



Spiritual Barrenness- Luke 1:1:5-7, 11-17

## Spiritual Barrenness

- When God desire to show us something, teach us something, or illustrate something He often draws pictures using our lives
  - It could be something about Himself, ourselves, or life in general
  - **Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV**, “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”
  - **Genesis 22:8 NIV**, “Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.”

## Spiritual Barrenness

- **Galatians 4:4-5 NIV**, 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.
  - When this set time came, God began by drawing a picture of Israel's spiritual condition and He found it spiritually barren
  - Barren - bleak and lifeless, too poor to produce much or any vegetation
    - Unable to produce offspring or fruit, or unproductive land that cannot support vegetation

## Spiritual Barrenness

- **Galatians 4:4-5 NIV**, 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.
  - Barrenness can also be used to describe a lack of interest, ideas, or meaning
  - As God begins to draw His picture of the Messiah coming; He begins with a very old childless (*barren*) couple called Zechariah and Elizabeth

## Scripture

- **Luke 1:5-7 NIV**, 5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- When reading Scripture ask yourself, “Why is it important for God to preserve this seemingly insignificant piece of information?”
- Both were descendants of Aaron – they were devoted servants of God their entire lives
  - Even when it did not seem God was blessing them
- They were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly
  - They were not sinless but declared righteous by God as they lived out their lives according to His Word

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- Their home was barren – “But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.”
  - Elizabeth was blameless yet barren
  - Old Testament Law states that those who are obedient to God’s ordinances would not be barren (*Deut. 7:12-14*)
  - So, infertility was seen as a sign of God’s disfavor, and a great deal of shame was attached to being childless

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- How did this affect Elizabeth?
  - **Luke 1:25 NIV**, “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace (*shame*) among the people.”
    - Disgrace - loss of reputation or respect as the result of a dishonorable action
    - Childlessness was a social stigma thought to be the result of personal sin

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- We hear the same type of judgement and condemnation from Peter
  - **John 9:1-3 NIV**, 1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- We hear the same type of judgement and condemnation from Peter
  - **Job 11:13-15 NIV**, 13 “Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, 14 if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, 15 then, free of fault, you will lift up your face; you will stand firm and without fear.

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- This type of shame still goes on today with couples that struggle with infertility issues, miscarriages, or abortions
  - Difference between guilt and shame
    - Guilt will say, “I have done something wrong, I made a mistake”
    - Shame will say, “I am something wrong or I am a mistake”

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- **Zephaniah 3:19 AMP**, “Behold, at that time I am going to deal with all your oppressors; I will save the lame and gather the scattered, And I will turn their shame into praise and renown In every land [where they have suffered].”
  - Behold – stand up and take notice
  - Oppressors – whomever or whatever is oppressing you
  - Save and gathered
  - Shame turned into praise

## What do these verses tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

- Shame turned into praise
  - How?
    - Jesus has taken our shame on the cross
    - **Hebrews 12:1b-2 NIV**, “And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

## So, what is God saying to Israel and us through this part of His picture?

- Spiritually the Nation of Israel was barren
  - They were going through the rituals without the relationship
  - The pressure was enormous to live their lives as others defined
    - Pharisees, Zealots, Romans
  - Remember the definition of Barren - bleak and lifeless, too poor to produce much or any vegetation (*or anything of real value*)

## **So, what is God saying to Israel and us through this part of His picture?**

- There was a type of national shame being under Roman rule
- And spiritual shame being unable to satisfy the conditions the Religious Leaders placed upon them
- You may find yourself spiritually barren this morning
  - Unmet expectations, Life decisions, Unrepentant sins, A period where God seems to be 1,000 miles away

## So, what is God saying to Israel and us through this part of His picture?

- **Romans 8:1 NIV**, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”
- **Psalm 68:4-6 NIV**, 4 Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the Lord. 5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. 6 God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.
- God plants a seed of hope in this couple’s life

## Scripture

- **Luke 1:11-13 NIV**, 8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

## Scripture

- **Luke 1:11-13 NIV**, 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

## Scripture

- Burning incense was an image of their prayers rising up to God in heaven
  - These prayers were for their Nation and their personal lives
  - “your prayer has been heard” – God is ready to act upon the desires of your heart Zachariah
  - Notice the singular word prayer and not prayers
  - What had Zechariah just prayed for?

## What was Zechariah's response?

- **Luke 1:18 NIV**, Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”
  - Doubt in God's Word and His promises
- Do we not do this to the promises of God today?
  - “I will never leave nor forsake you” – How can I be sure?
  - “Your sins are forgiven” – How can I be sure?
  - “I will give you strength” – How can I be sure?

## What was Zechariah's response?

- This is where the Nation of Israel finds themselves
  - “The Messiah is coming as promised” – How can I be sure?
  - “All the restoration of Israel is coming” – How can I be sure?
  - “God has heard your prayers” – How can I be sure?

## What was Zecharaiah's response?

- Here God has sent one of His chief angels to deliver a message of hope and encouragement to Zechariah and what is Zecharaiah's response?
  - Doubt - he doesn't fully believe Gabriel's words
  - **Luke 1:19 NIV**, The angel said to him, "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."

## What was Zecharaiah's response?

- Hear God say, “It’s not up to you and Elizabeth but God”
  - You keep being, “righteous in the sight of God”
  - You keep being servants of the Living God
- Did you notice God didn’t yank Zecharaiah’s blessing away because he was struggling to understand it and accept it

## Spiritual Barrenness

- What to do with my spiritual barrenness
  - Understand you are the object of His love
  - Shift from the past to the future
  - Keep your eyes upon Jesus
  - **2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 20:12-15 NIV**, 2 Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”
    - 13 All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

## Spiritual Barrenness

- What to do with my spiritual barrenness
  - **2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 20:12-15 NIV**, 14 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.
  - 15 He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.’”



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