanarrative that flows from Genesis to Revelation.
 - a. Luke is after this same dynamic, I believe, in the way he’s framing these 2 narratives. Certainly he wants us to compare and contrast Zechariah and John with Mary and Jesus on a personal level. But we’re meant also to compare and contrast them at an even higher level—a redemptive-historical level, a covenantal level.
 - i. We are to see them in light of this story (Luk 1-2), but also in light of The Story (Gen-Rev). And when we do this we find that these two families embody the covenants or dispensations which they represent.

(1) From Law to Grace

- A. First, recall with me that while The Story of God is unified and eternal with reference to Himself, it unfolds and develops historically with reference to us. And, now, having the full canon of His revelation before us in the Scriptures, we see that this Story unfolds in particular from the age of promise to the age of fulfillment, from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. And within this broader movement we see, in a more refined way, a movement also from Law to Grace.
1. Consider the way the Apostle John sums up the movement of salvation history: “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).
 - a. While grace truly becomes the fundamental principle immediately after the fall—established in the gospel promise of [Gen 3:15](#), and running underneath all God’s activity with men from that point forward—still, the law is added in Moses to keep driving men back to grace and to keep men looking forward for the fullest expression of grace that would come in the Messiah. In that sense The Story moves from Law to grace.

(2) From John to Jesus

- A. Now all this is well and good, but why do I think it is in play in our text here? One significant piece is understanding where John the Baptist (and by association with him, Zechariah) stood in relation to this unfolding of history towards the Christ and His grace. There are certain programmatic statements in Luke concerning John. I’ll give you just a couple here:
1. Jesus would later tell his disciples in [Luk 16:16a](#)—“The Law and the Prophets were until [up to, as far as] John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached...”
 - a. John stands on the side of the Old Covenant Law and Prophets, but has the special privilege of being the one to break through the testaments and point directly to the Christ. In that sense he is a bridge figure, but we are not left to question where he stands fundamentally. He is still of the Old.
 - i. This is why Jesus earlier says of him: “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).
 - b. While John, in some sense, preaches the good news of the kingdom, he could never get us into it. Only the Christ, the King of the kingdom, can do this! At the end, John would have to sit silently in prison and watch as the Messiah moves forward to accomplish the work of universal and eternal redemption without him! The Law prepares and points, but only the Christ accomplishes!

(3) From Silence to Song

- A. Now, returning to Zechariah, we are prepared to see his story in light of The Story. Zechariah, standing on the side of the Law with John, represents the pinnacle of the Law in many ways:
1. He is “a priest...of the division of Abijah” (v. 5a).
 2. “And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron” (v. 5b)—Elizabeth was also of priestly heritage.
 3. “And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (v. 6). This rings of Paul’s words in Phil 3:6b—“as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”
 4. And this is now the highest day of this priest’s life. The one time in his ministry where he is granted by lot to enter the Holy Place and offer the incense. It would not get higher than this for Zechariah and his priesthood...
 5. ...And yet it is on this day when Zechariah is lowered to the dirt! Though he receives the first gospel proclamation of the NT, he meets it not with faith and joy but unbelief, and he is stricken silent.
- B. Seen now in light of The Story, the silence that he is stricken with is symbolic of both man’s inability to keep the Law, and the Law’s inability to change man. Even in its highest form it is essentially impotent. The Law was never meant to save us, but to silence us!
1. In fact, this is precisely the metaphor used by Paul to describe the purpose of the Law: “¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin “ (Rom 3:19–20).
 - a. The Law of God was never intended to be a ladder by which we climb up to Him but a muzzle by which we are silenced and lowered before Him! We are meant by the law not to be fueled in our pride but emptied of it.
 - i. There's a whole lot of noise going on out there in the world—in politics, in academia, in entertainment, in athletics, even in the church, even in my own heart. Just ego: “Look at me!” And then God comes in with law and says: “Silence!” No one can utter a word before Him.
- C. But His end goal is not to leave us in the silence of our unbelief and sin, but to lead us to faith in Christ and His grace. The Law is not opposed to grace but subservient to it, it takes us by the hand and walks us to the foot of the cross!
1. For we keep reading in Paul: “²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom 3:21–25).

- D. We’ve seen the Law and its silence come for Zechariah; now watch as it leads him to grace and song!
1. The day that Gabriel spoke of in v. 20, the day when his words would be fulfilled, comes in v. 57: “⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son... ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God” (vv. 57, 59–64).
 - a. There is so much to say here, but, for now, notice 2 things: (1) Zechariah’s tongue is loosed; and (2) and it is loosed in direct correlation with the naming his son.
 - i. There’s this whole naming controversy here. Shouldn’t the boy be named Zechariah? It seems it would break tradition to name him outside the family line. And a great deal is made of this name, John. In fact, it’s as he’s writing “His name is...John” that “immediately” the muzzle drops.
 - (1) Why does Luke bring attention to this? The name John in Hebrew: Yo’chanan, “YHWH is gracious.” There’s a new era, a new family line, and it is coming by grace!
 2. The Law leads to grace, the silence of unbelief to the songs of faith. Zechariah is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 67) and blesses God in song (vv. 68-79).
 - a. And, intriguingly, his song focuses not on John, but on Jesus! Note the beginning with me: “⁶⁸ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old...” (vv. 68–70).
- E. As the last of the Law and the Prophets, John, his son, would point to grace; but as the first of the New Covenant era, Christ would be the accomplisher and source of grace. The quintessence of John’s mission and message is found in that text we’ve often quoted from John: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Joh 1:29b). “Look away from me, and look to Him!” He is the One who can teach man to sing again.
1. Christ’s whole life was a song of devotion to His Father. And yet, this Lamb, though spotless and unblemished, would bear in Himself the curse of our silence: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led

to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa 53:7).

- a. If He would teach us to sing again, His song must be utterly silenced. And it doesn’t get more silent than death. It’s as if the record of His heart is ripped off its player and shattered into pieces on the floor.
 - i. In our text, by grace, Zechariah’s silence is turned to song. But on the cross, by wrath, the Messiah’s song is turned to silence. He would bear in Himself the wrath of God against our sin. The law and its curse crushed Him to the grave.
2. But the Messiah’s song wasn’t over. What sounded to us as the end of the music in His crucifixion, proved to be only a momentary Selah—a bridge, exploding into a final, even everlasting, chorus in His resurrection!

(4) From Zechariah to the Church

- A. What Zechariah experiences, then, is but a mere foreshadow of what is coming for all in Christ. For while all the world would languish in silent condemnation as the Son of man died and rose, upon His ascension and pouring out of His Spirit, we would all be invited into His song, by grace.
 1. This is the meaning of Pentecost when the incipient band of disciples, commanded at first to be silent, was, 50 days later, “filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues...[of] the mighty works of God” (Act 2:4a, 11)! And the church, with her message and mission, was born!
 - a. The everlasting chorus is not at last to be a Messianic solo, but a choral arrangement, a song fit for a choir composed of every tongue! And there’s a place in the choir even for me, and for you!
- B. We come to find that [Luk 1:20](#) contains within its compass the entire Story of Scripture, the entire history of redemption! All of humanity has been struck silent by the Law, but God’s promise would be fulfilled—a Messiah would come, and His grace would be enough to save any whom He would call to Himself. As Paul would later say: “By Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” ([Act 13:39](#)). He has done what we could never do. Let Him turn your silence of unbelief into the songs of faith!

(3) The Destiny of the Saints (vv. 24-25)

- A. Returning to our text in [vv. 24-25](#), we see again in this couple a foreshadow of what God is doing for us all: “²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying,²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

1. He's a reproach-bearing and reproach-removing God. The only proper response is, with Zechariah and Elizabeth: joy and song, and (just to throw it in here) thanksgiving!



¹ O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure...

⁶ On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹ It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa 25:1, 6-9)