

Day 1 – Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer (“SOAP”)

Conversation Starter

What is your all-time favorite Christmas song?

Scripture Observation (5 minutes)**Scripture:**

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

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. 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. **Luke 1:1-7 NLT**

Paul writing to the church in Corinth: “As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due.” **1 Corinthians 4:3-5 NLT**

Sermon Insights:

We live in a time where people are confused and lack hope. So the question is, “Are we righteous?” Are we, as Christians, living blameless lives? A great temptation is to say, “Someday, I will really work on...”

Application (5 minutes)

Does the political climate or difficulties in life change the fact that God has called us to be “blameless”?

Zechariah and his wife endured many years of personal heartache fueled by the public shame of appearing “judged by God” for not having children. Yet God called them “blameless.”

What is involved with being “blameless” before God?

Is that the same as being “blameless” in the eyes of people?

Why is *today* important?

Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for your patience and kindness towards me. Teach me to embrace obedience today. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. Forgive my sins, and help me to be blameless!

Day 2 – Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer ("SOAP")**Conversation Starter**

What is the most surprising thing that has ever happened to you?

Scripture Observation (5 minutes)**Scripture:**

One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him.

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. 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. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. 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."

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." 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." **Luke 1:8-20 NLT**

Sermon Insights:

Zechariah was chosen "by lot." But there are no coincidences, no "just so happened" where God is concerned!

God works through his people.

God works through his church.

Application (5 minutes)

What was happening in the "Upper Story" (what God was accomplishing)?

What was happening in the "Lower Story" (what humans were experiencing on earth)?

Have you ever been confused, like Zechariah, wondering how "what God says" fits with "what I'm going through"?

Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for accomplishing your perfect plan through imperfect people and situations. Help me humbly trust and obey even when I cannot clearly see the way.

Day 3 – Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer ("SOAP")**Conversation Starter**

Do you like the origins of your name? Why or why not?

Scripture Observation (5 minutes)**Scripture:**

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. 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. Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way. **Luke 1:57-66**

NLT

Sermon Insights:

Just as God tapped Zechariah and Elizabeth on the shoulders and said, "Okay, it is time! I have chosen you for this special task," God will tap us on the shoulder to bless someone in this season. Every day we need to ask ourselves, "What does God want to do through me today?"

Application (5 minutes)

Zechariah's choice to name his son "John" broke tradition in a severely traditional culture. It also represented his strict obedience to God, even when he did not fully understand God's plan. And God used these unconventional parents to bring a wave of blessing and repentance to the Jewish people, preparing the way for Jesus to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

In what ways has God called you to obey? Have they been surprising?

Is there an area of your life that you are currently disobeying God? What thoughts, feelings, or desires are more important to you than obedience?

Are you willing and ready for God to use you in special ways today? Have you actually asked God to use you?

Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for using surprising people in unconventional ways to bring blessings to people who neither deserve nor understand your love. Thank you for working in me, giving me the desire and the power to do what pleases you (Philippians 2:13 NLT)!

Day 4 – Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer ("SOAP")

Conversation Starter

What is the most important thing you've ever waited for?

Scripture Observation (5 minutes)**Scripture:**

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

"Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant— the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.

"And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find **salvation through forgiveness of their sins**. Because of God's tender mercy, **the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us**, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel. **Luke 1:67-80 NLT**

The Apostle Peter would later write to Christians: But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. **2 Peter 3:8-14 NLT**

Sermon Insights:

So, we see God has a plan, God works through his people, and God works on his timetable, not ours!

God's timing is always perfect! He's never late and never early. He is always right on time!

Application (5 minutes)

Given what you've read about Zechariah and Elizabeth, what uniquely qualified them to raise John (the Baptist) for the work God uniquely created him to accomplish?

What means the most to you from Zechariah's song?

What step can you take today to live a peaceful, pure, and blameless life?

Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for giving me the desire and the power to live a life that is increasingly peaceful, pure, and blameless. Walk with me today! Love through me today!

Day 5 – Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer ("SOAP")

Conversation Starter

What is the most unique crowd of people you've ever experienced?

Scripture Observation (5 minutes)**Scripture:**

It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.

At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him! The valleys will be filled, and the mountains and hills made level. The curves will be straightened, and the rough places made smooth. And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.'"

When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

The crowds asked, "What should we do?"

John replied, "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry." Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, "Teacher, what should we do?" He replied, "Collect no more taxes than the government requires." "What should we do?" asked some soldiers. John replied, "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay."

Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. John answered their questions by saying, "I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire." John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people. **Luke 3:1-18 NLT**

Application (5 minutes)

John the Baptist gave direct and clear instructions to people based on their lifestyle. Tax collectors were confronted with their need to treat people fairly when it came to money. Soldiers were confronted with their need not to misuse their power. This is a hard question: if you were in that crowd, and John the Baptist pointed at you—what would he have said?

John the Baptist's humility and willingness to obey enabled him to be used powerfully by God. How does this challenge or support your view of leadership?

Is God calling you to repent of something? To do or say something? What step of obedience do you need to take next?

Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for working through very special people to help us understand your ways. Thank you for using us to bring your blessing to the people in our lives. Help me to lead humbly and obey faithfully.