

## What if you look at things from God's point of view?

Message for Sunday, December 9, 2018  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

**Children's Message:** from John 3:1-6  
When someone really important comes to town for a visit, they don't just show up one day. Someone comes ahead of them to get everything ready. If it's a woman, she might be dressed like this:



If it's a man, he might be dressed like this:



Jesus is pretty important. So when he was coming, someone came ahead of him. That person was a man named John. Here's how the Bible describes what John looked like:

**Matthew 3:4, New International Version:**  
John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

That sounds like a rough looking dude! Of course we don't have a photograph of John, but this is how one person imagined John might look:



We might think he wouldn't get any respect; people would look down on him, make fun of him. But here's what happened:

**Matthew 3:5-6, New International Version:**  
People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

What clothes a person wore were not important. Much more important was what that person did, what that person said.

That's good for us to remember. If you see someone wearing shabby, dirty clothing, don't look down on that person. What really matters is what that person is like on the inside. Get to know that person.

**Message:** "What if you look at things from God's point of view?"

Christmas will soon be here. One way we can tell is that the weekly newspaper gets thicker and thicker this time of year. It has flyers full of glittering goodies.

What do you want for Christmas? If you could have anything at all in the world, what would it be?

It's interesting how people answer that question. Some wish for things: the latest toy to take the world by storm, or some new clothing style which is the key to fitting in. Some wishes are about relationships: love with another person, love in a

family, make friends. Some wishes go beyond oneself: world peace, stop injustice, save the environment.

We're going to hear in the Bible about a couple who had one wish above everything else: they dearly wanted to have a child. Some of you here will identify with this couple; you know the heartache they went through.

**Luke 1:5-7, New International Version:**

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.

Zechariah and Elizabeth are a couple who are getting on in years, but they have no children. No one to share their love with. No one to carry on the family name and honour. They prayed often, asking that God would give them a child. This is what they wanted, more than anything else.

Then, out of nowhere, Zechariah gets the word from an angel:

**Luke 1:13, New International Version:**

"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."

A son! A little baby boy! What joy! At last, their greatest wish has come true. All the dreams they had for a family could now happen. Their child would have the best of everything. I can imagine them right away starting to make plans.

God gave them the answer to their prayers, but it came with a surprise! John was not going to be an ordinary child.

**Luke 1:14-17, New International Version:**

"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."

The angel said that John would have the spirit and power of Elijah, the greatest prophet Israel ever had. There had been no prophet in Israel for over 400 years. Now, John is coming. Why?

Because John was going to be a very special kind of prophet. When John was born, his father Zechariah was given a prophecy himself, about his baby boy:

**Luke 1:76-77, New International Version:**

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins."

For hundreds of years, the Jewish people had been eagerly waiting for the promised Messiah, the one from God who would save the people. At last, the Messiah is coming, and John will be the one to go ahead and prepare the way.

No normal child, indeed!

Imagine how you might have responded to the angel's announcement:

**Angel**

"You will have a son."

"You are to give him the name John."

"Many will rejoice because of his birth."

"He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his birth."

**Parent**

Wonderful! Praise God!

But this is our child. We get to choose his name.

What are you talking about? We're not celebrities. We're just common people.

We just wanted a normal child.

Is that how you or I might have responded? How *do* you react when you have your great dreams falling into place, and then something happens and turns it all upside down?

Zechariah and Elizabeth had wanted a child all their lives. They've waited all these years. At last, they have their child — but it's not really theirs. He will belong to the whole nation, and to God. Are they angry? Do they cry out, "Not fair!"

No! Listen to what happened when the baby was born. (Remember: John still can't speak, because he didn't believe the angel's message.)

**Luke 1:63-64, New International Version:**  
Zechariah asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

Why did they respond this way? Because their lives were centered on God, not on themselves. They were totally dedicated to serving God. So even though they are going to lose their only child, God had a much greater plan for the life of that child.

If they had been selfish, if their lives were centered on themselves, it would have been different. They would have been blind, unable to see how God was fulfilling their needs. They would have grumbled. But when they saw it from God's point of view, they rejoiced!

Let's go back to where I started this message, when I asked what you would like for Christmas. The Bible shows in many places that God promises to meet our needs.

**Matthew 6:33**  
Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [that you need] will be given unto you."

Do you see this happening in your life? Whose eyes are you using to look? Are you looking at it from a self-centered point of view? What if you look at things from God's point of view?

Let's talk about specific examples.

### **a) Money**

Maybe you figure you need more money. Suppose that God arranges to supply that need. Perhaps even more than you need. Then God also makes you aware of people who need help. I don't mean the

avalanche of junk mail we get, asking for donations to this and that. I mean someone you know personally, and you're the one who can help.

How do you feel about that money you received, giving away part or all of it? Is it easy or hard for you? Did you ever think maybe you're in that position right now? See what I mean about looking at things from God's point of view?

### **b) Concerns about loved ones**

Maybe your wish is for everyone in your family to get along better with each other, starting with yourself. God says to you, "Sure, that's easy. Spend more time with them, and less time on those other things that aren't as important." God answered your prayer, but that isn't what you wanted.

I won't dare to imagine how God might respond if you say you need to feel closer to God, that you want your faith to be real, not superficial. It's a dangerous thing to pray for a Christ-centered life! You never know where you'll end up.

But look at the alternative. It's even more dangerous to lead a self-centered life. You may have more money than ever before, but it's never enough. You're never satisfied. Marriage and family disputes just become greater when everyone is self-centered.

Let me give you an example of what it could look like when you look at life from God's point of view. I'm thinking of Charles Colson, who was part of the inner circle around President Nixon. Along with the others, he was part of the Watergate conspiracy as they tried to hide the truth about the illegal activities of the Nixon team. But Colson was the only who went to prison for his crimes.

After leaving the White House and back in his law practice (but before he was sentenced to prison), he had a business meeting with the president of Raytheon Corporation, Tom Phillips. Tom seemed more at peace than he had been the other times they had met. Colson asked why, and Phillips said he had surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. Colson was a bitter, broken man, and he realized he needed what Phillips had. He didn't immediately follow

through, but he finally also surrendered his life to Jesus.

During his time in prison, Colson saw first hand the living conditions of inmates—both the physical surroundings, but also the spiritual environment. He devoted the rest of his life to a ministry with inmates he started, called Prison Fellowship. Prison Fellowship now works in prisons in more than 100 countries around the world, including 106 prisons in Canada. One of the key parts of this work is that it is inmates themselves who do most of the ministry. Those who have experienced the amazing grace of God in Jesus Christ then share that gift with others around them.

Here's what Colson said in later years:

The great paradox [of my life] is that every time I walk into a prison and see the faces of men or women who have been transformed by the power of the living God, I realize that the thing God has chosen to use in my life ... is none of the successes, achievements, degrees, awards, honors, or cases I won before the Supreme Court. That's not what God's using in my life. What God is using in my life to touch the lives of literally thousands of other people is the fact that I was a convict and went to prison. That was my great defeat, the only thing in my life I didn't succeed in.

This year, when someone asks you what you want for Christmas, be careful! You might get what you ask for! Remember our part is to be faithful and responsible with the precious things we already have.

### **Next Steps:**

- Before you even make your wish list, spend time in prayer. Ask God to open your heart for what is truly important.
- Once you've taken that step, you never know where God may lead you! Perhaps instead of thinking you'd like this or that, *you* will be the gift! Offer yourself to love and serve however God may show you.