

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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## Fearlessly Serving

by Dan Trygg

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and He made redemption for His people, <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant <sup>70</sup> --as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- <sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; <sup>72</sup> to perform mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, <sup>74</sup> being delivered from the hand of our enemies, to grant us to serve Him fearlessly <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.” Luke 1:68-75

“Having therefore, brethren, confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> a way which He opened for us, a freshly-killed and living way through the veil, that is, of His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> we might draw near with a truthful heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts having been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies having been washed with pure water; <sup>23</sup> we might hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and we might consider one another toward a stirring-up of love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not abandoning the gathering together of ourselves, as is the habit of some, but encouraging; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:19-25

**Zacharias' prophecy came at the end of nine months of silence. He had not readily believed the angel, Gabriel, when he announced that he and his wife, Elizabeth, were to have a child. They were old, past the time of childbearing. They had long since given up hope that they would have a child. They had prayed for conception for years, but now they had accepted that this dream did not seem to be within the Lord's plan for their lives. As painful as this realization had been, they eventually let their hope for a family fade away. They became accustomed to think of themselves only as a couple, dedicated to serve God. By the time Gabriel made his announcement, Zacharias was no longer looking for children. The announcement was no longer eagerly anticipated or welcomed by him. Instead of filling him with joy, or excitement, it was more of a shock. The news he had hoped for and longed for over many years as a younger man, now fell on a heart weary from age and disappointment. It felt more like, “Are you kidding me?” than “Wow!” Unlike Abraham, who trusted in God in similar circumstances, Zacharias was skeptical. He asked, “How will I know what you say is true?” Literally, he said, “According to what will I know this?” This question was immediately followed by his reason for doubt, “For I am old, and my wife is having been advanced in days.” Abraham also had considered his body, which was also “as good as dead”, but he did not waver in unbelief. He grew strong in faith, knowing that it would have to be God, not his natural ability. He knew God could do what He said (Rom. 4:19-21). Zacharias was not looking at God as his hope, however. He was feeling the sting of disappointment. The jaded callous of unfulfilled dreams covered his heart and dulled his senses to the word of God. Instead of joyfully responding in faith, he challenged the emissary of God to “prove it”. He was not going to open himself up to disappointment again, at least not easily. Instead of receiving the message of the angel as an answer to his prayers, and a vindication of his faith and obedience, Zacharias closed his heart and said, “Oh, yeah? How can I know I can trust you?”**

**Gabriel was not at all conciliatory toward Zacharias. He didn't apologize for God's sense of timing, or facilitate Zacharias' desire to vent. In fact, quite the opposite! It was reality check time! Gabriel pointed out the insanity of Zacharias' inappropriate response. Not everyone has the privilege of a personal visitation from the likes of Gabriel, but Zacharias was so tied up in himself he couldn't see straight. He was way out of line. His feelings did not excuse or justify his lack of perception, or his disrespect. The facts should have spoken louder than his feelings. He was standing at the altar of incense, right outside the Holy of Holies, and an angel was announcing to him what God was intending to do. This was not a time to live in past disappointments. It was a time to acknowledge and embrace the wonderful grace of God! Zacharias' faith could not reach any higher than his own disenchantments. Gabriel did not listen to Zacharias' unbelief. He jerked him into the reality of what God was announcing to him right now. “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> Now listen! You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time” (Lk. 1:19,20). Zacharias left the sanctuary unable to speak, ...unable to talk back to God, or anybody else..., for the next nine months! God shut him up, and gave him something to think about, at the same time. The lesson for us? Don't play with God!! He is not here to assuage your feelings. It is not about you. You need to get aligned to Him, and what He wants to do in your life, not the other way around. Your temper tantrums and sulking will not manipulate Him. They are only hurting you.**

**Zacharias had plenty of time to think about this lesson in his life. Every day, his inability to speak was a reminder of his poor behavior before the messenger of God. You can be sure that he did some soul-searching. He not only repented for his disrespect and disbelief, he began to ponder and think over the angel's words. He daily**

witnessed the miraculous sign of God's plan develop and grow in Elizabeth's stomach. **The reality of what was happening was undeniable, and went far beyond the previous narrow expectations of his unbelief.** God did not give him an opportunity to comment on his faith journey, ...not until the end. He had nine months to ponder the angel's words, compare them with what he knew of the revelation of God in the writings of the Law and the Prophets. He poured over those prophetic passages, trying to grasp what it was that God was doing. **As he studied and pondered, understanding and faith grew, so that when the baby was born, and he was finally able to speak, his heart was full of faith and the recognition of what God was truly up to.** He did not just talk about who his son would be. No. When the words finally came gushing out, he declared what had been revealed to him. *God* had visited His people. **God has provided redemption. He has delivered us from the clutches and oppression of our enemies, to enable us to serve God without fear.** And, young John, would grow up to prepare the way for the Lord's coming, and to give God's people knowledge of this great salvation, the forgiveness of their sins (vs. 77)

**It is interesting that Zacharias' conclusion was that God had delivered us from the clutches of our enemies, so that we might fearlessly serve Him, in holiness and righteousness before Him all of our days** (vss.74,75). Many of those who hear the gospel, ...many of those even in churches..., like the "salvation from our enemies" and the "forgiveness of sins" part of the message, but they do not see that all of this is so that we might *serve God fearlessly*. **Most people have it all backwards. They want God to serve them.** They don't see that *the highest good is to serve Him*. Like Zacharias, most of us are all wrapped up in our selfish feelings, our emotions, our agenda. **We willingly acknowledge God, if He will help us with our agenda. No, no! That is not the way it is. He does not exist for us. We exist for Him. We were made to serve Him. The rest is nonsense, the machinations and manipulations of our minds.** God will not be manipulated by our emotions, or our religious games. Our tantrums, or our religious rituals will not move or change Him. **We have to get aligned with Him, and His will, if we want relationship with Him. If we want to experience His plan for us, ...what He designed and created us for..., then we need to clearly understand that we exist for Him, not He for us.** Like Zacharias, we need a "reality check" to get properly related to God. **It doesn't matter what we feel, or what we might want. What matters is what is real, ...what are the facts.** The fact is that He is God, we are not. He is the Creator, we are the creatures. We were made *by* Him and *for* Him.

**Part of our reality check involves a healthy fear of God.** Just like Zacharias found out, you don't trifle with God, or His representatives. **When we really see who God is, we shut up and listen.** God doesn't often take away our ability to talk, though that may arguably be an improvement. It would save time, and drive the point home, if He would shut each one of us down for about nine months, to get *our* attention. He doesn't usually choose to do that, however. **Interestingly, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and yet the goal of salvation that Zacharias perceived is to serve God fearlessly. How does that work?** Of course, part of Zacharias' perspective had to do with hostile *people*. Certainly in Jewish history, and even in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, the Jews were under the oppression of other human control. Often this resulted in persecution. The Jews understood, however, that God was truly in control. Generally, their problems with people were the result of a lack of obedience to God. Disobedience and disloyalty to Him often resulted in His allowing Israel's enemies to defeat and dominate them. Staying true to God was the best thing for their political freedom. "When a person's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). The salvation that God would bring through Jesus was not going to be a political coup, or overthrow human oppressors. It would, however, take fear out of the equation. **Those who would come to know Jesus would no longer be oppressed or dominated by fear, ...not fear of man, fear of the devil, not even fear of death** (Lk. 12:4,5; Heb. 2:14,15; I Cor. 15:50-58; Rev. 12:11). **Those who really understood this salvation would find that they were no longer to be afraid of God, if they were walking in agreement with Him.** In fact, **the distance and separation that once characterized their relationship with Him was removed in Christ.**

The Hebrews passage gives us some further understanding. **Jesus offered Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for us.** More than just paying for our sins, however, He opened a way into the Holy of Holies. **His death and resurrection was like a one-time, once-for-all eternal event which opened a passageway into the very presence of God.** The writer's description is very vivid. It is a "freshly-killed and living way", ...like Jesus' death is ever-present, as vivid and as effective now as it ever has been..., an eternally-present passage through time and spirit into God's very presence. At the same time He is the sacrifice, He is also the great priest, who entered the Holy of Holies with His own blood, making peace and establishing this entrance of access for those who follow Him into God's presence. **Because of this, we can now fearlessly draw near to God, fully assured that Jesus has covered and removed our sins,** cleansed us with His blood and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, we can now not only testify to others the assurance of our faith, but **we are also gifted and called to consider one another to see how we can edify each other** (I Pet. 4:10; I Cor. 12). This corresponds to Zacharias' words, "serving Him without fear, in holiness (God-directed devotion) and righteousness (upright dealings with others)". **We are saved to serve confidently in both directions. We serve Him in holiness, as "set-apart-ones" in Christ, and we also serve Him by treating others righteously.**