

Luke

The Gospel for Everyone

Study 14 | Luke 1:57-80

HIS NAME IS JOHN

News and Needs

Upcoming Events:

- 12/17 - Ministry Leaders Christmas Party, 7:30-9:30PM, Brown's Apt.
- 12/17 - Pub Night, Double Windsor, 8PM
- 12/19 - Ice Skating, Wollman Rink, 2PM
- 12/20 - Christmas in the City Concert, 4:30-6:00PM w/ light apps and desserts to follow, Resurrection Presbyterian Church
- Please note - PM Service this week is moved to Resurrection Pres. for the Christmas in the City Concert

Opportunities to Serve:

- Evening Service Help - PLEASE! We are completely dependent on volunteers to help with the few easy duties to make the PM service a warm and hospitable invitation to worship together and feast at the Lord's Table. Please appeal to your group to take a Sunday to join us at the PM service and lend a hand with greeting, offering, and/or communion setup/cleanup. Contact Brian Steadman to help out

1. Read verses 57-66. What is at stake in this naming dispute? What do the neighbors and relatives reveal in their reaction? What do Zechariah and Elizabeth reveal in response? What do we learn from this about about the costs of obedience for us as they concern God and the natural family? What are some of the costs you've experienced with your natural family as you seek to put God first in your life?

Earlier in chapter one, we saw the narrative of the announcement of John's birth to Zechariah. Remember, the angel Gabriel made specific promises to Zechariah and Elizabeth on who this child would be in relation to the Lord who was to come. Gabriel also specifically tells them that this "miracle" son born to them will be named "John." Zechariah doubts the certainty of these promises and the sign he is given to prove to him that the Lord will in fact make good on these promises comes in the form of a punishment, he will remain mute for the duration of the pregnancy. Now, the time has come, the promised son is born. Time to give him a name.

How much detail did Zechariah share with his neighbors and relatives concerning the promise given to them regarding this child? The text doesn't really say. The crowd seems to have no understanding as to why Elizabeth, who must have been clued in on the details, would choose the name John. They may not know all the details. At any rate, the crowd, naturally, figures the boy will be given a family name, specifically that of his father. The crowds rejoice with Elizabeth for the great mercy shown to Elizabeth, but they don't see that this "miracle" baby is a mercy to Zechariah and Elizabeth, and also a mercy towards an even greater purpose. Which is why they fail to understand why the parents would choose to give their baby a name outside the family line.

Zechariah has had nine months to think about that encounter in the temple. Nine months to do a whole lot of listening to the voice of God and not any speaking. Zechariah, and Elizabeth, show that they understand the significance of this great blessing they have received. The Lord has done a new thing in the life of these parents, but he is also doing a new thing in the life of Israel. Which is why this boy is given a new name, not an old family name. Zechariah and Elizabeth believe the promises given and in obedience, they name their child John.

Notice that the crowd was all happy clappy up to this point. Now they are filled with wonder, even fear, and the news of this peculiar birth and the parents' response begins to spread. We see over and over again in the gospels

that Israel had expectations for God to make good on his promises, to provide for them salvation through a promised Son. And God makes good on those promises, but not in the way the people expected. And this will be a struggle for Israel to grasp throughout the ministry of both John and Jesus.

That struggle to see and understand this new way the Lord is coming to Israel will divide families. Jesus' own family will struggle to grasp who he is as God's chosen King. Even John, connected to Jesus by family, by "miraculous" birth story, and by a common mission, will have his doubts as to if Jesus really is this promised King.

So, we should not be surprised that sometimes one of the costs of following King Jesus creates tension between the concerns of our natural families with that of our family in Christ. Does Jesus want peace and flourishing in our natural families? Absolutely. He of course is not pleased when we fail to serve and love our families faithfully. But we can't lose sight that Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit established a new family, God's family, which is the Church. And the Church has a mission to bring King Jesus' peace to bear on our natural families, our Church family, and all peoples to the ends of the earth.

So how do you balance that tension, between our calling to our natural family and our greater family, the Church? When has obedience to Jesus brought you into conflict with your parents, siblings, or extended family? What is able to sustain you through such conflicts?

2. With the naming of John, Zechariah is able to speak again. His response is great praise and blessing for God. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he now sings of God's salvation. What does Zechariah's response teach us about the discipline of the Lord? How do we respond to the Lord's discipline in our lives? Have you ever been able to respond to the Lord's discipline in praise?

This is a true picture of what the discipline of the Lord is for. Our Heavenly Father disciplines us for our restoration and for our growth to maturity. The Scriptures confirm that while no one would say they enjoy the discipline of the Lord in the moment, it's goal is to produce the fruit of righteousness in our lives. He disciplines us like any good earthly father, so that we may enjoy blessing and not endure cursing. And we know that ultimately, fatherly discipline teaches us that our fathers actually love and care for us enough to reign us in when we go astray. Ask anyone who grew up without a father, most of them will tell you that they did not enjoy their freedom to do as they pleased with no consequences. They longed for the security to know someone one bigger, stronger, and wiser than they were looking out for them and keeping them on the right path - because that is what love does.

The faithful response to the Lord's discipline is that of Zechariah's. He did not shake his fist or rail at God once his tongue was finally loosed after nine months of silence. He responds in repentance for his lack of trust in his Father and blesses the Lord. The Lord's discipline has worked greater faith in Zechariah, and he responds in overflowing praise for what the Lord will accomplish. Praise be to God that he uses his people, with a mixture of half-faith and devotion, to accomplish his purposes!

Hopefully you can lead your group in sharing stories of the Lord's discipline in their lives. How did you respond to the Lord's discipline? How long did it last? How would you graph your response to that discipline? Were you able to see at last the Lord's faithfulness and goodness to you in that discipline? Can you praise him for it now?

3. List the many hopes and promises attached to the baby John as they are prophesied by the Holy Spirit through Zechariah in 67-80. What challenges to their own self-understanding does this prophecy present to Israelites who might have thought they were doing well? In what ways has the gospel forced you to have a bleaker view of your own spiritual state?

The promises begin with deliverance from Israel's enemies. It probably wouldn't be terribly hard for those hearing this prophecy to know exactly who they needed deliverance from - Rome, the occupying force. Rome really stands on a long line of national enemies of Israel. National life for an Israelite has not flourished for hundreds of years, since the decline of the nation into exile in 586 B.C.

But to deliver Israel, the Lord must deal with a much worse enemy. The enemy that got Israel in their fix in the first place. Israel needs the Lord to provide forgiveness for their sin. It was Israel's rebellion against God's rule in their life, their idolatrous worship of other gods, and their acts of oppression and injustice that punishment came upon them in the form of exile, as promised.

No Israelite can presume that the Lord will do this because Israel is so righteous and deserving. No. Sin and death reign over God's people, and they need salvation from those enemies just as much as deliverance from their national ones. The good news is good news. But the grace promised is not cheap grace. The forgiveness we need is not for a few petty faults. It is for outright rebellion against the one true King. We don't need Jesus to just come lift us up, dust us off, and send us on our way. We need Jesus to breathe new life into our cold, dead hearts. To provide forgiveness for sin and resurrection life, Jesus would have to go all the way to the cursed, bloody death of the cross.

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That is the gospel. It is good news, but it assaults in false notion we may have that we're basically ok in God's eyes and isn't it nice that we have this cute story about a baby born in a manger. Those who acknowledge that they are hungry for the life only Jesus provides, will be satisfied with good things. Those who are too rich in themselves to need this great salvation, will be sent away empty.

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