

JJ¹

"Just who do you think you're talking to? Don't you know who I am?" Usually we hear that phrase in movies and TV shows when a powerful person is confronted by the police. They say this because they arrogantly think they're above the law and untouchable. Sometimes we might want to say it to kids when they get sassy.

As we continue making FAMILY PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS, we pick up where we left off last week with Zechariah and Gabriel in the temple. Today we find Gabriel treating Zechariah a bit like we might treat a sassy child, and deservedly so. As we continue to make our Christmas preparations we are told to not be like Zechariah, **Doubting the Power of God**. Instead we'll see that we prepare for Christmas and Christ to come again in being like Elizabeth, believing and rejoicing in the power of God.

Now, remember that Zechariah has just heard Gabriel speak the most amazing words that have ever fallen upon his ears. His prayers at last had been answered for a son and The SON. Like Abraham and Sarah, he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son in their old age. And not only that, God named their son John, which means "God is gracious," and this son would be God's prophet, the one

who would prepare the way for the Savior!

There wasn't any better news that an Old Testament believer could ever hear. But Zechariah considered the gray hair on his head and the growing weakness of his aging body. He considered his wife and saw the same thing and knowing she had gone through menopause doubted God's word and power and said, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years?"

Last week we heard Abraham say something very similar. Moses writes, "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'" (Gen. 17:17) Yet Abraham's laughter and questions weren't doubt. We know it wasn't doubt because there was no rebuke from the LORD. Abraham's reaction was believing amazement. Zechariah's response was just like what we heard from Sarah in our lesson today: "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" (Gen. 18:12) Then we heard the LORD rebuke her for her doubt.

Because Zechariah **doubted the word and power of God**, God rebuked him

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

through his messenger, Gabriel. "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 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 proper time."

"Just who do you think you're talking to? Don't you know who I am?" The way in which Gabriel speaks to Zechariah makes it sound like Zechariah should be familiar with him and how he looks. Obviously Gabriel wasn't just appearing as a normal human being as angels sometimes would. Gabriel came shining with the glory of heaven and of the One before whom he stands. Who knows, maybe Gabriel has some sort of heavenly name tag that Zechariah should have read. "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God...and you question what I'm telling you?!" It's not arrogance on Gabriel's part. He is a holy angel. Gabriel's response only reveals Zechariah's **doubt in the word and power of God.**

Gabriel's words to Zechariah essentially say, "I came with an amazing message of joy for you and all people which perfectly answered your prayers, and you meet this message with doubt!?" But who of us hasn't ever been just like Zechariah, doubting and questioning God's plans and power? We hear unbelievable

promises in God's Word and we think they're too big for God to keep, at least to me. "God says he's going to use everything for my good? Yeah right! I'd like to see him make anything good out of this (fill in the blank)!" "God tells me that Christ did everything to save me and paid for all my sins, but there are lots of smart people out there that say that's too good to be true, that I need to do things to help right my wrongs." "God tells me in his Word that he will bring all his believers to live with him forever in heaven, but I worry that he won't let me in."



Friends, doubting God's power does not prepare us for Christmas. It didn't prepare Zechariah and it won't prepare us. Every time we doubt God's Word and power we ought to have the Lord stand right before us and say, "Just who do you think you're talking to?"

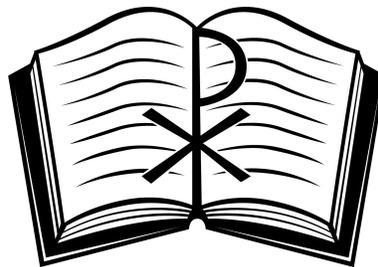
Don't you know who I am?" Every time we doubt God's Word and power we deserve to face consequences, perhaps having a blessing taken away from us like the Lord took away Zechariah's ability to speak. And sometimes he does. Sometimes the Lord does take something away to get our attention so that we would set our doubt aside and listen to him.

Friends, instead of being like Zechariah, let us be like Elizabeth as we make our **Family Preparations for Christmas.** Luke writes: "When his time of service was

completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion."

Zechariah returned home, unable to speak and certainly repentant of his sin and believing the promise. Can you imagine that reunion after two weeks apart? You can just picture Zechariah coming into the house. He walks through the door and Elizabeth can tell something isn't right. He's quiet. His face is still somewhat downcast. He looks at his dear wife with tears of both sorrow and great joy beginning to fill his eyes. At first she's confused and maybe even thinks Zechariah is playing a strange joke on her. Then he finds a tablet and slowly begins to tell her everything—the beauty of the temple, the angel and the message—the ugliness of his doubt and the consequence of his sin—the joy that would soon be theirs and would belong to all believers after them.

Just as the Lord promised, Elizabeth became pregnant. Then we're told that Elizabeth does something we might consider strange. She remains in seclusion for five months. We might wonder, "Why?" Over 100 years ago, Pastor Johann Ylvisaker said it best: "Now the reproach no longer rested upon Elisabeth. But she prefers to remain in seclusion before God, to praise Him who had revealed His grace, and so avoid even the appearance of vanity in the great joy that had entered her heart." (Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, p. 65,66)



Then we hear that beautiful confession of faith from Elizabeth: "The Lord has done this for me," she said, "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Remember, Elizabeth's disgrace wasn't something real before God. It was a disgrace the people of her culture created. Her barrenness was not a punishment for sin or because God loved her less than other women. It was all part of God's plan, not only for her life and the life of her husband, but part of God's plan for all people. God rewarded all those years of praying and patient waiting with the gift of a child in her own aged womb. She confesses that she knows the Lord has done this *for* her. He has taken away the disgrace of her culture. He has fulfilled the longing in her heart for a child of her own. He was also fulfilling the greatest desire of her heart—her Savior was coming!

Friends, let us be like Elizabeth and live in quiet confidence, knowing that the Lord has done and will do all things for our benefit. When the Lord speaks, let's remember who's talking to us, and believe his Word and his power to keep every promise he makes. One of those promises is the promise to forgive us all our sins. Yes, even the times we have doubted his word and power. How do we know? He proved it by keeping his promise to send his Son the first time. On

that cross, Jesus said, "It is finished."
Friends, believe those words. Don't doubt
them. Jesus speaks those words to you.

Rejoicing in what the Lord has done for
you, friends, know that he will fulfill the
greatest desire of our hearts and send his
Son again. One day at last he will take
away the disgrace our world places on us
for believing in him and his power to
save. The Lord will do this for us! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.