

## **The Christmas Touch pt 1**

### **“A Christmas Touch for the Disappointed”**

Luke 1:5-25

Do you ever get tired of the repetition that happens at Christmas?  
Does it seem to you that we always do the same things every year...

...the same traditions

...the same songs

...the same long waits in line

...the same wrapping paper and bows that were saved from  
the year before

...the same fattening snacks and cookies

...the “same ol’, same ol’”

It was a few days before Christmas on the Oregon coast. Two men whose families lived next door opted to go sailing while their wives went Christmas shopping. An unexpected storm surprised the weekend sailors. Before long, the sea became angry, and the two had a difficult time keeping the sailboat under control. While heading toward the harbor, the craft hit a sandbar and grounded. Both men jumped overboard into the icy water and began to push and shove in an attempt to get the sailboat into deeper water. Knee-deep in mud and repeatedly bounced against the hull by the unfriendly waves, the one said enthusiastically to the other, “Sure beats Christmas shopping, doesn’t it?”

Well, that was a sure way to beat the “same ol’, same ol’.” But you know...

For some, Christmas is a time of disappointment.

There are many that have real difficulty this time of the year. And it is more than an issue of repetition.

It becomes a time of pain and heaviness. There are many that are longing for a fresh touch from God.

Hopefully my message today should be of some help to us in this matter... Using Luke 1, let’s examine five stages in the story of Zechariah that describe how he went from disappointment to joy.

I. The first Step was one of disappointment.

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. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. (Luke1:5-7)

- A. Zechariah and Elizabeth knew disappointment.
  - 1. Here was a couple that was well into their sixties. And yet had not had a child.
  - 2. Disappointment, even a faithful follower of Christ can be very evident in our lives.
    - a. And Christmas has a way of bringing it to the forefront.
    - b. It may stem from not getting the present we wanted. (A dictionary.)
    - c. Or not being able to be home for Christmas.
      - (1) I'll be Home for Christmas
    - d. To realizing and remembering that someone will never be with us for Christmas again.
  - 3. Or it can be something like Zachariah and Elizabeth faced.
    - a. Feeling like God's blessing has slipped away.

II. But the second step is to remain faithful.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1:8-10)

- A. What do you think your chance of receiving God's touch is?
  - 1. To determine the cause of a kidney problem, Eveline Johnson's son, Anthony, had to have several diagnostic tests. Upset about a consent form stating that one out of 10,000 people could have a serious allergic reaction, he insisted on speaking to the doctor. His mother asked, "What do you want to ask?" "I want to know," he replied, "what number they're on." Well, I don't think the doctor could precisely tell Anthony that information.
  - 2. In a similar way, this is what seemingly faced Zechariah as well.
  - 3. He was one of out of 20,000 priests in Israel. He served at the temple in Jerusalem for two one-week periods each year.
  - 4. Now...when it came to offering the incense at the daily sacrifice, a priest could only do this once in his lifetime. It was an honored ministry, for the priest stood in the Holy Place alone.

5. Something really unexpected happens, and you say, “I am so lucky!”
- B. And then you realize that luck had nothing to do with it.
  1. But for the followers of God, I don’t believe God leaves things up to chance.
  2. God is faithful, and will be with us even through times of disappointment.

### III. The third step is to recognize God’s presence.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 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. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 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. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 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.”

(Luke 1:11-17)

- A. It is here that life takes on a new meaning.
  1. For Zechariah and Elizabeth this was the answer to their prayers.
  2. A family was out vacationing at the lake one summer. Dad had been puttering out by the boat house. Two of his sons, a 12-year old and a 3-year old were down playing along the dock. The 12 year old was supposed to be watching his little brother, but he got distracted. The 3 year old, little Billy, thought that would be a good time to check out the shiny aluminum fishing boat tied up at the end of the dock. So he went to the dock and put one foot on the boat, and one foot on the dock. He lost his balance and fell into the water, which was about 5 or 6 ft deep.  
  
The splash alerted the 12-yr old who let out a piercing scream. Dad came running from the boat house, jumped into the water, swam down, but unable to see anything, came up for air. Sick with panic, he went right back down into this murky water, and began to feel everywhere around the bottom. He couldn’t feel anything. Finally, on his way up, he felt little Billy’s arms

locked in a death grip on one of the posts of the dock, about 4 ft under water. Prying the boy's fingers loose, they burst up together thru the surface to fill their lungs with life giving air. Finally when the adrenaline had stopped surging, and nerves had calmed down a little bit, the Father asked his son, "What on earth were you doing down there hanging onto the post so far under the water? And little Billy's answer was a classic, laced with the wisdom only a toddler could give. He said, "I was just waiting for you dad. Just waiting for you."

B. Sometimes it's hard to wait for God, but it's the right thing to do.

1. God cares about us so much, that he will answer our prayers and give us his touch when we need it the most.

2.

IV. Sometimes however we still have a hard time trusting in God's faithfulness.

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." (V.18)

A. We let logic move God out of the picture.

1. For Zachariah it was age. I'm to old.

2. For us it may be something else.

3. Maybe we just don't believe that God loves us enough to really care.

4. Sometimes we have prayed for something for along time, but when it happens, we doubt it because we really don't believe that God hears us.

5. One day John Wesley was walking with a troubled man who expressed his doubt as to the goodness of God. He said, "I do not know what I shall do with all this worry and trouble." At the same moment Wesley saw a cow looking over a stone wall. "Do you know," asked Wesley, "why that cow is looking over the wall?" "No," said the man. Wesley said, "The cow is looking over the wall because she cannot see through it. That is what you must do with your wall of trouble. Look over it and avoid it." Faith enables us to get above circumstances and look to Christ who is over all, blessed forever.

V. But in the end, we must realize that God cares enough to touch us even when we are discouraged.

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." (V.19-25)

- A. For Zachariah it was a touch of silence, along with a touch of amazement.
  - 1. God wanted him to make sure that he didn't forget the source of the miracle.
  - 2. Zachariah would have a lot of time to think about what God had done.
- B. The people probably wouldn't have believed him if he could have told them what God had said.
  - 1. Often times others don't really want to hear about God's Blessing.
  - 2. A number of years ago Orel Hirschheiser was pitching for the Los Angeles Dodgers. They had just won the World Series, & Orel had been named "The most valuable player of the series." One of the TV shows about the series showed him in the dugout just before the 9th inning started. He was leaning against the wall & his lips were moving. It was obvious that he was saying something to himself.  
So when he was a guest on the Tonight Show, Johnny Carson asked him what he had been saying. "I wasn't saying anything," Orel responded. "Well, then, tell us what you were doing." Finally Orel replied, "I was singing."  
"You were singing?" Johnny said. "I didn't know you were a

singer.” “Aw,” Orel said, “I’m not.” Johnny persisted, “What were you singing? Sing it for us now.” “Nah, I don’t want to sing.” But by that time the audience was chiming in with “C’mon, sing it, sing it to us!” Finally, Orel Hirschheiser started to sing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below.” And Johnny Carson was speechless. The whole audience was dead silent. Then one person started clapping, & soon the whole audience joined in applause.

## Closing

### 1. GOD DESIRES TO TOUCH US.

God wants to make an appointment with you about your disappointment. I don’t know what lays heavy on your heart today. But I assure you that God does know and that God cares. And I know that He desires to touch you with His grace. Perhaps you feel worthless and useless. Perhaps you feel barren and lifeless. There is a spiritual emptiness in your life and you need a rejuvenated spirit. Perhaps you are weighed down by sin in your life and you need release. All that you have experienced has not given you satisfaction. But there is a touch that will make a difference in your life.

### 2. God breathes hope into the stale air of impossible solutions.

There is hope for us today. It lies in the touch of God that He offers to each of us, our job is receiving it.

Dr. James Dobson relates a story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died just a few months prior through a slow developing cancer. Now, several days before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone——so much so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas. Late that afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What’s in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden Labrador Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, Ma’am. He’s six weeks old, completely housebroken." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity. "Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked. The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope and said, "It’s all explained here in this envelope, Ma’am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift to you." The young man then handed her a book, How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever.

In desperation she again asked, "Who sent me this puppy?" As the young man turned to leave, he said, "Your husband, Ma'am. Merry Christmas." She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then. She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of "Joy to the World, the Lord has Come." Suddenly Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and a wonder greater than the grief and loneliness.

"Little fella," she said to the dog, "It's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'd like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you." God has a way of sending a signal of light to remind us life is stronger than death. Light is more powerful than darkness. God is more powerful than Satan Have you returned your heavenly Father's love? Have you completed the family circle? Have you adopted God's heart, as surely as He has adopted yours?

It doesn't matter who you are, or how discouraged you might be, God wants to use this Christmas to change your life around. As we come to his table why not come expecting His touch