

2009 ADVENT #1 OPEN YOUR EARS ZECHARIAH Luke 1:5-25

It doesn't matter how often we're reminded that God made us
With two ears and one mouth.

Some folks are just not good at listening.

Colin Powell was in England a few years ago at a large conference. He was asked by the the Archbishop of Canterbury if our plans for Iraq were just an example of empire building by George Bush. Colin Powell answered by saying, "Over the years, the United States has sent many of its fine young men and women into great peril to fight for freedom in Europe and beyond our borders. The only amount of land we have ever asked for in return is enough to bury those that did not return".

You could have heard a pin drop.

The world hasn't been listening very well to America's foreign policy.

Listening isn't easy.

Too many people are getting ready to respond with a better story.

William Rotsler said:

Some people overrun your sentences the way they'd speed up
to go through a yellow light, crowding you off the road,
sideswiping your point to rush on to the parking lot of their thoughts.

James says:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19

Can we learn to listen with our hearts and not our head,
With our passion and not our politics?

I was fresh out of seminary,
Into my second parish and leading a men's bible study.
I had just pontificated on a subject,
When one of the men who was sitting across from me,
Reached over and took my Bible and said:
"That is not what that verse says":

My first reaction was to say to myself "Doesn't he know that I just got out of seminary,.
Who does he think he is telling me what the bible says?"

But after reading the verse a second time I realized that he did have a point.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. Isaiah 55:8

God hears with the wisdom of the ages.

He sees what has been and he sees what will be.

And he answers accordingly.

I. FAMILY HELPS US HEAR BETTER

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Luke 1:5

Digging into this verse we discover the affect of family on ones personal faith.

Let me ask you a question here this morning?

How many of you here today had a parent who
took you to church or SS when you were a child? (Raise your hand)

Zechariah was born into the priestly family of Abijah.

His family was one of 24 classes of priests
 Who served two weeks out of the year in the temple. I Chronicles 24:1, 10
 So Zechariah was born and grew up in a godly home.
 A priestly family.
 And he grew up to take on a priestly role.

Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Luke 1:5b

And Aaron was the first order of priesthood established by Moses
 Elizabeth was also raised in a priestly home,
 Taught and trained by Godly parents.
 And she grew up to marry a priest.

Just how important is our family to our belief system?

*George Barna researcher of Religious influence and trends in America,
 asked the question on November 16, 2009 -*

What is the connection between childhood faith and adult commitment?

More than eight out of every 10 adults in America remembers consistently going
 To Sunday school or some other religious training with their family,
 before the age of 12.

Most said they were engaged every week.

That is a remarkable fact about the adult population in America and our
 exposure to spiritual training as children and teenagers.

Seven out of 10 adults (69%) said their family attended religious programs weekly.
 So when parents wonder: "Does our spiritual investment pay off in our children?"

Yes

Listen now Parents

When you participate with your children in a Spiritual life experience,
 It has a positive boost on them.

Even if your children didn't want to go.

Or wanted to sleep in.

Which bring us to Zechariah and Elizabeth's family.

**6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's
 commandments and regulations blamelessly. Luke 1:6.**

Verse 6. They were both righteous

They were raised in a Godly home

Taught to listen in a godly way,

And live a godly life.

They are a fitting example of Barna's research.

Our influence in the home hasn't changed from 2000 years ago.

Things interact or feed off one another.

As Iron sharpens Iron so one man sharpens another. Proverbs

We don't understand it but it's all connected in some way.

Let me illustrate this.

1, If your kids don't like vegetables, I can help.

Chocolate is derived from cocoa beans.

Beans- vegetable.

Sugar is derived from either sugar CANE or sugar BEETS.

Both are plants, both are vegetables.

Thus, chocolate is a vegetable.

The problem:

2. How to get 2 pounds of chocolate home from the store in a hot car.

The solution: Eat it in the parking lot.

3. Are you having trouble with your diet? I can help.

I'll tell you something else.

Little diet tip:

Eat a chocolate bar before each meal.

It'll take the edge off your appetite, and you'll eat less.

4. If you're a procrastinator, I can help.

Put "eat chocolate" at the top of your list of things to do today.

That way, at least you'll get one thing done.

5. You worried about the economy of the country I can help.

If not for chocolate, there would be no need for control top pantyhose.

An entire garment industry would be devastated.

You can't let that happen, can you?

Now you know how that all works together

And we can see it in our families,

Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

Friends, it works.

A frustrated teacher was talking to a student said:

"Look at this paper. How could one person make so many mistakes?"

The defensive student said: "It wasn't one person - my dad helped!"

When Dad helps with the spiritual training.

Friends you raise the stakes in your home

You can't make a mistake training up your child in the Lord.

SLIDE-----Ask yourself, if you were God would you choose your family as a place

To raise Godly children?

To hear God's word and

To become sensitive to his voice,

To be obedient to his call?

God placed a child into the home of a couple who

Observed all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. Luke 1:6b

What a sacred pair!

who made their duty to God, to their neighbor, and to themselves,

No wonder Zechariah had ears to hear

What the lord would say.

His family had taught him how to listen.

He taught his son the same.

FAMILY HELPS US HEAR BETTER.

II. CHURCH ALSO HELP US HEAR BETTER.

The second piece of information we get from Barna Research is that

when we're in the right place.

We hear the right things.

Bara's statistics also prove that if you bring your child to church,
when they are old they will not depart from it.

Isn't it true that we're prone to listen better at different places.
A full moon, on a romantic night clears the ear to hear
what our loved one is saying.
Love is not deaf. It hears more not less.
But because it hears more- It is willing to hear less.
A scary night makes our ears a lot sharper to detect where danger may be.
If we don't put our ears at the right place
we will never hear the right message.

Years ago I had trouble with my 62 Ford Fairlaid and took to be diagnosed
This was before our cars were all computerized.
I told the mechanic there was a noise in the engine.
He walked over to his wrench board and he had a
stethoscope hanging where his wrenches hung.
He took them down and listened to the engine.
I thought it a bit strange,
But he fixed that car
Because he heard where it needed repair.

When Zechariah was in the temple
He got his spiritual stethoscope on to listen.
When the Angel of God spoke he heard,
"God is going to redeem humanity.
Zechariah you will have a son.
Your son will be the forerunner of the One
who will take away the sin of the world."

How appropriate for God to pick a moment during worship
When the people outside were praying and asking God for forgiveness.
How many times has God spoken to you during worship
In a hymn, or a prayer, the scriptures or maybe even the sermon?

**And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers
were praying outside. Luke 1:10**

And Zechariah was inside listening.

**13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been
heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name
John.**

Humanity was in a hopeless situation
The angel's message was that Zechariah would have a son,
And his son John would be special.
And play a very important role.

**17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the
hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the
righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."**

The Lord himself is coming!

In the spirit and power of Elijah"

Now remember God's last recorded words in Malachi 4:6
promised the return of the prophet Elijah.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Malachi 4:6

Parents you play an important role in the spiritual life of your children.
 If you want your child to hear the word of God.
 Get them to church
 Put them into youth group and SS,
 Bible School, Upwards Basketball, and Bible Study.

Barna's research found that children who attended Sunday school or other religious programs were much more likely than those without such experiences to attend church and to have an active faith as adults.

Barna's research also found that families willing to switch faith or churches also added to their children's faithful spiritual life experiences. Dead churches produce dead faith, live churches produce live faith.

Barna's research found that families who never attended church as children and teenagers, produced the highest proportion of unchurched adults.

Little ears need to be in the right place to hear.
 If you want your children to hear the spirit of God.
 Bring them to church with you and turn off the television.
 "O be careful, little ears what you hear."

Its amazing to me how many people will say:
 Well God never speaks to me?
 Well do you go to church.
 Well no.
 Do you ever read your Bible?
 Well no?

We have terrorist cells that will kill you physically following Osama Bin Laden
 But we have terrorist cells right here operating in many of our churches. They have been identified as: Bin Sleepin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, and Bin Missin.
 Their leader, Osama Bin Lucifer, **but there is a report of a sixth group.**
A tiny cell known by the name Bin Praying.
That what we need.

Now before I leave this let me say that many times
 When a child is born to or is adopted by an older couple,
 The kids end up terrible spoiled.
 Causes them a lot of heartache.
 Zechariah and Elizabeth were way past child rearing.
 They were old, but this blessing came with a promise.
 A son.

14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

How did they keep a teenage in their household from drinking.
 And partying?
 Yet they instilled in his a love for God

That kept him from wine and fermented drink.
 And because of his faithfulness
 And the faithfulness of his parents, .

16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. Luke 1:14-16

Wouldn't every parent rejoice if their children turned out this way?

Parents don't give up.

We have a God whose ears are open.

He hears your prayer

13 "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

What a wonderful promise:

Your prayer has been heard.

God stepped in late in the game with this old couple,

But he brought hope where hope was gone.

Can I say to you today who are feeling hopeless,
 Can I say to you today who are facing impossible situations.
 Can I say to you up against impossible relationship,
 Those suffering from pain, wounded in spirit,
 Those here troubled by difficult financials problems.
 Friends, .

God hears

Do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard.

God specializes in hopeless cases.

He's the expert at taking impossible situations and turning them into blessed possibilities.

Caedmon's Call popular song on Christian radio says–

“There you go, working good from all my bad.

There you go making robes from my rags.”

Friends, this same God who brought a child to a hopeless elderly couple.
 is still making robes from rags, And working good from all my bad.
 And God want to breath hope into your stale air of impossibility.

This advent season,

As we prepare for Christmas,

Open your ears,

Hear the Music,

Hear the Message,

Here the hope for you life.

That Unto us is born a savior

Which is Christ the Lord.