

Dear Friend,

A couple of weeks ago I bought an advance Christmas present for my four-year-old grandson. It was a sing-along book version of the Charlie Brown Christmas story. When reading it, I was shocked to find that the publishers of this new version had completely eliminated the Christmas story about the birth of Jesus from the text.

I am appalled at the constant and unapologetic assault on the gospel of Jesus Christ in this country. Yet I remain encouraged by the knowledge that the genuine story of the miracle of Jesus' birth, life and redemption has been written indelibly on the hearts of those of us who believe. Though they may attempt to eradicate it from the written page, you and I are genuine audio books from which the story can and will be told with joy and passion.

We have come to a point in history where we must speak. We must pray for courage. We must pray for wisdom and the ability to speak from our firsthand knowledge of the most incredible story ever told! As the enclosed article suggests, this is not the time to be silent in the presence of a Holy God. I personally am asking for the ability to join with the angels, and with a strong and clear voice say, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

STRANGE SILENCE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

by Carter Conlon

There are times and seasons when God does the impossible, even though His people appear to be in some of the worst positions imaginable. I believe you and I are living in such a moment. However, that means that we must make the choice to believe Him. What comes out of our mouths must be what God has spoken; we cannot be silent.

In Psalm 115, the psalmist paints a grave picture, saying, "*The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence*" (Psalms 115:17). In the original Hebrew, "any that go down into silence" means those who are dumb; who cannot speak. Earlier the psalmist said of the heathen, "*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat*" (Psalms 115:4-7). In other words, the heathen make idols that have mouths, but they can't speak, and those who trust in them become like them. The idols of those who are outside of the kingdom of God leave them powerless.

■ WHEN UNBELIEF CLOSES YOUR MOUTH

Along with the heathen, people of another kind come into a strange silence, even though they are in

the presence of God. It is as if they lose their speech, their song, their testimony, their sense of awe of who God is. A story in the book of Luke gives a clear illustration of this type of strange silence:

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"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias...and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense" (Luke 1:5-10).

This appears to be holy, doesn't it? Zacharias was a righteous and

obedient man. He was appointed as a priest and given the privilege of going into the temple to burn incense, which is a type of prayer. As those on the outside could see the incense wafting out from under the curtain, they might have concluded, “This is an incredible man of God. He knows so much more about God than we do. We are only here on the outside praying, but he really has an inside track!”

You and I can be as righteous as possible but there is still something that only God can do in our lives, something supernatural, far beyond our human limitations.

“*And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense*” (Luke 1:11). Note the significance of “the right side,” which symbolizes the side of strength, for it is at the right hand of God that Christ sits. This speaks of God’s willingness to give Zacharias what he could not attain through all of his obedience and religious observances. It is as if God was saying, “I am going to do something in your life that you cannot do for yourself.” In the same way, you and I can be as righteous as possible—attending every prayer meeting, reading the Bible until our eyes are crossed. But there is still something that only God can do in our lives, something supernatural, far beyond our human limitations.

In Zacharias’ case, his wife was barren. He and Elisabeth were both past childbearing age, yet it was

at this point of hopelessness that God appeared through a messenger and said, “*Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard*” (Luke 1:13). Zacharias must have been taken aback, wondering, “My prayer is heard? I am 80 years old now! I prayed that prayer back when I was about 35!” But God is an on-time God! Not our time—His time.

“*Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord...filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (Luke 1:13–17). What a phenomenal promise! God essentially told Zacharias, “I am going to do something supernatural through you and Elisabeth. In spite of your lack of ability, I am going to do something sovereign, and it is going to turn many people back to Me.”

There are moments when God begins to speak something so deep and profound to us that it would be impossible unless God Himself performed it.

“*And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that*

stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless” (Luke 1:18–22). Unbelief closed his mouth!

In each of our lives, there are moments when God begins to speak something so deep and profound to us that it would be impossible unless God Himself performed it. That is when we come to a road of decision. Am I going to believe God, or am I going to believe the frailties of my own heart?

Sadly, many Christians end up standing at the shores of incredible promise, only to look in and say, “God, I hope whomever You send has great success.” They understand what God is saying and even believe His Word to be true...just not for them personally. It is almost as if they conclude that God has finally arrived at the one person in history through whom He cannot do anything! And so what happens is that unbelief closes their mouth, just as in Zacharias’ case.

I have witnessed this time and again in the house of the Lord—people coming in with great fervency and zeal, singing and leaping in the presence of God. Yet as they delve into the Bible and gain more knowledge, reading of all the incredible things God has done in the past, they begin to have a hard time believing it for their own lives. Suddenly their song starts growing fainter and fainter until eventually they are left sitting in silence.

Although they deceive themselves into thinking that they have somehow come into a holy place, in reality, unbelief has gripped their hearts.

■ EVERYONE ELSE HAS A TESTIMONY

Just as the angel said, Elisabeth does get pregnant, and Zacharias still cannot speak. To add insult to injury in Zacharias' life, one day Elisabeth's cousin, Mary, comes to visit. Mary was a young virgin, pregnant with the Son of God and Elisabeth, who was past childbearing age, was pregnant with a prophet who was going to announce the arrival of the Son of God. Now bear in mind that Zacharias had more biblical knowledge than the two of them put together. He had experience with God and he was closer to the altar than either of them had ever been. Yet I can picture him peering down from his balcony into the courtyard as Mary rushes in with excitement.

Did you know that you can hide unbelief in theology?

“[Mary] entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:40–43). What revelation! Not only is Elisabeth pregnant and filled with the Holy Ghost, but the mother of the Messiah has come to visit her, and she knows it!

Imagine what it must have been like at the dinner table later—Mary sitting on one side, Elisabeth on the

other, and Zacharias in the middle. “Isn't it exciting what the Lord is doing?” Mary exclaims. “How amazing when God speaks! When the angel Gabriel came to me, I believed him, and there was a fulfillment of those things which he had promised in my life!”

Elisabeth would be able to say the same, “I believed God for forty-five years, and suddenly there was a stirring in my heart. I knew that God had answered our prayer. Oh, let's magnify the Lord! What do you say, Zacharias?”

Silence.

I cannot help but wonder if Zacharias finally got tired of people passing him by!

To those who have known the Lord for a season, have you gotten to the point where you are tired of being passed up by the young—those who do not have nearly as much learning as you? You have biblical knowledge, you know the Hebrew meanings of words, and you have a history with God. But next to you is an excited, young Christian who simply believes that all things are possible with God. He has perhaps a quarter of your knowledge yet is pressing into something that has long eluded you—something that God told you but you had a hard time believing.

Did you know that you can hide unbelief in theology? You can study and dazzle people with your incredible brilliance, yet still not be growing one ounce in the miraculous faith of God. Nothing in your life causes people to say, “Surely there is a God, how else could this have ever happened?”

As the Scriptures remind us, *“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that*

the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:1–3). By faith we understand that what God speaks, He can create. It does not matter if you are barren or if this place in your life has been empty from generations past. It does not matter what others have called you or what the unbelieving say. All that matters is what God says.

■ HIS TONGUE WAS LOOSED

Soon the baby was born, and it came time for Zacharias and Elisabeth to dedicate him. *“And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father”* (Luke 1:59). This is exactly what the world will do—call you after the name of your father. They will call you a drunk, a loser, someone who is going nowhere. In other words, “You are just like your father. You are just like your mother. The history that was created in your family is just going to carry on through your life, and you will never be any different.”

It is never too late to finally get to the point where we agree with what God has spoken to us.

“And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John” (Luke 1:60). No! This child has a name different from any name that has ever been named in this family! *“And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marveled all”* (Luke 1:61–63). Zacharias finally agreed with God!

He finally came to the place of saying, “Whatever God calls it, that’s what it is.” His name is John! In the case of the Christian, His name is Jesus—the author and giver of life. It would be like those today who say, “You may want to call me what they called my father. You may call me a coward, but God calls me an evangelist. You may call me selfish and unloving, but God calls me husband and father, protector of my house. You may call me a recovering alcoholic, but I am not recovering anymore—I am a new creation in Christ Jesus!”

The Lord has told you something that He desires to do through your life and now is the time to agree with it.

“And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God” (Luke 1:64). Thank God that it is never too late! No matter how long we have been living in unbelief or how long we have made peace with powerlessness, it is never too late to finally get to the point where we agree with what God has spoken to us.

“Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied” (Luke 1:67). When Zacharias finally agreed with God, not only was his tongue loosed, but he was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied! It is just like the 120 disciples in the Book of Acts who agreed with God and had their tongues suddenly loosed. They were failures when they went into the Upper Room, but they were

empowered by God when they came out, speaking of the wonders of God!

■ REFUSE TO GO DOWN INTO SILENCE

All throughout the Scriptures, we have been given a marvelous demonstration of God’s miraculous power through a people of faith. And now that we have come to the threshold of His return, shall we be found going down into silence?

I don’t know about you, but I choose to live and die on the side of faith. I choose to believe that God can do exceedingly more than we can ask or think when we pray to Him. I choose to believe that if we will walk humbly before God, He will do something in and through us that will touch this generation!

So my question for you today is: What is the name of the thing that God has planted inside of you? What has the Holy Spirit been whispering to your heart? The Lord has told you something—something that He desires to do through your life. You know it, God knows it, and now is the time to agree with it. After all, there comes a point in our walk with God when there is no longer any excuse for unbelief. There comes a point when we must trust God, determined not to sit on the sidelines in silence and unbelief. Instead, we must allow God to be God in us—doing what only He can do, leading us where only He can take us, bringing honor to His name. That is how the Church started, and that is how the Church will finish before Christ comes to take us home! Hallelujah!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

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