

GABRIEL / WITNESS 4

If you could be invited to be a part of any event, any meeting, any group, any happening past or present. Could be something that is famous, important, epic or just common – what invite would you want. For me – History: WWII Allied Leaders (Churchill, Stalin, Roosevelt), Sports: 1990's Bull Champions, Music: play w/ the Eagles
God is inviting us into something epic – that will make the every day – have meaning, bring passion, purpose. We have been talking about awaken. Praying today God would awaken to the bigness of what God has for us – in every day life.

God is inviting us in – to join His redemptive work.

01. Why, how and what is God inviting us into?

02. Does our response to God's invitation matter?

01. Why, how, and what is God inviting us into?

LUKE 1:1-25 (ESV) 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Pics from Civil Rights Museum & the location of MLK's assassination 50 years ago Wednesday at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis. I was not there – but I learned so much and was moved by the whole exhibit from eyewitnesses who had seen and been a part of the whole civil rights movement black and whites. I even got to talk to a lady whose family helped house Freedom riders in rode buses in civil rights movement across the south and were beaten and some killed for the audacity of wanting equal rights. She was 19 at the time. Getting to do this with my (inner city pastor friends) gave me a whole perspective on an ugly part of country that is still moving forward. Hearing eye witnesses spoke to the events and meanings with power – unveiling sin and hope for my eyes.

2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word

- **The story of Jesus – is not a tale – but the true and witnessed revelation of God's redemptive work in our midst.** Eyewitness accounts take us there, affect our view, & move this from good moral teaching - to the true revelation of God's redemptive work in our midst. Don't need blind faith or no faith – God came as Jesus & He is inviting us in.

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Being barren was seen as a result of some sin in the family or some curse from past generation's sin. Even though they walked upright lives before God & others – they would have lived with constant whispers and speculations. 25 ... my reproach among people. As we will see, this was a constant prayer to the Lord – maybe for 30-40 years of their life.

- **Walking in God's redemptive work – does not mean we will avoid pain.**

Eric Mason – Yvette (cancer, 12 years ago, not suppose to live, no kids – alive, 4 kids, went thru chemo again 2016 and lost a child at 6 mos. More pain in the way he has been treated by others in regards to prejudice – especially hard because its believers.

Matt Chandler – Brain cancer, should be dead, just talked to him – all clear, but they know they are a headache away. I don't live always trying to forget or always asking why – but my 4 kids do.

Have you been praying for something – for a while – that is hard, painful, or full of confusion and whispers? God is inviting us in – pain and prayer is one of the ways he ushers into His redemptive work.

8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. (24 divs & 18,000 priests – so no priest was permitted to offer incense more than once in his life-time. This was his opportunity!) 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

- **God's presence is overwhelming (glorious).** *The residual glory of God on Gabriel overwhelmed Zachariah.*

[VS 19] ... I stand in the presence of God.

Gabriel stood in the presence of God! Ponder that for a moment. Day in & day out, this angel lived in the very presence of God. He walks with, worships in the presence of, and most of all – he knows Holy God! Amazing. Zachariah – went to the temple that day expecting what??? Who knows - but **God, holy, glorious God – invited him in & is inviting us in!**

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

Side note: God has not spoke in over 400 years to his people. His people have not heard: 1) His audible voice, 2) His

voice thru a Prophets mouth, 3) His voice thru an Angels mouth, 4) His voice thru the written word of a prophet. And, he breaks this silence to tell a priest (1 of 18,000 who probably pray a lot) that his prayer has been heard. **Why?**

1) **God is about to unfold the climatic chapter in His redemptive work.** This is an important moment for all – including you and I. That is why we are reading this today. 2000 plus years later.

2) **But he had not forgotten Zechariah & Elizabeth.** *And, he has not forgotten you!*

• **God is in our midst working His sovereign redemptive plan through us – as well as in us.**

He cares, and hears, and is moving in and through us - even when we cannot see Him on the move.

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah.” God does not have to choose this man and woman to announce the climatic moment of his redeeming work on this earth – but he does. He invites them into healing, but at the same time something way bigger.

God is inviting us in – because He cares you – and wants you to know the greatness of all he is about in us & this world.

14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,

He was about to have a child at 60 or 70. Does this add up – joy, baby at 70? We had kids later 32 and 35. At 45 wrestle daddy hurt. 70? Something about the joy God promises that is different than the no pain, no discomfort, - joy we long for.

• **Living in God’s redemptive work brings joy in the midst of life.**

God had joy and gladness in mind for Zachariah and “many” others in the birth of this child. **Wouldn’t always be because things were pleasant.** John would grow up &: 1) move out - into the desert, 2) he would become a

controversial prophet: He was a freak to many (looking like Conon the Barbarian & sounding like William Wallace). He was hope to some (spoke of a forgiving God), and a danger to others (said you can’t hurl sins on others and hide your

own from God) and ultimately, 3) he would lose his head (literally) for God. *Not everyday would be filled with gladness – but God was inviting Zachariah into His redemptive work which promised joy (that which could not be taken by*

circumstances) in the birth of this child. **Why? Why would this child, a child bring joy to him and many others?**

15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

God had a specific plan to use this child to turn many back to God’s presence & RULE in their life. In God’s presence & rule – is Joy that cannot be taken by any circumstance. **Notice: the joy was not based on Zachariah’s work.**

• **God’s redemptive work brings His presence – or Joy to many.**

Our joy is never based on our work. It is always based on God’s work for us in His redemptive plan.

Ultimately – the joy of God’s presence would come to this earth in Jesus (God the Son) and this child would pave the wave for His arrival and work. What is Jesus’ work – to fulfill God’s eternal redemptive plan – to bring many back to God. *God is inviting us into something greater and bigger than us – that offers joy to us and to many others.*

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” As amazing as everything was that God was laying before Zachariah – Zachariah didn’t believe God.

It wasn’t that he didn’t believe in God or that God was speaking to Him. He just didn’t believe what God was saying.

He didn’t trust God!

Are you here today? *You believe God is ... But at times, you struggle believing God is trustworthy because you are trying to walk in God’s bigger plan – but things aren’t working out the way you planned. There is pain or confusion or shame maybe just one of those or maybe all three like Zach & Elizabeth had. Maybe your not walking in God’s bigger plan – but today you hear his invitation and it sounds ... (what) crazy, too much, to out there, too good. Wherever you are today – listen and watch – witness how God cares for this one who doesn’t believe.*

What was God saying to Zach? Your shame will be removed, you will have joy, and it will come in the midst of a child – who will bring many into my joy thru my redemptive work. **Zach’s response:** *Ah – I don’t think so. Zachariah said no to*

God’s invitation to join his redemptive work. *Child would have been amazing to Elizabeth, but to Zach, old & about to retire. This would have been hard, tiring, painful- physically & emotionally. Doesn’t sound like a great plan God! (yikes)*

God is inviting us in – to join His redemptive work. Does our response to God’s invitation matter?

02. Does our response to God’s invitation matter?

19 And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”

Our response does not stop God's redemptive work – but we can miss out on a season of Joy in Him.

God's response to Zachariah

God does not punish Zachariah – but there is loving discipline.

He does not say: because of your unbelief I will take away your child. He does not say you are out of the priesthood, or generations of your family line will be cursed and have no children because of your disobedience. *(This is what most of the religious leaders taught the people and why there was shame already over his family in their barren condition.)*

Do you believe this? Have you been taught this? If so, that is a lie! THE CROSS – says God poured out all his punishment on Christ. If you are in Christ (trusted your soul to His redeeming work) no punishment for you!

ROM 8:1 (ESV) There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. *But there is loving discipline.*

God's loving discipline corrects our sin and turns us to Him and His Joy:

20 "... you did not believe my words, *which will be fulfilled in their time.*"

• **Our response does not stop God's redemptive work – in others or us**

You will turn from you sin and believe in time because I am Sovereign King of All and I will accomplish all my will. (14 And you will have joy) The angel said, because you don't believe, you will be silent. God was going to allow these 9 months to be a time where Zach could see that only in God and his work – no matter the struggle and pain – was joy. **The CROSS says – God doesn't waste pain. It is God's path to joy. Our old life dies – we get his life and his joy.**

20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak

• **Our response affects others.**

- Zachariah's response would have affected others belief – **so God shut his mouth.**
- Zachariah's response affected the other priests while he was there and after he went home. **He couldn't do his job the same.**
- Zachariah's response affected his wife.

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

She could not talk with him or hear his words of love and affirmation for almost 9 months during a time (pregnancy) – *that I'm guessing she needed him and his words.* She kept herself hidden from the people who had shamed her – joyous but at the same time somewhat fearful because her husband had been struck mute by God.

Our response affects others – especially those we love.

19 "... I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news."

• **Our response affects us – and our Joy in God.**

- Zachariah's response affected himself and his joy in and with God. *He missed out on the joy of the gospel for a season – God's redemptive work because of his response to the "good news".*

Your response to God's invitation will affect you. God's sovereign redemptive work will not be stopped in this world, our city, your neighborhood, or even your family – but you will miss out on the joy of it – for a season.

God is inviting us in (pause, holy, awesome, loving God) – to join His redemptive work.

Eagles invited me up onto stage to play – I would have little to offer. No one would be there for me, but I would get to be on stage playing with the Eagles bring fun and some happiness to many for a few hours.

God is calling us into something much greater – maybe on a back stage. You may bring nothing to the table to actually change and bring redemption. God has done all the work. You may bring little gifts and skills. But, God wants you with Him. And, you will live in His joy and see others come into His joy. It will be and is awesome! Join Him. Come on!

(What?) God is inviting us into a greater story of His redeeming work thru Jesus in this world.

(Why?) Because He loves us.

(How?) Prayer, pain, joy, telling others of His overwhelming greatness, loving others in their pain and joy, serving others

Will you join Him?

Repent – today and see in the cross pain has a purpose to bring joy and God is present he is here