

WHEN GOD CRASHED INTO THE WORLD OF ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH

Imagine driving down a road, “minding your own business,” so to speak, when the road beneath you begins to shake. That happened to Chris Riekema in Anchorage, AK, this past Friday (November 30th) while driving with his 7-year-old son. Assuming he had blown a tire, he pulled over to the shoulder. He quickly realized it was not a flat tire, however, when he saw the row of streetlights above him swaying and the red SUV in front of him sink into the road. Riekema said, “[It] sank, and then it sank some more. It was a slow process—about 30 to 40 seconds.” Thankfully the driver walked away unharmed and Riekema was quoted as saying, “In a way it was exciting and it wasn’t because it was so slow.”

In other parts of the city, power went out, glass shattered, tiles dropped from the ceiling to the floor, and both school children and office workers scrambled to get under their desks. What a way to start your Friday morning!

Earthquakes are not new to Alaska—I was surprised to read they have 40,000 each year which is more than the combined total of the other 49 states—but they have not had any this big near a populated area since 1964. We’ve had a lot of these kind of things lately, haven’t we—hurricanes, fires, and now earthquakes. Add to that the number of mass shootings and one can’t help but think God is trying to get our attention! As I thought about these things—and the various passages from which we get the history of Christ’s coming to earth—the Lord laid it on my heart to start a series entitled “When God Crashes Into Your World.”

I chose the word “crash” for several reasons.

1. A crash is something that is usually unexpected; it is not something we are looking for or planning on
2. A crash is something that is “loud” enough—or significant enough—to stop us from doing what we are currently doing; it gets our attention.
3. And a crash is something that if we are directly involved in, it affects us for life!

Please turn to Luke 1:5-12. “And when Zacharias saw him [the angel], he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.” God—through the means of an angel—just came crashing into the life of Zacharias. Although Zacharias was a priest and served God in the temple, he was not expecting a direct encounter with a messenger from God that day. Malachi—the last book of the OT—was written some 400 years prior to this. Think about that for a moment. Four hundred years had passed since God communicated a message to mankind and now that silence was broken. God had a message for Zacharias that not only got his attention, but that changed his world for the rest of his life.

As we look at instances when God “crashed” into the world of the individuals that were involved in the coming of Christ to earth as a baby, I will attempt to answer these 4 questions:

1. Who God sent messages to
2. What were they doing when they received the message
3. What was the message to them
4. What did they do with the message they received

1. Who God sent a message to—Zacharias and Elisabeth

Although the angel Gabriel appeared only unto Zacharias, we are going to look at both him and his wife because they were both affected by the message from God.

A. Background

--Luke 1:5 Zacharias was a priest of the course of Abia—referred to as Abijah in I Chronicles 24. We aren’t going to turn there, but David divided the priests into 24 groups and each group was named after

the leader of the group at that time. Kind of interesting that David reigned from 1010-970 BC—meaning these divisions were still in effect close to 1000 years later!

--Elisabeth (same verse) was “of the daughters of Aaron” meaning both Zacharias and his wife had Aaron as their great, great, great (not sure how many “greats”) grandfather.

--In Luke 1:7 we see here they are childless and “both were now well stricken in years.”

More important than their background, however, was their behavior. We can’t do anything about the family we were physically born into, but we certainly can do something about how we live our lives.

B. Behavior

--Luke 1:6—“And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Were they perfect? Obviously not because we see in verse 18 that Zacharias doubts the message from God and in verse 20 the angel Gabriel tells him he will not be able to speak “because thou believest not my words.”

--Although not perfect, they strived to be. They feared God and loved God and obeyed God and served God. They were upright and holy in their conduct. Clarke writes: “They were as exemplary and conscientious in the discharge of their religious duties as they were in the discharge of the offices of civil life. What a sacred pair! they made their duty to God, to their neighbor, and to themselves, walk constantly hand in hand.”

--They were also pray-ers! Notice verse 13—“But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is **heard**...”

2. What were they doing when they received the message

--Elisabeth? No clue because we aren’t told

--What was Zacharias doing?

--In Luke 1:8-9, we see he was carrying out his duties as a priest. He was serving God in the role God had assigned to him. Did God have a message for him because he was an incense burner—or because he was a faithful server? God had a message for him because he was righteous and obedient.

Let’s pause here a moment. Who does God have messages for **now**? Who does He visit, so to speak? He most certainly speaks to those who want to hear from Him! Notice again verse 13. The prayer of Zacharias was heard—and the angel Gabriel came with the answer. Since verse 13 connects his prayer being heard with the announcement that Elisabeth was to have a son, it is pretty safe to say that that is at least part of what he prayed for.

I don’t want to read too much into this, but can I suggest they asked God to give them a son so he could **serve** God? Is that not what godly parent wants—for their children to fear God and love God and obey God and serve God?

Matthew 9:37-38 “Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.”

Can we sincerely ask God to send forth laborers if we are unwilling to be laborers ourselves—and if we are unwilling for our children to be laborers?

Do you want to hear from God? Do you want a fresh visit from Him? If so, be diligent and faithful doing what you know He wants you to do!

3. What was the message to them

A. Good news to be shared (vss 13-17)

--v 13—you are going to have a son

--v 14—many are going to rejoice at his birth. For people to rejoice at his birth, that news would need to be shared.

--v 16—he (John) shall turn many to the Lord

--v 17—he (John) shall go before Him (the Lord) in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah). The last book of the OT both in placement and time is the book of Malachi. The last two verses of the OT are as follows:

Malachi 4:5-6 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

Although there are 400 plus years between Malachi and Gabriel’s message to Zacharias, it is noteworthy that the message of the NT begins with how the OT ended—with a promise that God will send the prophet Elijah “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Was John perhaps Elijah brought back to life again? No—because Elijah never died! John was not Elijah; he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah...” The disciples recognized John as a forerunner to Christ, however.

Matthew 17:10-13 “And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist.”

The good news, then, was not just that Zacharias and Elisabeth were going to have a son they would name John, but that John would prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. And if the one who is coming to **prepare** the way of the Lord will soon arrive, the ultimate good news is that the **Lord is coming soon too!**

Not only was there good news to be shared, there was also a

B. Godly example to be set (vs 15)

Why do I say the message involved Zacharias and Elisabeth setting a good example? Maybe I’m stretching it a bit, but I don’t really think so. Look at verse 15—“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”

Although the message does not **state** they are to be a good example, it certainly is implied. The son they were to have would be characterized by three things:

--being great in the sight of the Lord. He would be great according to God’s assessment—not man’s.

--he would drink neither wine nor strong drink.

--he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from birth. In other words, he will have a heart for God and a hunger for God and will be equipped by God for this task.

If they were to raise this kind of son, would not it behoove them to live a certain way? ‘Now John, your mother and I have told you a number of times that you need to stay away from alcohol.’ ‘But father, why then do you not stay away from it?’

What was God’s message to Zacharias and Elisabeth through Gabriel?

--First, they had good news to share

--Second, they had a good example that they would need to set,

Third, C. Great purpose to be stressed (vss 16-17)

I can’t help but think that the story of Zacharias’ encounter with the angel Gabriel was heard more than once by John as he was growing up. My guess is that it was told to him often to remind him that he had a mission—he was to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God (v 16) and to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v 17). We will look at more evidence of that in just a minute.

4. What did they do with the message they received

A. They named him John (vss 59-63) Gabriel told him he was to be named John and they obeyed

B. They shared the good news of both John and Jesus (vss 64-69)

i. About John (64-66)

Everyone who heard what Zacharias said ‘What manner of child shall this be!’

ii. About Jesus (67-70)

--v 68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people,”

--v 69 “And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David”

Jesus had not yet come, had He? In fact, He was still 6 months from being born. And yet, God led Zacharias to say that because it was so sure to come to pass that it was declared as if it had already taken place!

That is truly the good news of Christmas, isn’t it—God visiting earth for the purpose of redeeming us. Redemption—being the substitute for the payment of our sins—would not take place until Jesus died, but He had to come to earth first.

C. They prepared John for service

--v 76—Zacharias told John of his mission at 8 days of age!

--v 80—John waxed strong in spirit. Barnes writes that he increased “in courage, understanding, and purposes of good, fitting him for his future work.”

Were they successful? They certainly were! We see that in several ways:

i. What John said about Himself

John 1:22-23 “Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”

ii. What John preached

Matthew 3:1-2, 7-9 “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

iii. What John said about Jesus

John 1:27-30 “He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for He was before me.”

Although Jesus was born AFTER John, John recognized that Jesus existed before him and was superior to him.

iv. What Jesus said about John

Matthew 11:11 “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist...”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. Zacharias and Elisabeth—as a couple—were devoted to God. Is that not God’s goal for all Christian couples?
2. God has a message that needs to be shared—are we sharing it?
3. Do you want a fresh visit from God? Seek Him with your heart; be faithful doing what He wants you to do