

In society's, like Israel, in which a woman's value was largely measured by her ability to bear children, to be without children often led to personal hardship and public shame. For Elizabeth, a childless old age was a painful and lonely time but still she remained faithful to God.

Both Elizabeth and Zechariah came from priestly families. For two weeks each year, Zechariah had to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to attend to his priestly duties. After one of those trips Zechariah returned home excited but speechless. He had to write down his good news, because he couldn't give it any other way. And what a wonderful surprise he had for his wife; their faded dream would become an exciting reality! Soon Elizabeth became pregnant, and she knew her child was a long hoped for gift from God.

News traveled fast among the family. Seventy miles to the north, in Nazareth, Elizabeth's relative Mary also unexpectedly became pregnant. Within days after the angel's message that she would bear the Messiah, Mary went to visit Elizabeth knew that Mary's son would be even greater than her own, for John would be the messenger for Mary's son.

When her baby was born, Elizabeth insisted on his God-given name: John. Zechariah's written agreement freed his tongue, and everyone in town wondered what would become of this special child.

Elizabeth whispered her praise as she cared for God's gift. Knowing about Mary must have made her marvel at God's timing. Things had worked out even better than she could have planned.

We, too, need to remember that God is in control of every situation.

When did you and I last pause to recognize God's timing in the events of your life?

1. God remembers our faithfulness

⁶ *Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations* Luke 1:6 NLT

¹¹ *While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar.* ¹² *Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him.* ¹³ *But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John.* ¹⁴ *You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth* Luke 1:11-14 NLT

Once again I remind that you that Zechariah and his wife were both found to be faithful in God's eyes. It should always be our goal. We should continually strive to be like Him and in a vibrant daily relationship with Him so that we can please Him daily.

Someone once encountered Coach Lou Holtz and inquired concerning his wife, who has been fighting cancer for several years. He said, "The other day, we were talking and she said to me,

Do you know the difference between you and me? I replied, No! She said, You believe in God, I believe God!"

A promise from God is a statement we can depend on with absolute confidence. Here are 5 promises for the Christian to claim.

God's presence -- "I will never leave you" (Heb. 13:5)

God's protection -- "I am your shield" (Gen. 15:1)

God's power -- "I will strengthen you" (Isa. 41:10)

God's provision -- "I will help you" (Isa. 41:10)

God's purposes -- "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil" (Jer. 20:11)

God is faithful to us and He remembers our faithfulness to Him.

2. God responds in His time not ours

For Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, the years of bearing children had passed them by. When it comes to God we need to understand that His timing is far different than ours. You will find this to be true in many places throughout the Bible.

Moses was not called to lead Israel until he was 80 years old and had spent forty of his years on the back side of the desert. Most scholars believe that he spend forty years in Pharaoh's court, forty years in the desert and forty years trying to lead the nation of Israel to the promise land. Getting called to lead a million plus people out of slavery was not really all that appealing for an 80 year old but God's timing is far different than ours.

Often we try to seek God's blessing on our plans instead of just asking Him to allow us to join Him in His will and plan for our lives.

Henry Blackaby said, "You never find God asking persons to dream up what they want to do for Him...Without doubt, the most important factor in each (Biblical) situation was not what the individual wanted to do for God. The most important factor was what God was about to do." (Experiencing God, page 66)

He adds, "God reveals His purposes (His tasks) so you will know what He plans to do... When God came to Noah He did not ask, 'What do you want to do for me?' He came to reveal what He was about to do. It was far more important to know what God was about to do. It really did not matter what Noah had planned to do for God. God was about to destroy the world. He wanted to work through Noah to accomplish His purposes of saving a remnant of people and animals to repopulate the earth."

God's timing is perfect. We need to learn to accept that and make it a part of our faith. There will be times when we question His timing but just settle it now that you trust God and you will trust His timing.

Rowland V. Bingham, founder of the Sudan Interior Mission, was once seriously injured in an automobile accident. He was rushed to a hospital in critical condition.

The following day, when he regained consciousness, he asked the nurse what he was doing there.

"Don't try to talk now, just rest," she replied. "You have been in an accident."

"Accident? Accident!" exclaimed Dr. Bingham. "There are no accidents in the life of a Christian. This is just an incident in God's perfect leading."

God responds in His time not ours. His timing is far different than ours.

3. God redeems our:

What does the word redemption mean? It means deliverance or rescue and in theology it means deliverance from sin or salvation. It is atonement for guilt. Redemption means to rescue and I want to tell you about three of the ways that God brings redemption into our lives.

a. Disgrace

When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home.²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months.²⁵ "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children." Luke 1:23-25
NLT

For Elizabeth it was the disgrace of not having children because in her world it was considered a sign of not being blessed by God. People can feel disgraced for a lot of different things.

We can feel disgrace because of things that happened in our childhood.

We can feel disgrace because of our family

Job or loss of job

Children sometimes disgrace their parents and sometimes parents disgrace their children

Sometimes we may feel it because of our physical challenges.

It may come in the form of bullying from people at school or even in the work place

Disgrace may come because of spiritual failure both private and public

Disgrace may happen for some because of a divorce or failed relationship

There are people in this room today that carry around with them every day of their lives a secret that makes them feel disgraced for one reason or the other.

Romans 10:11 says that: *"Anyone who trusts in him will never be **disgraced**."*

Acts 5:41 says that: *The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer **disgrace** for the name of Jesus*

I don't know that you may feel disgraced about today but I know that God knows about it and He cares about you. He offers to take away our disgrace through accepting His grace.

b. Discouragement

Keeping a positive outlook on life is pretty hard when nothing much positive seems to be happening in your life. Let's face it, when things are going bad, really bad, there is nothing worse than a confrontation with an eternal optimist. That's the last thing you really need. At times like that you would much rather hear "You poor thing!" than "It could be worse!" Sure, it could be worse; it could always be worse. But, at the moment, you don't need to be reminded of the fact that there is still more trouble that could be hidden somewhere and it is just a matter of time before it catches up with you. When you feel like that, you really would prefer some sympathy. Or, in the very least, if they don't feel your pain they could pretend?

Life isn't fair and the fact that some people have more money, more power, more beauty, more – more and better of everything, is pretty good evidence of that. Sometimes you just want to sink down into the depths of the inequity and dwell in it, wallow in it and let it cover you. If you can't overcome it, then at least you can learn to cohabit with it. If you can learn to live with your own inability or inadequacy, at least you have accomplished something of value. Unfortunately, when we open the door to defeat, we open the door to negativism and bitterness. Thus embittered, the value of life itself may become meaningless

*The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God."³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month."³⁷ **For nothing is impossible with God** Luke 1:35-37 NLT*

c. Disobedience

While Zechariah and Elizabeth made good choices and followed the Lord's wishes not everyone does. Maybe you have not made right choices. Maybe today you are feeling as though you wish you would have done things differently. Maybe it's about the distant past or it could be last night. Regardless of what you have done, the reason for this elaborate plan of using people like Elizabeth and her husband and their son John the Baptist, was to bring the world the message of redemption and salvation.

It is not too late to make a clean start.

It is not too late to turn your eyes toward Jesus Christ.

Elizabeth's husband Zechariah gives these words upon receiving his voice back. They are words you need to hear today. We all need them.

“And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.”⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.” Luke 1:76-79 NLT

Robert E. Coleman writes that he once “heard a missionary tell about a boy who appeared at a mission hospital in Kenya with a gaping wound in his foot. He had been accidentally injured while cutting grass far out in the jungle. Part of his heel was cut off. Without waiting to inform anyone of the mishap, he set out across country to find the mission station where he had heard medical help was available. Every time the little foot touched the sandy earth it left a faint trace of blood. The journey was long and difficult, but at last he arrived.

A little while later the boy’s mother appeared. The doctors were surprised that she found the way. There were no well-defined trails, and she had never made the trip before.

"How did you do it?" she was asked. The dear woman, overjoyed to be with her child, replied, "Oh, it was easy. I just followed the blood!" (Robert E. Coleman is Distinguished Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary).

If we will just follow the blood through the pages of Scripture it will lead us to Freedom!
Because by the power of the Blood of Jesus Christ:

We are free from being victims of our upbringing (I Pet. 1:17-18).

We are free from the power of sin so we can live holy lives for God’s glory (Titus 2:11-14).

We are free from our physical body of corruption (Rom. 7:24-25; Col. 2:11; Rom. 8:23).

We are set free from the fear of death (Heb. 2:14).

We have been set free in order that we might live for the one who set us free (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

“If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist. But, our greatest need was forgiveness and redemption, and, therefore, God sent a Savior!

“One of the greatest evangelistic hymns of all time was written by a woman who knew well the release and peace that come from confessing one’s sins and failure to God. ‘*Just As I Am*,’ a hymn frequently sung at the close of evangelistic meetings, was written by Charlotte Elliott, who at one time had been very bitter with God about the circumstances in her life. Charlotte was an invalid from her youth and deeply resented the constraints her handicap placed on her activities. In an emotional outburst on one occasion, she expressed those feelings to Dr. Cesar Malan, a minister visiting her home. He listened and was touched by her distress, but he insisted that her problems should not divert her attention from what she most needed to hear. He challenged her to turn her life over to God, to come to Him just as she was, with all her bitterness and anger.

She resented what seemed to be an almost callous attitude on his part, but God spoke to her through him, and she committed her life to the Lord. Each year on the anniversary of that decision, Dr. Malan wrote Charlotte a letter, encouraging her to continue to be strong in the faith. But even as a Christian she had doubts and struggles. One particularly sore point was her

inability to effectively go out and serve the Lord. At times she almost resented her brother's successful preaching and evangelistic ministry. She longed to be used of God herself, but she felt that her health and physical condition prevented it. Then in 1836, on the fourteenth anniversary of her conversion, while she was alone in the evening, the forty-seven-year-old Charlotte Elliott wrote her spiritual autobiography in verse. Here, in the prayer of confession, she poured out her feelings to God—feelings that countless individuals have identified with in the generations that followed. The third stanza, perhaps more than the others, described her pilgrimage: Just as I am, tho tossed about—With many a conflict, many a doubt,—Fightings and fears within, without,—O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Many years later, when reflecting on the impact his sister made in penning this one hymn, the Reverend Henry Venn Elliott said, ‘In the course of a long ministry I hope I have been permitted to see some fruit of my labors, but I feel far more has been done by a single hymn of my sister’s, ‘Just As I Am.’”

“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” It is the nature of the natural man, that part of Adam that has transferred to us over countless generations, to bolt when God puts the halter of suffering or inequity over our heads. We toss about and fight against the tide of conflict and sorrow in our lives. We sputter and spew forth the negative in hopes that God will hear us and recognize the injustice He has visited upon us. We long to stand before Him perfected, not in this imperfect state. “Just as I am? Does it really need to be this way Lord? I want to be like him or her, not like me!” Yet, when the negative invades our lives, whether that be personal illness, a handicap or just plain bad fortune, if we would be but still for a moment, perhaps we might hear that still, small whisper of hope that God most surely puts in every sinner’s heart—true happiness is not a product of living; rather it is the result of the attitudes we embrace while we are alive.

God is here today and He wants more than anything else to help us and redeem us. It’s why Jesus came to this earth. It’s the story of Christmas. It’s the story of a Savior that offers the only salvation available to save us for eternity. You can try everything you can think of here to numb the shame or dull your senses but there is only one thing that will make a difference and that’s accepting the redemption of our Lord.