

# The Gospel According to Luke

“Speech Therapy”  
Chapter 1:5-25

## Introduction

The Bible moves from Malachi to Matthew with the turn of a page. *It is a page-turn that spans centuries!*

From the time Malachi spoke forth the Word of God until the announcement of the birth of Jesus was about four hundred years. They are often called “the silent years” because God was not speaking to His people through His prophets. They were silent years, but not stagnant years. God was busy behind the scenes of human history preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. There’s a verse in the Bible that says, “[when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law](#)” ([Galatians 4:4](#)). In other words, the time of the Lord’s birth was God’s perfectly appointed moment – the moment He had been long preparing. It’s the moment in Luke’s Gospel when the angel Gabriel breaks the silence and speaks to Zacharias.

It’s the twenty-first century. We have the Word of God – Malachi and Matthew; Old Testament and New; from Genesis through The Revelation. God speaks through it; but still it can seem as though He is silent on a personal level.

If He is silent, He is not stagnant! He is busy behind the scenes of your life preparing things, getting things lined-up, so you can experience more of Jesus.

There is a principle here in the life of Zacharias that we should consider. When God spoke to him, he was busy serving. **God speaks to you when you are busy serving Him.**

God not only speaks to you when you are busy serving; you speak for Him through your serving. Zacharias was left temporarily speechless,

but that doesn't mean he didn't "speak" for God. From the time he emerged mute from the Tabernacle until he regained his speech, the events of that day preached a powerful silent-sermon to the nation of Israel.

So, too, with you. Get busy, or stay busy, serving God and your life will speak to others looking on.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Get Or Stay Busy Serving God And He Will Speak To You, and #2 Get Or Stay Busy Serving God And You Will Speak For Him.

#1 Get Or Stay Busy Serving God  
And He Will Speak To You  
(v5-17)

There had been no prophetic word to Israel for some four hundred years... Yet the Gospel of Luke opens with a scene of the nation serving God in His Tabernacle.

There had been no personal word to Zacharias and Elizabeth. Long had they prayed for a child, but it seemed God was silent. It was a social disgrace that could have embittered them against God... Yet the Gospel of Luke opens with a scene of personal service to God in His Tabernacle.

The daily discipline of living a quiet but obedient life before the Lord is of great value.

With a great sense of drama and a perfect sense of timing, God spoke to both the nation and His priest at the same time!

In the opening verses we get a glimpse at what it means to be busy serving God:

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

“Herod” was king, but not the rightful king. The Jews were under Roman domination. Where was God, to fulfill His promises of a king and a kingdom? Four hundred years seems a long, long time.

“Zacharias” served as a “priest.” He was “of the division of Abijah.” There were in those days about eighteen thousand priests. They were divided into groups, called here “divisions,” to serve on a rotating basis. All the divisions, all the priests, were present at the Temple during Israel’s three great annual feasts. Then each division served twice more during the calendar year for one week at a time.

“Elizabeth” was the daughter of a priest. It was an honor for her husband – a priest married to the daughter of a priest. Not only that, but in verse six you read,

Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

This is shorthand to say they were both sincere believers who were busy serving God faithfully. They sound blessed... until you read,

Luke 1:7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

To be childless was a reproach. It was seen as a judgment from God. We are meeting this couple at a time in their lives when it was unreasonable to expect a pregnancy.

They had married well; they had a good career; they were believers serving God faithfully... **And** they had a severe, lifelong trial. Their response was to go on trusting God, to stay busy serving Him.

One very special day of serving came along:

Luke 1:8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,

Luke 1:9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

Luke 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

There were more priests on duty each day than there were sacred duties to perform. They would therefore cast lots to choose which of them would perform each function. To “burn incense [in] the Temple of the Lord” meant going into the holy place, out of sight of the people and just before the veil of the holy of holies behind which God’s presence dwelt among His people. It was not just a great honor; it was a once-in-a-lifetime moment. Many priests never drew the lot to burn incense; and, if they did, they could never offer it again in their lifetime.

What a tremendous, momentous opportunity this was for Zacharias! Elizabeth would be so proud of him. Think of what they both would have missed if they had let bitterness and self-pity at being childless overrule their serving God.

Zacharias had no idea just how life-changing this moment would be:

Luke 1:11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

Luke 1:12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

Zacharias got more than he bargained for! What seemed like the culmination of his career, the crown of his service, began a whole new chapter of serving God.

In life, in our secular careers, we work to retire. We want to get to the culmination, to the crown, and then rest. We need to adjust our thinking when it comes to serving God. The culmination and crown do not ever come in this life; they come when we go to be with Jesus.

It was while Zacharias was busy that God spoke to him. I might add that Elizabeth was “busy” as well. She was what we would call a “PK” – a priest’s kid! Yet she hadn’t rebelled against God, but herself married a priest. Even though barren and reproached by all the other women, she evidently supported her husband in his work.

Get busy serving God and stay busy! Warren Wiersbe illustrated it by saying, “It is difficult to steer a car when the engine is not running. When we get busy, God starts to direct us.”

The angel Gabriel gave this blessed married couple their new sphere of service:

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

Luke 1:14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Commentators like to point out that the word for “prayer” is in a verb tense that would indicate his immediate prayer – the prayer Zacharias was offering as he burned the incense. In other words, he didn’t take advantage of the moment to pray for himself and his wife and their desire to have a child. It’s a great insight into his servant’s heart that he considered others and took his ministry seriously.

Why, then, does Gabriel promise them a son? Because the birth of John would answer both prayers! It would answer the prayer Zacharias undoubtedly prayed at the altar of incense; the prayer of all the multitude of Jews; for the coming of their Messiah. **He was coming!** And a son born to this couple would prepare the people for His arrival. Zacharias and Elizabeth would “have joy and gladness”; the nation would “rejoice at his birth.”

Luke 1:15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.

Luke 1:16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

Luke’s Gospel emphasizes the ministry and influence of the Holy Spirit. John would forego ever taking a “drink” of anything that might influence him because he would be entirely influenced by the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power and the influence by which we are to serve God.

Luke 1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’*<sup>2</sup> and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

The mention of “Elijah,” and the quote, are both from Malachi. Remember, that was the last word God spoke until now. From God’s perspective He had never stopped speaking. He picked-up four hundred years later right where He’d left off!

I want to suggest something even more amazing. Gabriel had last appeared to Daniel over five hundred years before. There is a parallel between these two appearances:

1. Gabriel appeared to Daniel at the time of the evening sacrifice (Daniel 9:20-21); and now he appeared to Zacharias at the time of the sacrifice, which was probably the evening.
2. Daniel described himself as being fearful (Daniel 8:17); so was Zacharias afraid.
3. Daniel was temporarily rendered speechless – not in the same way, but the encounter itself left him, he said, “dumb” (Daniel 10:15).
4. Daniel’s visit dealt with the future coming of the Messiah; Zacharias’ visit was the announcement Messiah was coming.

Here is something else: Daniel was given the prophecy of the “Seventy weeks” of years that describe prophetic history. **You can see these seventy weeks in the chronology of Jesus’ infancy:**

1. There are six months – 180 days – between the announcement of John’s and Jesus’ coming births.
2. Mary’s pregnancy took nine months – 270 days.
3. There were 40 days from Jesus’ birth to His presentation in the Temple.

$180 + 270 + 40 = 490$  days, or *seventy weeks!* Coincidence? Hardly.

Zacharias and Elizabeth had a new assignment, a new service. You know what it was? **To raise a godly young man!** Serving God begins at home, with your marriage and your family. Even the quote from Malachi confirms it: *‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.’* Parents must awaken to their responsibilities. Regenerated lives lead to reprioritized lives; reprioritized lives lead to the redeeming of families.

#2 Get Or Stay Busy Serving God  
And You Will Speak For Him  
(v18-25)

Here is a reminder you might want to write in the margin of your Bible: When angels talk, don't ask them any questions!

Luke 1:18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

God often delighted in giving children to the childless. Zacharias knew the stories of Abraham and Sarah, or Isaac and Rebekkah; or of Hannah; but he did not think of himself and his wife in the same privileged category as them. God loves you as much as any other saint, regardless your path is different from theirs.

Gabriel got a little testy:

Luke 1:19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

Luke 1:20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

Do you ever share God's wisdom, grace, and mercy with someone... Only to have them reject it? Every time we have an altar call and folks refuse to respond and reject salvation, it is a reenactment of this scene.

Zacharias was rendered "mute." The word and subsequent story indicate he was deaf as well.

Luke 1:21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple.

Luke 1:22 But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

The priest who offered the incense was to go in, pray a short prayer, then get out and pronounce the Lord's blessing upon the people waiting outside. The delay was puzzling; then positively mind-boggling!

Although Zacharias could not speak, he could still share. His life, and that of his wife, would "speak" with greater volume than any words

could. Maybe you are not articulate; but your Christian witness can “speak” volumes to people as they observe your life on a daily basis.

Luke 1:23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

One more detail is given regarding Zacharias as a servant: He finished-out his week before going home! Handicapped and anxious to share with Elizabeth, he nevertheless remained faithful to his commitments in the Lord’s house.

Luke 1:24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,

Luke 1:25 “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people.”

Zacharias had undoubtedly written-out what had happened. His neighbors would have been terrifically curious - like modern day paparazzi.

Elizabeth “hid herself five months.” She gave-up an expectant mother’s joyful announcement of pregnancy until it was obvious, until she was showing. Was it to avoid the crowds? The questions? Was it to simply enjoy God’s work in her life? Whatever her reasons, she was “righteous and blameless.”

There is always more than one way to speak for God. Hers was to wait, and then come out all at once with the news and the evidence. Be careful not to project onto others your own attitudes and ideas of how they should speak for God, or when, or where.

**Your** life speaks for God. It may not seem to you to be saying much; it may even be saying things that seem to contradict God’s blessing – like Elizabeth being barren. But if you will get busy and stay busy serving God, He will speak through you in His time and for His glory.

Conclusion

Start at home, with your family – even if you are a family of one... Or a blended family... Or a family mixed with believers and unbelievers.



Ask the Lord how you, in your situation, can say what Joshua said centuries ago,

Joshua 24:15 ...Choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.