

Sunday, December 12, 2021 | Great Joy

Week 2 | Luke 1:67-79 | "Zechariah's Song"

Announcements:

- Teen Girls Paint Night Sat., Dec 18th @ 4PM.
 - Christmas eve, Communion, Carols, and Candlelight, @ 6PM.
 - We'll be having Bob's ordination on Sunday, January 30th, 2022. The examination will be on Saturday, January 29th.
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Last week, started a new four-week series called Great Joy. This study looks at the Christmas story from the songs sung in the Gospels before, during, and after Christ's birth. As we dive deep into these passages, we'll discover that at the heart of each song lies a hope that the Messiah we'll change the world. And, with any luck, these messages will warm your heart, stir your soul, and challenge you to worship the true Joy-Bringer.

The first song we studied was that which Mary sang after she met her cousin, Elizabeth. Traditionally, this song has been referred to as the *Magnificat* after the Latin translation of the Greek word *meg-al-oo'-no*, translated as "glories" here in our text. The Greek verb *meg-al-oo'-no* is a term that expresses praise and adoration. And that is precisely what Mary does. She magnifies God because of the way he's acted on her behalf, for everyone, and throughout all generations. In this way, **Mary's song established continuity between the Old and New Testaments.**

Today, we'll move on to Zechariah's song. Known by its Latin name, *Benedictus*, from which we get our English word benediction ("blessing"), this song is both a melody of praise and a message of prophecy. Before uttering this magnificent song, Zechariah had been both deaf and mute for at least nine months. Sound strange? It was. In fact, it caused quite a stir in the community. The reason why Zechariah lost both his hearing and his ability to speak was because of unbelief. You see, while he was ministering in the Temple, an angel appeared to Zechariah and told him that, even though he and his wife, Elizabeth, were old, they would bear a son. But rather than accept the message—after all, Gabriel himself had given him the message—Zechariah doubted and questioned. To this, the angel struck him with muteness and deafness. And so he remained for nine long months. He could not speak, and he could not hear. Until, finally, his son came into the world. And this is where we pick up the story.

READ: Luke 1:57-80 (ESV)

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 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, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 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.

Here's something extra—Old man Zechariah's arch in Luke 1 from disbelief to belief is an excellent reminder that it doesn't matter how old you are; the "growing up" phase never really stops. Nine months of deafness and muteness has taught this old priest that obedience to God is best done when it is done emphatically and immediately. Zechariah was handicapped because of his lack of faith. Here, his faith in God's word made him whole once more.

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit 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, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Now, if you remember from last week, Mary's song had three different verses. Zechariah's song, on the other hand, has just two. However, both poems are quite a mouthful.

Zechariah's song is both a...

i. A melody of praise (vs. 67-75).

Zechariah praises God for several things:

- a. In verse 68, Zechariah begins by blessing Yahweh for visiting and redeeming his people. The tense used here for "has visited" is the Greek aorist tense, which signifies a completed action in the past. But how has Yahweh visited them? Through sending the Messiah. After all, he is not only to be named "Jesus" but also "Emanuel" (cf. Isa. 7:14; Mat. 1:23; "God with us"). We serve a God who has visited us and never left. He now dwells in us.
 - This Messiah will have God's "[horn of salvation](#)" (vs. 69). Now, that phrase may sound odd to us, but to a first-century Jew, it held great significance. The phrase comes from how the horn of a bull would have represented power and strength.¹ This imagery declares that Christ would have the strength to deliver his people, Israel.
- b. Zechariah's song takes a decisive nationalistic turn in the latter half.
 - In verse 69, he mentions the "[house of David](#)." In verse 70, he speaks about the "[prophets from of old](#)." In verse 72, he talks about the "[holy covenant](#)" made to his forefathers, and then he mentions Abraham explicitly in verse 73. What's more, in verses 71 and 74, Zechariah also blesses Yahweh because he has delivered the Jews from their oppressors—i.e., those who "[hate](#)" them. He's not speaking metaphorically here. When Zechariah talks about their "[enemies](#)," he's no doubt thinking about the Romans.

Now, typically, when we (Christians) speak of deliverance, we usually mean it in the sense of spiritual liberation (i.e., from the devil, death, sin, etc.). However, while he will speak of that kind of deliverance later on, here, Zechariah's song has a strong emphasis on a reprieve for Israel alone. This deliverance is the kind that will save the Israelite's from their foreign enemies. In fact, to the average

¹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *St. Luke*, vol. 1, The Pulpit Commentary, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 11.

Jew, a national rescue was likely what came to mind when they thought of the Messiah. It will not only take Jesus dying for them to realize that this is only part of God's plan, but it will also take Luke all of this book and all of his next book (Acts) to explain that God's act of deliverance was first and foremost spiritual. And while there is still a nationalistic deliverance that has yet to happen for the Israelites, death—the bigger enemy—had to be dealt with first. God needed to redeem his people from their sins before he rescued them from their enemies.

SIDEBAR: In fact, one cannot help but wonder what would've happened to the world had Jerusalem welcomed their King of Kings rather than nail Him to cross. But Zechariah does not have the blessing of hindsight as we do. He doesn't yet know how his own countrymen will treat their Messiah. However, from an eternal perspective, we can still say that Zechariah's words of prophecy are valid. God will not forget the Israelites. And, ultimately, he will redeem them from their enemies and set up His earthly kingdom forevermore. "For Luke, the reconciliation of God's people and deliverance from enemies are both part of one divine movement."²

ii. A message of prophecy (vs. 76-79).

While there is no doubt that Zechariah looks with love—the kind of love that only a new father experiences—he also regards his newborn son with the knowledge that he will do great things. It is far more of a knowing look than a loving one. After all, Zechariah knows John will do great things because that is precisely what Gabrielle said nine months ago. So, he is also gazing into the future in looking at his son.

Whereas Jesus was called the "[Son of the Most High](#)" (cf. Lu. 1:32), the first thing Zechariah says about his son is that John will be called the "[prophet of the Most High](#)" (vs. 76). Interestingly, only after Zechariah has spoken about God and the Messiah does he now turn to talk about his son, John.³ It seems, even at his birth, John is subservient to Christ even though he was, technically, born first. And here, even with this prophetic moniker, John takes his rightful place under Christ. This is why Zechariah then says that

² Green, Joel B., *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), p. 115.

³ Morris, Leon, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 97.

John is to “go before the Lord to prepare his ways.” John’s primary role was preparatory. He was a herald that the Kingdom was coming. But John wasn’t the King; he was merely the representative of the King. Or, as one commentator put it, “John prepares the way, rather than being the way.”⁴

In verse 77, Zechariah explains how John will prepare the way by saying that he will “give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.” Here, Zechariah leaves his emphasis on nationalistic deliverance and moves more generally to spiritual redemption. Practically, we know that John will preach a message of repentance, encouraging people to get baptized as a sign that they are ready. In this way, John's baptism is distinct from our own in that we get baptized to testify that Jesus came into our hearts, whereas those who were baptized by John testified that they were ready for the Messiah's coming. And, in fact, as you'll no doubt remember, this is precisely where Jesus finds John: preaching and baptizing. John was at work, clearing the brush from the road, preparing the way of the Lord.

Then, in verses 78 and 79, Zechariah sings about how John's messaging will not be one of condemnation and judgment, like some of the prophets before him (i.e., Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc.), but John's message is one of “tender mercy” (*khesed*). In that tender mercy, God has sent the “sunrise” to visit humanity and the “light” to shine on those who “sit in darkness,” who are in the very “shadow of death” itself.

For over 400 years, the Jews had no word from heaven. Their last prophet, Malachi, prophesied about an imminent judgment. The judgment came, and there was naught but silence for four centuries. Then John enters the scene. He is the last of such prophets; he will even be likened to Elijah himself. But his is not a message of doom; John's message is a message of *hope*. The great long night was coming to an end. The sun was about to rise. And with the rising of the Son, a new era for humanity had dawned.

So, WHAT’S THE TAKEAWAY?

READ: Luke 1:74-75, 78-79 (ESV)

that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days...the sunrise shall visit us from on high...to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

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Bock, Darrell L., *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 1994), p.195.

Zechariah's song established that at the heart of God's kingdom is a mindset of peaceful **pietism**, not **escapism** or **materialism**.

Jesus did not come so that we might go to heaven (i.e., escapism), though, thankfully, you will if you die before he comes again. And Jesus did not come so that we might have a good life (i.e., materialism), though, thankfully, you will if you believe in him. Jesus came so that we will be enabled to serve God as we were always intended to (i.e., pietism). "God saves for service."⁵ And, in serving God, our "feet" will be guided onto the "way of peace." This kind of peace is far more than a simple absence of conflict or war. It is a peace that indicates total well-being.⁶ In this way, Zechariah's words resonate with those of the angels when they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (cf. Lu. 2:14).

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Christ came not to establish a mindset of escapism or materialism but an outlook of peaceful pietism.

⁵ Bock (1994), p. 186.

⁶ Bock (1994), p. 193.

Video Description

Great Joy | Week 2 | “Zechariah’s Song”

TEXT: Luke 1:67-79

Zechariah’s song established that at the heart of God’s kingdom is a mindset of peaceful **pietism, not escapism or materialism**. Jesus did not come so that we might go to heaven (i.e., escapism), though, thankfully, you will if you die before he comes again. And Jesus did not come so that we might have a good life (i.e., materialism), though, thankfully, you will if you believe in him. Jesus came so that we will be enabled to serve God as we were always intended to (i.e., pietism). “God saves for service.”⁷ And, in serving God, our “feet” will be guided onto the “way of peace.” This kind of peace is far more than a simple absence of conflict or war. It is a peace that indicates total well-being.⁸ In this way, Zechariah's words resonate with those of the angels when they sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (cf. Lu. 2:14).

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here:

⁷ Bock (1994), p. 186.

⁸ Bock (1994), p. 193.