

Luke 1 (Part 3): 57-80 • The Prophecy of Zechariah

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Luke 1:57. *“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, (Remember, this is the woman who has conceived miraculously beyond her time of childbearing. She's going to be the mother of John the Baptist. And it says) and she bore a son⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.” (ESV)*

Again, rejoicing because Elizabeth was well past her childbearing years, and yet here she is, the recipient of the mercy of God, allowed to conceive, allowed to have a son. We're told then in verse 59 that,

“And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” Now stop there for a moment. In

Israel the birth of a baby boy was a huge celebration. In fact when the time of the birth was near at hand, and of course they didn't know it's going to be a boy or girl, but when the time of the birth of a baby was at hand the people would gather. In fact friends, even local musicians would gather, and I'm laughing because if it was a baby boy they would absolutely go nuts and have a party. If it was a girl, they would slink off and go home and do nothing.

I'm sorry, but that's the way it was. But so that's what would happen, when they announced that it was a boy everybody would just break into music and song. But in the home of Zachariah and Elizabeth, this was a double joy because not only had they been allowed to have a child, outside of the years when people normally have children, but it was that second joy of having a son that they had received finally at last.

And Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day according to the command of God and that's what we're reading about right here. When they gathered to circumcise the child on the eighth day, it became tradition for the Jews also to use that as the naming ceremony for the child. And so even though the parents would've probably no doubt known the name during that time, they would announce it during the circumcision. And it says here that everyone expected

that he would be named after his father. And of course at this particular point, Zachariah can't speak up for himself because he can't talk.

He's been made mute by the command of God because he disbelieved when the angel came and told him that his wife would have a child. So Mary or Elizabeth speaks up and says, I didn't say Mary before, did I? I think I said Elizabeth. Elizabeth spoke up and said, his name will be John and they go through with the circumcision and so on and so forth. I want to just back up here a bit. Regarding circumcision, this is the covenant sign that God had given to the Jews through Abraham, you'll remember. I'll put this up on the screen for you. It's recorded in Genesis chapter 17, where God said,

Genesis 17:10-12 (ESV)

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign (there it is) of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,

And so, this is where circumcision was first declared as a covenant sign between God and Israel. And then we come to the place of the naming. Verse 61 the people respond to Elizabeth here. They said to her listen, none of your relatives is called by the name of John.

⁶² *“And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, ”*

You dummies it's just my mouth not my ears. I just threw that in there, because I always thought about that. I thought, why are they making signs to him? He's mute, but he can hear just fine, and they're making signs. He's like, weird. Anyway.

⁶³ “...he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” (And it says, to that) *And they all wondered.* (Maybe whether he'd lost his mind, I don't know. But look at verse 64) “*And immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.*”

Here's a man who has been mute for over nine months, and the first words out of his mouth are praise, instead of saying whew that was a long nine months. First thing, first thing, blessing the Lord, and I love that. And fortunately, Luke records what he says here and before he writes that first we're told in verse 65 that “*fear came on all their neighbors.*”

Speaking of Zachariah, I think I hit the mute button, but that was just me. That wasn't the Lord. I trust you. Well, we're trusting that was the case anyway. Okay.

⁶⁵ “*And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,* ⁶⁶ *and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.*”

In other words, the people of that area knew that something supernatural had been taking place for some time now. It started with stories of a mysterious angelic visitation. And then those stories morphed into this idea of Zachariah, the priest, losing his ability to speak. Did you hear about Zachariah? He can't talk. He's but he'd been, he told us that he saw an angel and dah, dah, dah... And then they hear that his wife, Elizabeth, has conceived, become pregnant, who knows, she's probably 55, maybe 60 years old. And then there's this naming of the child John.

John? You don't have a John in your family, why are you naming this child? It's just, it's piquing their interest. And then finally, Zachariah receiving back his voice right after confirming by writing that the name of the child will, in fact, be John. You got to know that's enough to get people talking. I mean all those things over a period of some nine plus months, people are talking. But what's really cool is that once Zachariah was able to speak, he really spoke, and we have this beautiful prophetic Psalm that we're going to look at here this morning, that is known by its Latin name of, The Benedictus.

You'll remember that Mary's Psalm is called, The Magnificat. Again, these are the Latin terms for these Psalms. And Zachariah speaks here this word message called the Benedictus and that's the Latin word for blessed, and that's the way

they would name these things usually after the first word. And it says here in verse 67,

“And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Remember, last week, we mentioned that the phrase filled with the Holy Spirit is the language of the empowering work of the Spirit remember? Filled with the Holy Spirit does not refer to somebody who is saved. That's an error. I should say this, it's not talking about salvation. It's talking about the fact that they've received the empowering work of the Spirit to do, or to speak. So that's why Luke says, right before he gives us this beautiful song of Zechariah, *“filled with the Holy Spirit.”* He says,

“...and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,”

You might look at that phrase and say, *“horn of salvation,”* why did they call things the horn of salvation? Well, you have to understand that when the Jews thought of animals, particularly animals with horns, they perceived that that was the source or the focus of their strength, and so the word horn became synonymous with strength, and so they would refer to the horn of His salvation, meaning the strength, the power, the might, right of His salvation and notice that he has raised up for us in the house of his servant, David, there, at the end of verse 69, which speaks of the Messiah. And in verse 70, he goes on to say,

“..as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,”

And that essentially means that the Old Testament prophets spoke extensively of the coming of Messiah and His mission, and Zechariah is praising God in these first verses for remembering His promises. We'll see this here in a bit. He said, but I want you to see here in verse 71, as we keep reading, how Zechariah at first characterized the mission of the coming Messiah. Look at verse 71,

“that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;” Stop there.

Interesting, isn't it? The coming of Messiah and His mission is first characterized by Zechariah as *“that we shall be saved from our enemies and those who hate us.”* He doesn't talk about salvation as being saved from our sin. Now, that's what you and I think of, right? When you think about, okay, if I were to say to you, when Jesus came, what was His mission? You would

probably say, well, his mission was, ultimately, to die on the cross that we might be saved from our sin, right? That pretty much sums it up.

But what's interesting is that's not what Zachariah mentions at first. He's not talking about spiritual salvation; he's talking about political salvation. What's interesting about that and what makes this prophecy so amazing is that that is what Jesus is going to do when He comes the second time. He's not going to come to die on a cross the second time. He's going to come to bring political salvation, particularly to Israel. So what Zachariah is doing in this first statement, prophetically, is he's leapfrogging past the cross, by the way he'll come back to it in a minute.

But he's leapfrogging over the cross and he's talking about how Jesus is going to fight for the nation of Israel against all of their enemies and those who hate Israel, and He's going to destroy them. And that is a battle that you and I call Armageddon. And that's what Zechariah is prophesying about here first, right? And that is why he said, here in verse 71, *“that we should be saved from our enemies.”*

Guys, this hasn't happened yet. This is a prophecy that is yet unfulfilled. It's coming, and there are huge prophecies to the Old Testament saying that it's coming, and we know that it's going to happen but it hasn't happened yet.

It will happen when Jesus comes back again. Right? and there are several prophetic passages that speak of this battle that is going to be taking place right before the Millennial Kingdom. By the way, this battle is at the end of the Great Tribulation at the very conclusion of the great tribulation, and I'm going to show you where some, I'm going to piecemeal some prophecies together for you to show you this. A couple of them first from revelation chapter 19. John says,

Revelation 19:11-14 (ESV)

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. (look at that) His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many (crowns)

diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. (we're talking about Jesus, aren't we?) And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

Then, next couple of verses, it says,

Revelation 19:15-16 (ESV)

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to (do what?) strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now, interesting passage, two passages there. Now, although these passages talk about the fact that there's going to make war and he's going to strike down the nations. You'll notice that they do not tell us that these nations are going to be gathered against Israel. They don't say that here in Revelation, do they? It just talks about the war. This is Armageddon.

So how do we know that He's going to strike down the nations who are assembled against Israel? Well, for that, we have to go to another prophetic passage. Here's what's interesting about that other prophetic passage. It is given by a man named Zechariah who lived about 500 years earlier but had the very same name as the father of John the Baptist, and here's what he wrote,

Zechariah 12:3, 8-9 (ESV)

On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples... And all the nations of the earth will gather against it. On that day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, going before them. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

On that day (the Lord says) I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples... And all the nations of the earth will gather against it. On that

day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, going before them. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

Incredible prophetic passage. It's interesting to me that the prophet Zechariah actually gives clarity to a prophecy spoken by a man named Zechariah, the priest, who lived 500 years later, and then Zechariah the priest goes on, in verse 72 if you look with me there, he says, *“to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, that is.”* Oh, what a beautiful thing. Here Zechariah emphasizes God's faithfulness to His promises, and he says that He remembers to bring those things to pass.

He'll actually, isn't that beautiful? To remember His holy covenant, to remember His holy covenant. You know what I found very interesting? I looked up Zachariah's name. It means Yahweh remembers. Fascinating that this man whose name means, Yahweh remembers, speaks to us prophetically and he says He is coming to bring the mercy that He promised to our fathers and to remember the covenant that He made. Verse 73,

“the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, (there's that political salvation) might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

Again, he's praising God. Thank you God, for holding fast to your covenant. Thank you for keeping to your promises, for remembering your promises, and bringing them to pass, even though He hasn't brought them completely to pass. He's praising the Lord ahead of time. In fact, it's been 2,000 years and this political salvation for Israel has not yet happened. But he's praising God for it. It's coming, right? Now, then we come to the second part of Zechariah's prophecy and he begins to speak of his son, John, and the ministry that John will have as he goes before the Messiah, look at verse 76,

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,”

And those words are so key. I brought these up to you last week when we talked about it, but to “prepare the way of the Lord,” this is the prophecy that is given about John. Elsewhere in the Old Testament here, Zachariah says it by the leading of the Holy Spirit, but it was said elsewhere. I've shown you these before, but I want to show them to you again both from Isaiah and Malachi.

Isaiah 40:3 (ESV)

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

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Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

Behold I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

Behold I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

So, John is the one who prepares the way for the Messiah. Verse 77, Zechariah continues to speak about John's ministry, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins. And this is now, remember I told you that prior to this Zechariah has been speaking of political salvation, now he speaks of spiritual salvation. Look what he says here again.

"To give knowledge of salvation." (And again, that word salvation means deliverance, but we know exactly what he means because he goes on to say) *"in the forgiveness of their sins."*

Spiritual salvation. Alright? John is the one who's going to bring the knowledge of salvation to the people of Israel. How is he going to do it? He's going to go out in the wilderness out to the Jordan and he's going to talk to everybody about their sin. Not the greatest of topics. If God gave you one message for really the entirety of your ministry life and He said, here's what I want you to do. I want you to tell people that they're sinners, but I want you also to tell them that there's forgiveness for their sins, and then I want you to symbolize that forgiveness. Have people come down into the Jordan and then dunk them in the water and tell them that that's a picture of how God forgives.

Just as filth is washed away from the body by water, so also the filth of our sin is washed away from us by God. But the thing about John is, he didn't just go around telling people, hey come get forgiven in the Jordan. I'll symbolize it for you and then go home and don't worry about it and you'll be good for the rest. He didn't do that did he? He baptized people, but then he pointed them to the One who was to come, who was going to fulfill all those promises and make that salvation a reality by His death on the cross.

John had a two-fold ministry. Convince the people of their sin, speak to them about forgiveness, and then point them to the One who was going to make it all a reality. He says, the One coming after me, I'm not even worthy to tie his shoes. Very important ministry that John has. And then Zachariah closes this beautiful prophecy. He speaks of why John is coming or has been born. He speaks of why the Messiah is still to come, and here's what he says in verse 78, and this is a very important verse. *"because of the tender mercy of our God."*

I want you just to think about that for a minute. I want that to just sink into your heart. Jesus Christ came because of the tender mercy of God. Isn't it amazing? We humans, all we can seem to think about is God's wrath. People ask me questions; I get them pretty regularly. So is God really going to send people to hell just because they've never heard of Him or because they just won't acknowledge Him or all their questions center around God's wrath, God's anger and hell.

People want to know, and you can tell they're really tweaked by the whole idea and they're so what's the deal with hell anyway? I just don't get this hell business. This eternal suffering business. What's that all about? I just don't get it. You guys keep talking about how great it is to know this God, but it seems to me like he's just angry. And what we don't ever focus on is the fact that we're the ones that got ourselves into trouble in the first place with sin, and God's response to our sin was tender mercy. Tender mercy.

That's what Zachariah is saying by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That's why God sent a forerunner, John, to get people's hearts ready, and that's why God sent His only Son to die on the cross for you and I, because of His tender mercy. The Bible says, *"God is not willing that any should be lost, but that all would come to repentance."* Why don't people think about that verse? Why don't they meditate on verses like that? Why don't they think about those statements where God says, I don't want anyone to be lost. Why don't they think about that?

Why don't they stop and consider the fact that the Bible says that hell was created for Satan and his devils, his demons. It was never created for man. Men choose to go there by rejecting the salvation that is ours through Jesus Christ. Why does God send people to hell? Goodness gracious, you've got it all backwards. Men choose to go there. They refuse. They say, no! I refuse to accept this free salvation. This forgiveness of sins. Forget it. I don't need it. Hey, you throw away the only life boat that's sent your way. Then there's nothing else to do. There is no other salvation.

There's no other options. Jesus is the only option. He said it Himself. I am the door, not a door. I am the door. All who pass through me will be saved, right? And therein lies the problem. I've got to do it through just Him? Forget that! You see, it's that stubborn resistance that says, no, I'm not going to go through your little narrow door. That's exactly what Jesus said. The way to life is narrow and it's hard. The way to destruction, it's broad and it's easy to go that way. Just go with the world. Just go with the flow.

It is because of the tender mercy of our God that God did these things, that God sent us His Son. Look what he goes on to say, I'll read that verse again,⁷⁸ *"because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise"* or as the NIV renders it, *"the rising sun shall visit us from on high."* What a beautiful statement saying that Messiah is coming. He is the very light of God to give light. Verse 79, *"...to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

On Christmas Eve, we showed a video. For those of you that were here, you remember, for those of you that weren't, it was called, and you probably heard the story before, but it's called, The Man and the Birds. And I actually read it about 3 or 4 years ago at Christmas Eve. And then we had a video actually showing the story of this man who just, couldn't believe in all this Jesus dying incarnation junk, and he told his wife when she was getting ready to go to church on Christmas Eve, you go. I just feel like I'd be a hypocrite if I'd go to church and I'm just going to stay home.

And so he did, he stayed home and he's sitting around reading his paper and he starts to hear a thump on the window pane of the living room, and he thought at first kids were throwing snowballs at the house, and then he went to look and saw that there were birds that were repeatedly hitting the window because they were seeing the warmth glow of the light, and they were trying to come in out of the snow because there was a storm that was building outside. And so the man put on his coat and boots and he went out and he thought, I got to try to do something about this, and he tried everything. He went and opened the door of the barn and turned the light on in there he tried to shoo the birds in there.

He tried to do breadcrumbs to get them to go and everything he tried, nothing worked, and he thought to himself, they're afraid of me. What I would need to do to really be effective is become a bird so I could lead them to safety, and suddenly he heard the bells of the church chiming on Christmas Eve, and he suddenly understood why God sent His Son. And Zachariah says it right here, *"to guide our feet into the way of peace."* Jesus came to show us life, the way to life, the way to live, the way to be saved. He's like, you guys, it's this way. Go

that way. Stop being stubborn and prideful and stiff necked. I just love that verse. Verse 80. He ends, Luke ends it for us by saying,

“And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

Before we close, I think it's important for us to see the Lord's mercy toward this man named Zechariah, whose prophecy we've looked at here today. Remember something. He was a man-made silent because of his unbelief. Sometimes people will do really dumb things and then they'll assume from that point on, God has no use for them. I want to just remind you this man whom God made silent because of his unbelief. The Lord turned around and made him an instrument of one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible, right?

Think that went through for a while. Let that one wash over your heart. I mean, no sooner was his tongue loosed from the consequence of his unbelief, but the Lord also went on to loosen his heart to speak of the Lord's great mercy. And that's what I love about this prophecy so much is it emphasizes, really not His son who's about to be born, and you would think that as a dad thrilled to death that his wife and he finally had a child, you'd think that would be all he'd want to talk about because that's what parents do, right? All we want to talk about is our kids. He's talking about God's mercy. The focus of his message is the mercy of God.

And that is such a moving and powerful declaration that we see from this. How the coming of Jesus Christ is the mercy promised to come. All right, we'll get into chapter two next time. Let's stand together. We're going to have our prayer team down front to pray with anyone who is needing prayer this morning. Thank you, Father for giving us this new year and thank you, Lord, for reiterating the wonderful promises that are ours through Jesus and the Lord. We just want to say one thing. We don't deserve it. I'm not good enough for you to save me, and neither is anyone in this room.

We haven't earned it. We don't deserve it. What we've deserved is the opposite, and yet you saved us because of your great mercy. You are a God of mercy. Thank you for your mercy. We don't deserve it, but we accept it nonetheless, and we ask you to continue to fill us with the light of your presence and to teach us from your Word what we need to know to walk before you with a whole heart. We ask it in Jesus precious name, amen.