



Sermon Notes from 16 December

Trouble for An Old Couple (Luke 1:5-25)

by Pastor GL Wong

Most married women yearn to have a child. It hurts deeply to be barren. Zechariah and Elizabeth suffered the stigma of childlessness. It was in their old age that the impossible pregnancy happened! *Our troubles open our eyes to see the grace of God more clearly.*

1. A persistent trouble

Childlessness in the Jewish culture was a big disgrace! Childless couples were, and still are being discriminated, and considered unblest and punished by God! Not only Elizabeth, but also Zechariah was affected. He would remain as an ordinary priest (v5) among the 20,000 at that time and suffer the implicit shame. They had suffered for decades (v7); and must have thought that they were childless because of their sins. Yet they did not curse, forsake or blame God (vv6-7)! They were not without sin but they did not indulge in their sins. They were repentant and trusted God by faith, living out God's commandments as a way of life! Wrong doing often results in disastrous troubles. But most of the time the troubles we face are not because of our sins. As in their case, *grace endures longer than even your most persistent trouble.* Wait for the Lord (Ps 27:14, 39:7, 130:5)!

2. An unexpected trouble

Lu 1:8-9 Zechariah was chosen to burn incense in the holy place. It was a once in a lifetime privilege. It is comparatively harder to be chosen than to have a child. *It teaches us that whether you get something or not in life is ultimately not about probability but about God's sovereignty.* Don't focus on the odds; focus on GOD. The thick smoke symbolises the varied

prayers of God's people (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; Lu 1:10).

Lu 1:11-13 God was not only answering Zechariah's prayer for a son, but also answering many other prayers for Israel! God shows Zechariah that his prayer was interconnected with trillions of other prayers like the thick incense smoke. Some troubles persist despite prayer because God has a better plan to give an answer beyond that prayer. *God's grace is not subordinate grace; it is sovereign grace.* Lu 1:18-20, 34 Unlike Mary who sincerely wanted to learn, Zechariah was skeptical. He asked for a sign in disbelief.

v67 The season of discipline (silence), prepared him to be God's prophet – not just a priest (Heb 12:10-11). *God's grace unto us means he always seeks our good more than we seek our own. Zechariah means Yahweh (God) remembers.* God remembers every word, and tear shed in prayer!

3. A trouble no more

v25 *The answer to our disgrace is God's grace.* The name *John* means *God is gracious.* John is a forerunner of Jesus; he came to prepare people's hearts for the Saviour – the greater gift than John. The ultimate disgrace is a sinful soul. Jesus was damned and disgraced for our sins and troubles (Isa 53:7). Identify with Christ in his sufferings to know if you truly appreciate this grace! Moses forsook prestige for scorn. He identified with the suffering of his people (Heb 11:26). *If you truly know that your reproach of sin has been taken away, you will gladly bear the reproach of Christ.* Do not fear disgrace or rejection; boldly proclaim Christ!