

## **The foolishness of Jesus' forerunner.**

Lesson 01 of the series, "The Foolishness of Christmas"

"This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God."

1 Corinthians 1:25-29 (NLT)

### **1. God chose an old priest and his barren wife to raise John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.**

"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."

Luke 1:5-6 (NLT)

*Note:* God chose Zechariah and Elizabeth because of their faithfulness. "The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. From his throne he observes all who live on the earth. He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do." Psalm 33:13-15 (NLT)

*Life Application:* If we are faithful in small things God will entrust us with greater responsibilities.

"Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!" Matthew 25:23 (NLT)

"They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. 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 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.'" Luke 1:7-17 (NLT)

*Note:* God's plans for us don't depend on luck. "We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall." Proverbs 16:33 (NLT)

*Life Application:* God has plans for me!

"The LORD will work out his plans for my life— for your faithful love, O LORD, endures forever."

Psalm 138:8 (NLT)

### **2. Zechariah doubted God's plans.**

"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.' Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long.

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. When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home." Luke 1:18-23 (NLT)

*Life Application:* We must guard our hearts against doubt and unbelief.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." James 1:5-8 (NIV)

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."

Hebrews 3:12 (NIV)

### 3. God's "foolish" way of doing things removed Elizabeth's disgrace and brought joy and praise.

Soon afterward... Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. 'How kind the Lord is!' she exclaimed. 'He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.' ...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 1:24-25, 57-66 (NLT)

*Life Application:* God still removes disgrace and brings joy and praise.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

"If we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." 1 John 1:7-9 (NLT)

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## Discussion Questions

To prepare for this week's meeting, take some time to focus on the following questions and write out a few brief answers. Be prepared to share them with your group.

1. Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching on Zechariah, Elizabeth & John the Baptist was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1: 25-29 & Luke 1:5-17. Why do you think God chose an old priest and his barren wife to be John the Baptist's parents? Who might have been deemed more qualified to raise the child who would eventually grow up to be the forerunner of the Messiah? What does this say about God's value system?
3. Read Luke 1:18-25. Why did Zechariah find it difficult to believe God was really giving him a son? Have you ever experienced an answer to a prayer that you had given up on? If so, what happened? What do the following passages teach us about persistence?

- Matthew 7:7-11
- Luke 18:1-8
- Galatians 6:9

What would you say to someone who doesn't believe that God answers prayers?

4. Read Hebrews 3:12 & James 1:5-8. How do we guard our hearts against unbelief?
5. Read Luke 1:57-66. How would you have reacted if you had been a neighbor to Zechariah & Elizabeth? What would you have thought about their baby? Do you know someone whom God has called to a specific task or ministry? How can you help them and/or pray for them?
6. What do the following verses teach us about God's plans for us? Does God really have plans for all of us or only a few of us? How can we learn what God's plans are?
  - Luke 1:76-80
  - Psalm 32:8-9
  - Psalm 138:8
  - Proverbs 3:5-6

7. How can we keep Christ at the center of our Christmas celebrations this year?
8. Which of your Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances or Neighbors could you bring to worship or a Christmas Eve candle light service this year? Spend some time as a group praying for people on your FRAN plan lists.