

Walking With The Characters Of Christmas
“Zechariah: A Man Who Struggled Believing God”
(Part 1)

Intro: Have you ever struggled believing God?

- Summarize Story: Luke 1 – Zechariah and Elizabeth
- There are 4 Biblical principals from this story that will help us in our own struggle believing God.

I. Following God Does Not Mean He Removes All Disappointment

Luke 1:6-7 “Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.” (NLT)

A. Disappointments are part of living in a fallen world

1. Just because we decide to follow God doesn’t mean He puts some protective bubble around us and nothing difficult or painful ever happens. We live in a fallen, evil world where bad things happen to good people.

I Peter 4:12 “Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.” (NLT)

- Country Song: “Sounds Like Life To Me” – Darryl Worley
 2. Pain and disappointment does not mean God doesn’t love you / He’s abandoned you / or that you’ve done something wrong. Everyone gets to have disappointments in this life.
 3. Just because I’m a pastor, doesn’t mean God wraps me in some spiritual “bubble wrap”. I live in the same world you do. Just in the past 2 months – I have had severe eye infections / daughter was in a car accident / my regulator stuck on my pump and my pump house blew up / I drove home one day last week and noticed my flowering plum trees didn’t look right along my creek. (Beavers! – explain)
 4. It’s easy to doubt God’s love and care when circumstances are against us. BUT, circumstances do not always indicate all that God is up to.

B. Disappointments can also be God’s opportunities

1. Disappointments can be God setting the stage for His power. Some for the greatest disappointments I have experienced in this life have turned out to be opportunities for the power of God.
2. This was true for Zechariah and Elizabeth. The stage was set. Often God will wait until the circumstances are impossible so there is not confusion that it was Him. God waited until it was humanly impossible for Elizabeth to have children...then God showed up!
3. It just may be that some of the disappointments and pain you may be experiencing is

God setting the stage for something beyond what you ever expected. God doesn't want it to look like luck. He wants it to look like God!

4. Sure life can be disappointing at times, BUT this is not the entire story!

II. Our Circumstances Can Make it Difficult To Believe God

Luke 1:13-15,18 "Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord...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." (NLT)

A. Sometimes God's promises seem too good to be true

1. Here Zechariah has been praying for a child probably his entire adult life and now an angel is telling him his prayers are answered. Even more than this, the angel goes on to tell him that this boy will be no ordinary boy, but the forerunner of the Messiah!
2. Do you ever struggle believing what God has said in His word? C'mon...some of the promises of God can seem too good to be true; especially if you're really hurting. We say we believe in God...BUT do we believe God?
 - Ps.37:4 "Delight yourself in the Lord..."
 - Josh. 1:8 Study and obey this word...only then will you prosper and succeed
 - Phi. 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ..."
 - Rom 8:37 "Overwhelming victory is ours through Christ..."
 - Matt. 6:33 "Seek the Kingdom of God first above all else..."
3. The Bible is a book filled with promises for us to believe, claim, walk in, and experience. Most of you believe IN God...BUT do you really believe Him?

B. Sometimes our circumstances seem bigger than God

1. This was the case for Zechariah. We don't know how old they were, but it was obvious from his response to the angel Gabriel that Elizabeth getting pregnant at her age was something he just couldn't wrap his mind around.
2. I think we have the same problem today, especially in our western culture and thinking. We value science / information / rational explanations. This is how our minds have been trained to function. If I can't understand it then it's impossible!
3. God is not bound by the laws of science / laws of nature / or the wisdom of man. God created all these things. God exists outside of all these things.
4. Our problem comes when we put more faith in what we can physically see with our own eyes and understand with our own minds, instead of God and His word. God is not bound by the circumstances. In fact, He wants us to understand that His word trumps the circumstances. (More about this later)
5. Zechariah was about to get an up close and personal lesson about this. Some of you may be thinking..."I'd like to get an up close and personal lesson with this too. You may be in the middle of one and just not know it!

...look at the next principal.

III. There Are Consequences For Doubting God's Word

Luke 1:19-20 "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! 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." (NLT)

- Gabriel was not very impressed with Zechariah's response. Zechariah doubted the message and the source...which was God Himself. Thus, Gabriel's response.
- God probably won't make any of us mute for not believing His word, but there are other consequences for doubting what He has said.

A. We follow alternate directions in life

1. If we don't believe in what God has said we end up traveling in our own direction. We follow alternative directions that lead us to dead ends. It's like not believing GPS. It points the direction but you choose another path.
2. You believe IN your GPS...but you don't believe it. If you truly believed it, you would follow it. In fact many people look at God's word like a GPS. Sometimes your GPS in your car will tell you which way to go, but you know it's not the best way. (Coming back from fishing the Deschutes River 2 weeks ago)
 - Told us to take a forest service rd. Sometimes you have to ignore it!
3. BUT God's word isn't something we can ignore without consequences...without getting lost. How many roads have you traveled that have taken you to dead ends...or to destinations you wished you never would have visited?
4. Have you ever asked yourself; "How did I end up here?" "How do I get myself out of this mess?" When we doubt God's word we start navigating life by our own understanding and the results are negative consequences.
5. Believing God...not just believing IN God protects us.

Ps. 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." (NLT)

6. Believing God is believing and following His word. This is what protects us. His word is 100% right 100% of the time!

B. We miss out on God's promises becoming our reality

1. I believe one of the main consequences for doubting God's word is simply what we miss out on. We miss out on seeing all of His promises becoming a reality in our lives.
2. God and His word are experiential! God wants us to experience Him and His word in real life...in real circumstances...in real time.
3. It's like the difference between looking at someone's vacation pictures and actually being there yourself.
 - It was like how I used to view visiting the Grand Canyon (explain) Didn't really care to / what's the big deal / I've seen the pictures / etc...
 - Like watching the outdoor channel on Alaska fishing and being there yourself.

4. There is so much that God wants us to “taste and see”. He doesn’t want you to look at His word / hear about His promises / and look at them like a vacation photo / look at them as a spectator. He wants you to experience the reality of His promises first hand.
5. Some of you may be thinking; “I’d like that! I’d love to experience God’s promises in my life.” “I don’t want to be a spectator.” I don’t want to miss out any more! How do I move forward?

IV. Obedience Releases Us To Experience All God Has Promised

Luke 1:59-64 “When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, “No! His name is John!” “What?” they exclaimed. “There is no one in all your family by that name.” So they used gestures to ask the baby’s father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s surprise he wrote, “His name is John.” Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.” (NLT)

A. Obedience releases our lives into a fuller experience with God

1. Once Zechariah agreed with the angel’s message, his speaking impediment was released and he began praising God.
 2. Obedience is what moves us from believing in God to believing God. Our obedience is what gives God the opportunity to prove to us His word is true. Our obedience is what allows us to have experiential knowledge with God.
 3. Too often people are at a place with God where they think; “Prove to me your word is true and I will follow you.” God says; Follow and obey My word and I will prove to you it’s true!”
 4. This is where many of you are stuck. You’re standing at “The Great Divide”. You want God to prove Himself to you before to step forward...while God is asking you to step forward by faith anyway and then He will prove himself to you then!
 5. Obedience is this spiritual key that unlocks and releases our experience with God. I am convinced that if Zechariah refused to name the boy John, he would have been mute until the day he died. BUT, his obedience released him.
 6. God is waiting to release you into more as well. Where are you resisting Him? Where are you struggling not obeying what you know He’s said?
- Notice one more truth about obedience

B. Obedience releases God’s power into our circumstances

1. As soon as Zechariah obeyed God by naming the boy John, he experienced God’s power. He was not only released to speak, but He was filled with the Holy Spirit and began praising God!
2. I am convinced that God is more willing to pour out His power upon our lives and circumstances than we realize. There are simply too many promises in His word that relate to His power. They are everywhere!
3. When we choose to obey and follow God despite the circumstances, God’s power is

released. God has already chosen to demonstrate His power in our lives. He has already promised it! He simply waits for our obedience in order to release it.

4. Where do you need to see the power of God in your life? In your marriage / your finances / in some overwhelming circumstance? Find out what God's word has to say about it and step off the great divide of obedience and watch God work!
5. Stop allowing circumstances to dictate how much of God's word you're going to follow. Follow God's word regardless and your circumstances won't matter. God's word trumps the circumstances experientially BUT, only if you obey it.
- 6.

- Most of us are just like Zechariah,..we all struggle believing God at times. Pain, disappointment, overwhelming circumstances loom large in our lives. Sometimes we simply don't want to allow ourselves to have hope. We've just been let down so often.
- If there was ever a season that represents hope it is Christmas. God is all about giving hope to the hopeless. Maybe you feel as if your situation is impossible...much like Zechariah and Elizabeth.
- Are you willing to give your impossible situation to God today and just trust Him? Choose to walk in obedience despite the circumstances and let Him prove Himself to you. Can you decide to walk off the great divide, and in so doing, release God's presence and His power upon you and your situation? If so...I invite you to pray with me today.

Prayer time.