

"SEEK A FRESH TOUCH FROM GOD"
by Rom A. Pegram (12/24/17)

Today's message is about receiving, rather than giving. And, receiving is just as important as giving, wouldn't you say? After all, if we don't keep our own cup full, in many ways, it's pretty hard to reach out and share with others in *any* way...

The past couple weeks, we've been talking about reaching out with a special Christmas *touch* for our neighbors, the 'overlooked' in our communities, and even for members of our own immediate families. But, the truth is ... *you cannot very effectively 'reach out' until you've taken the time to 'reach up.'* What I'm talking about is this: **sometimes we need a fresh touch from God in order to accomplish all God wants us to here on this earth.** But, what would a fresh touch from God be for you?

- A rejuvenated spirit?
- A closer walk with God?
- Or, maybe just a dose of encouragement.

For each and every one of us, I'm sure the answer to that question would be different—as different as the meaning of Christmas itself...

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 to the other, "Sure beats Christmas shopping, doesn't it?"

For some, Christmas is all about shopping ... and, for others, it may be about sailing! We're all different ... and we have different needs during this time of year. But, one thing is true: **WE ALL NEED A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS TOUCH FROM GOD!** The character that we're going to look at today, as a part of the Christmas story, sure needed a touch from God. And let this be an encouragement to you: God supplied his needs—gave him a 'fresh touch' in a very unique way. Take a look at today's scripture with me, would you—from Luke 1:5-25 (NLT)...

When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the

sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks.

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

¹⁹ Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰ But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. ²² When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

²³ When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home.

²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

Sometimes, we forget about this parallel story to Jesus’ birth—the story of Zechariah (and Elizabeth). In light of this story, have you...

- ‘Ever felt like *you’re* not worthy of God?
- Maybe you’ve done something in your life & feel ‘God can’t use someone like me!’
- Or, maybe some of you just think, today, you’re *too old* to be used by God...

Do you remember the story of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18)? *This* story—about Zechariah and Elizabeth—is kind of like *that* story. But, let’s take a closer look at *this* story right now...

ZECHARIAH WAS A GOOD MAN WHO ... LOOKED AT THE POSSIBLE. Scripture tells us Zechariah lived a good life in God’s sight ... and obeyed all God commanded of him ... completely! So, WHAT DID HIS LIFE LOOK LIKE? He and Elizabeth probably had *no* intentions of having kids at this point in their lives. I’m sure that they’d given up on ever having the blessing of a child! But, God had other ideas, didn’t he?

God needed someone to give birth to and be the parents of ... John the Baptist ... so John could '*prepare the way*' for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth! God needed good parents that would make sure John behaved himself while growing up ... even as a teenager (and they got instructions through this angel on how he should behave). So, God chose this *old* couple who could not have children—to have a son who'd be *filled with the Holy Spirit* from birth (v. 15b)!

Do you parents understand what this means? Talk about having it made as parents! This child was filled with God's Spirit of love ... even as a two-year-old, then as a teenager! Wouldn't that be great?

Seriously though, Zechariah thought that his life *was* what it *was* and nothing was ever going to change ... as far as having a family was concerned! *Zechariah probably thought he and Elizabeth wouldn't ever be of much use to God!* But, NEVER SAY 'NEVER' WITH GOD...

Sometimes, I wonder if we're a bit like Zechariah. I wonder if we feel like we cannot be used by God because we're just too...

- Old ... or young...
- Little ... or big...
- Insignificant...
- Ignorant ... or smart...
- Something else ...

If you've ever felt this way before, *my guess is God has his eye on you right now*, knowing you need a fresh touch from him during this season! But (and here's the *real* question) ... *are you willing to be used by God?* That's the key to God's 'fresh touch' in our lives. Are you *willing* to be used to do the impossible ... like Zechariah?

Now, here's a question for you: *Why did Zechariah want proof from the angel?* Maybe he didn't really believe what the angel said ... because it seemed so *impossible!* But, know this: *while we have a tendency to only look at what's possible...*

GOD IS A GOD WHO LOOKS AT THE IMPOSSIBLE! Verse 18 reminds us of this: "Zechariah said to the angel, 'How shall I know if this is so?'" Here is Gabriel, the highest ranking angel in heaven ... standing in front of him with a word from God ... and Zechariah was doubting that it could ever come true! Well, God let Zechariah know in no uncertain terms that it *was* true! Two miracles here! Did you notice? Miracle #1 – The miracle of childbirth during their winter years... And Miracle #2 – The miracle of a priest/preacher being silent for several months! Can you imagine Rom with laryngitis for 9 months or so? That *would* be a miracle...

Folks, I don't know if *you've* noticed, but God never appears to do anything the easy

way!

- The blessing of *children* was a *major* blessing in the days of Zechariah and Elizabeth—in their culture. Without children, Zechariah & Elizabeth probably felt short-changed in a major way—even cursed, perhaps...
- Children were not only a blessing, but your *security* for old age; there wasn't anything like Social Security, so your children were your security in the later years...
- Another thing ... I'm sure there were *many* young couples who would've been happy to be John the Baptist's parents! But, again, God never seems to do things the easy way!

My father had a saying I've heard all my life that I want to share with you: "The difficult stuff in life we can do fairly quickly; the *impossible* just takes a little longer." At 28 years old, when God told Rom to 'go back to school,' it seemed impossible. But, with God's help, I graduated from seminary at 41 years old and went through my final ordination when I was 43 years old. It looked *impossible*, several years ago, in the world's eyes ... but not to God!

So, what looks *impossible* in your life right now? In what area of your life do you need a 'fresh touch' from God? Family... Work... God nudging you to *do* something... Someone you know who needs to come to church and meet Jesus, but you haven't invited them because ... you know "They'll never come!" Or maybe something else... Remember, if you're *not* attempting something in life because it seems *impossible* or you've ignored God on some matter because it doesn't seem *feasible* ... then you may be doubting God like Zechariah did!

Folks, again, I know this to be true of all of us (if we're honest): One way or another, WE ALL NEED A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS TOUCH FROM GOD! We need to be touched in a special way that will help to get us through this season and beyond—to be exactly who God is calling us to be. And I believe, today, *God wants to break through into your life!* But, *God can't ... if you don't have the desire to be touched by him in a deeper way!*

I believe, with all my heart, that God sent me here about a little over two years ago to deliver many messages to *this* congregation ... but today—without any doubts, I know the message I am about to give you is from God. Now, I know I'm not Gabriel, but I am one who has said 'yes' to God to be used as a messenger of his to this world ... and Lomira, Wisconsin, is where God & my bishop have sent me...

Listen: Just as God, through Zechariah and Elizabeth, worked a miracle to bring John the Baptist into this world to prepare the way for the coming Messiah ... so God has worked a miracle in bringing this church into the world to prepare the way for others in our community to come to His Church and to meet the Christ of Christmas! John the Baptist had a message of life. We, too, have a message of life.

And *God wants to use us to deliver that message*—that those who are now eternally lost (without Christ) won't miss out on all God has for them...

- Are you ready for *that* miracle?
- Are you willing to be used by God in *that* way—in an eternal way?

'Sound like the impossible to you ... *that you could be used by God to bring others into his kingdom?* Good. 'Because we serve a God of the impossible. God wants to bring each and every one of us a 'fresh touch' this Christmas ... if we *want it*—to be used in mighty ways for his kingdom. Our part is to *want* it, to *pray* for it, to *wait* for it ... and then to *watch* the miracles happen! Remember, "The difficult stuff in life we can do fairly quickly; the *impossible* just takes a little longer." But, it's *never impossible* with God...