

“How to Receive the Gift of Silence”

Text: Luke 1:5-25

November 30, 2008

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Oakland, California

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Read Luke 1:5-25!

PRAY!

This morning we begin a new series I'm calling, “Great Gifts for Christmas”. Thanksgiving to Christmas can be summed up as a time for giving.

- Thanksgiving is when we celebrate all that God has given us throughout the year.
- Christmas is when we celebrate God's gift to humanity in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Between Thanksgiving and Christmas is a time of giving and receiving gifts from friends, family and loved ones.
- The key word in all this is giving. This is the time of year for giving.

The theme verse for this series is John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that He gave...”*

- God is the greatest gift giver of all and very generous. God saw what we needed and gave us the best gift that keeps on giving—Jesus Christ.
- God knew what we needed. If you're like me, You have a hard time knowing what to get people. My wife listens for clues for months before the holidays for potential gifts for our daughter and for me. Kids wrote up Christmas gift lists to help “Santa” know what they want.
- Read Christmas lists from children to Santa. “Listen to this: ...”

If you need Christmas gift ideas, this message series is for you. Over the next four weeks we will be looking at four gift ideas that would be a little different than what you might find at a store. These gift ideas come from the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke in the Bible.

Luke 1:5-25 tells us that Zachariah has just been given great news from an angel of God that his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son, John. This son:

- Would be a miracle baby as Elizabeth was beyond childbearing age. The name John means “the Lord is gracious”.
- Would be great in the sight of God.
- Would be set apart for a special service to God.
- Would be filled with the Holy Spirit to help him fulfill this special service.
- Would prepare people for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah (Anointed One), by encouraging people to turn away from sin and back to God.

How did Zachariah respond to this good news? He doubted the angel's words. Perhaps he was looking for confirmation through a sign. From a human perspective this is understandable—but with God anything is possible. Zachariah needed to learn this. So the angel of the Lord responds to Zachariah with discipline.

- Vs. 20, *“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.”*
- Zachariah is made mute by the angel for a period of at least nine months until the birth of their child. Nine months without being able to speak. We all know some people for whom this would be a great gift – silence for nine months! But that's another story.
- The good news is that God always keeps His promise which means the punishment is temporary.

So let me ask you - Is it possible to see Zachariah's silence as a gift? How can silence be a gift? I want us to explore a couple of ways that silence can be a gift this Christmas season.

I. SILENCE HELPS US TO CONCENTRATE ON GOD IN THE MIDDLE OF LIFE'S “NATURAL DISASTERS”

- A. 1 Kings 19:9-13 – The Lord appears to Elijah who's in the cave.
 1. Great and powerful wind
 2. Earthquake
 3. Fire
 4. Gentle whisper
- B. What are the “natural disasters” in life that you are facing?
 - Nate's letter
- C. Who are you looking to for help? Yourself, friends, Dr. Phil, Oprah, Dear Abby, fortune tellers?
 1. David writes in Psalm 46:10 of the need to focus on God: *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*
 2. The Hebrew word for “Be still” is “Enough”. God is saying, “Enough! Know that I am God.” God is our Strength and Deliverer. God will act on our behalf. He wants us to know that He is God. Silence yourself before God and He will make Himself known to you.
 - Oakesdale
- D. How do we do this?
 1. Start off every day focusing on God in at quiet place. Read your Bible and commit your day to Him. Start with silence.
 2. When our circumstances “rock our world,” don't panic; quietly talk to God about what is happening. Look for the Hand of God to be at work in the situation. Ask God for wisdom and strength.

3. Purchase a Bible promise book and remind God of His promises to you. God wants you to know Him as God.
- E. Focus on God - Silence can be a gift.

2. SILENCE CAN GET YOU BACK ON TRACK WITH GOD.

- A. Zachariah in Luke 1:57-66. After John was born and was circumcised, Zachariah wrote on a tablet that his son's name was John.
- B. Zachariah had received a nine month "time out" from God for not believing the good news from Gabriel. What do "time outs" How did silence work internally in Zachariah's life?
 1. **A time to reflect.** It's helpful to spend some time reviewing different areas of our lives and how we are doing in those areas. Ask God to show you:
 - Where you have missed the mark or sinned against Him or others.
 - How your walk with God is going (reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, worshiping with the family of God, Bible study, ministry, tithing).
 - Are you growing in your faith and trusting God more with your life?
 - Are you closer to God today than a year ago.
 - Zachariah had time to reflect on what the angel said to him and to think through how he would respond differently.
 2. **A time to repent.** Repentance is a change of mind resulting in a change of behavior. How do we repent in order to see a change in behavior?
 - First, confession—"Lord, I have sinned against you." This begins with confession of our guilt and recognition that our sin is against God.
 - Second, taking full responsibility for our sin. When we blame others, our repentance is incomplete. We made the decision to sin.
 - Third, repentance requires honesty with God. God is looking for us to be honest about our sin—honest about our weaknesses, our failures, and our frustrations. Honesty promotes fellowship with God. He can then continue to work with us.
 - After you receive Christ, you will continue to repent as you grow in Christian faith and character.
 - Zachariah needed to repent of his unbelief and he did. There was a change of behavior in his life, a stronger faith in God.

3. A time for renewal. After a time of reflection and repentance, we're ready to continue the work God has given us to do. God can now work with us.

- You can hear God's voice and are ready to move forward.
- Chris and one month of inactivity.
- Zachariah had heard from God and was now ready for the task God had given him to parent John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, the Messiah.

C. Silence can get you back on track with God.

This Christmas season, allow yourself to be silent before God.

- Resist getting caught up in all the frenzy that can often define Christmas.
- Allow times of silence in your life to keep your eyes on the real meaning of Christmas - the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, our Forgiver and Teacher.

PRAYER