

The Right Response

I recall an evening, some years ago, when my oldest son was in high school, that he was asked to share his testimony in a chapel service. And the matter that was most pressing upon his heart and life at that time was the matter of the “choices” that a person makes in this life.

I recall his words clearly. He began his testimony with the words, “Life is made up of a series of choices”. And he was right!

Many of the choices that we make each day are minor and have little consequence on our life as a whole. But oh, there are other choices that we make, especially those choices that are in response to a matter taking place within our lives in which our options are few. And the response that we will have at those moments can have an impact that might affect our entire life, even our eternity.

In these words of scripture that we have before us here today in this Book of Luke, we find some of those very life-changing events taking place in two women’s lives. And we see their responses. And thanks be to God, their responses were the right ones.

Follow along with me as I read these words in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 39.

³⁹Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

⁴³But why is this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

⁴⁶ And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the

thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (Luke 1:39-56)

Each time that you and I open up these scriptures, God gives us precious “revealed truth” about Himself. And His Holy Spirit who resides within us and also within these words, speaks to us out of these pages and makes known to us the “hidden secrets” of God’s heart.

And the question that is ever before us is, “Will we hear His voice, and if we do hear it, what will be our response to it? What will we do with the precious truth that we receive?” What will be the choices we will make?

In the words that are given to us here in Luke chapter 1, God is graciously giving us a glimpse into the private lives of two of His dearest humble servants, Elizabeth and Mary; and God is allowing us to see the response that they had when they suddenly received special “revealed truth” from God.

From all that we read here; it is evident that these two dear ones did everything right with the revelation that they received. And again, that should prompt you and me to wonder, “Do you, do I have the right response to the “revealed truth” that we receive . . . to these words that we have just read and heard?”

Here we see God’s special messenger, Gabriel, delivering a message to each of these dear ones, a special revelation about some very mysterious things that would soon take place in each of their lives, things unimaginable, things that had never before taken place, and would never again take place in any other person’s life in all of time. And here we see the personal response that each of them had to their special revelation.

Folks, there is a message that cries out to you and me from this account that we are reading about here in these words. While no, we might never have an angel standing before us, giving us a message from God, His voice is still, nonetheless, speaking forth powerful words of truth and wisdom and promise to us out from these pages of scripture.

If we fail to hear His voice, or upon hearing it we refuse or neglect to act upon it, then we will surely miss out on all the wondrous provisions and blessing that would have come to us.

And I must say to you that I believe that you and I probably do that very thing much too often. Our reluctant hearts find all sorts of reasons why we should not do a thing that we are being prompted to do. Sometimes we are hesitant to respond because we think that we are not learned enough or trained well enough in the scriptures to do the thing that God is calling us to do, but folks that will never be true. God will never call us to do something that He will not fully equip us to handle. If we will only step on forward, God will do as Proverbs 3:5-6 tell us, "He will surely direct our paths".

With Mary and Elizabeth, their special callings were to do something that came very natural to them, to have babies. But these births were under really strange and mysterious circumstances. These were two of the most special babies to ever be born on the earth.

Mary and Elizabeth heard God's call and simply responded to their revelation exactly as they were supposed to respond. The choices they made at those moments were the right ones. They surrendered themselves up to God's Will.

I think it interesting to observe that just as through the "disobedience" of the first woman, Eve, sin entered in and caused mankind to fall. Now, through the "obedience" of these women, and especially the "obedience" of this special woman Mary, God is graciously allowing a woman to take the first step in the redemption of mankind from that first sin.

Mary responded rightly to the revelation that she received and because she did, all mankind would forever be blessed. And Elizabeth prophesied those very words to Mary. Verse 41,

⁴¹ . . . Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! (Luke 1:41)

Note here also, that God used a very expressive word to tell us about Mary's first response to the revelation that she received. We read here that she arose and went with "haste" to visit with Elizabeth. Mary did not hesitate, she "hastened".

You and I must never hesitate when God places a call upon our hearts. Often, God's call is immediate and demanding, and if we hesitate, even for a

moment, then that special opportunity will pass us right on by. And to our great disappointment, we will never have that opportunity again.

I'm reminded of an event that would take place later on after Jesus grew up and was coming close to the time of His crucifixion. Then, when in the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples, Jesus needed to pray about all that was about to take place in His death, burial and resurrection. And there in the Garden, He asked His disciples to watch and wait and pray with Him as He prepared His heart for the suffering He would endure.

The disciples were truly earnest in their desires to serve Jesus. They had proven that over the three and a half years that they had walked with Him. But there in the garden, they stumbled in their commitment and in their surrender to His plan. And they failed Him. Instead of being diligent in watching and waiting and praying with Him, they fell asleep. And as they slept, they missed out on the most important opportunity that God would ever give to men, to participate firsthand, through prayer, in the redemption of all mankind. Oh, what a lost opportunity!

Yes, they would probably make a lot of excuses later, but there is no excuse that will make up for their loss. They faltered in their faith, and they faltered in their response to Jesus' special call upon their lives.

And yes, they were probably confused and uncertain at the time it was all taking place. but that is the very essence of "faith", dealing rightly with things that are uncertain, "unseen" things that lie ahead of us. Hebrews 11:1,

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is seldom ever found in the things that we are able to see and feel. "Faith", "real faith" is only to be found in trusting the deeper things of the heart of God, His righteousness, His holiness, His purposes, His precepts, His plans for us, believing that He is trustworthy in every matter that we encounter. That is faith.

Faith should have girded up the disciples as they slumbered there in the garden, but it didn't. But thankfully, that was not so with these two precious women, especially Mary. When she heard the call that God placed upon her soul, she responded rightly and immediately. She said to the angel,

³⁸ . . . "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

And then Elizabeth would confirm it to us later when she would say of Mary in verse 45,

⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." (Luke 1:45)

This word "believed" is the same word for "faith". Mary had faith. She trusted God and she believed that God would bring all that He had said to fullness. So, she did what we must all do when we receive a revelation from God, she made the right choices. She "hastened" to take part in God's plan. Verse 39 again,

³⁹Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city in Judah. (Luke 1:39)

Mary did not hide herself in a dark room as some women so often do when they find out by surprise that they are going to have a baby. Mary caught the vision that God had given to her, and she responded with enthusiasm.

And praise be to God that there were no abortion mills like Planned Parenthood to tempt Mary to "take the easy way out" and have her baby aborted. And also, praise be to God there were no governmental edict to require midwives to kill the newborns, as in the days of Moses. No, God's timing was perfect for this special baby Jesus to be born.

And Elizabeth also was obviously very elated to welcome her promised son into the world. And also, to welcome her new-found calling, because when she heard the voice of Mary coming into her house, she was immediately caught up in the power of the Holy Spirit and she began to shout "with a loud voice" a special prophetic blessing that the Holy Spirit put into her heart. Listen, beginning in verse 41,

⁴¹And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! (Luke 1:41-42)

Elizabeth was excited and she showed it. Most of the time, we conservative Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists don't get really excited about the presence of the Lord. We are afraid that someone might think badly of us if we shout out loud. But praise be to God, Elizabeth was not concerned about such things.

I wonder . . . if we in this church were to catch the vision that the Holy Spirit is in this place, would we begin to shout out loud, even during the middle of the

service. Would we tell someone who did that kind of thing to be quiet so that our church service could continue “decently and in order”?

Elizabeth was obviously not constrained by man-made rules. She was excited by the Holy Spirit, and she could not hold back her joy. Listen again.

⁴¹And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” ⁴³But why is this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”
(Luke 1:41-45)

This is an exciting thing taking place here folks. Here is one, very young girl, already bearing the seed of the Savior of all mankind, and here is an elderly woman carrying the seed of the prophet who would go before this Savior “making straight His path in the wilderness”.

Deep within their wombs are two men, meeting each other for the first time, still as unborn babies, but yet recognizing and acknowledging each other. Folks, this is a powerful message to us about the unborn. Even though they are still in the womb, they are still very real people.

And to make matters even better, these are two babies who would grow to carry out a mission like no other mission that would ever come to men. Two women, hearing the call of God and stepping forward and carrying it out to completion, how admirable and how faithful!

Consider for a moment, just why God chose to give us this brief glimpse of these two special women. He could have just rushed on ahead and told us about the days that Jesus would walk the earth, preaching and healing. And He did that in some of the other Gospels. But here, God chose a different path. Here He wanted you and me to see the intimate details of the lives of simple and very ordinary people, people like you and me.

Why did He do that? I have no doubt that it was because God wanted you and me to identify in a very intimate way with all that took place. Because that is also the way that God will deal with you and me, personally and intimately, and also, sometimes demanding.

As we go about the activities of our day, we think that we are doing it all ourselves, planning and carrying out every activity. But interspersed within all of our busyness, God is placing opportunities within our paths, some of those opportunities are easy, but some are difficult and even painful, as it would be for Mary and Elizabeth over the coming years.

The question for you and me is, "as God places a call upon your heart and mine, will we be open enough to God to even recognize His calling?" And if we do hear His call, will we be willing to have the right response, to make the right choice, and to answer His call as Mary and Elizabeth did, with surrendered hearts and with great enthusiasm? I do hope so folks! I do hope so, for me and for you.

Let me close with this thought. God's Spirit truly is in this place today, and He is in this word that we have read and preached from these pages. And just as the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy, and as Elizabeth shouted out her joy, you and I should also be leaping with joy and shouting out God's praises.

Are we willing to take that kind of step with the Lord, to get excited about His presence? And are we willing to listen for His many calls upon our souls as we read the other many words within these pages?

And are we willing to respond with great haste and joy? We should be, and we must! Listen as we close . . .

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed (Luke 1:46-56)