

8] BLESSED BE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL

(Sunday, November 14, 2021)

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-19; Luke 1:67-80

INTRODUCTION

What do we see just in this chapter in terms of the gospel?

We are called to have conviction and certainty.

We are called to trust in God's work. "For with God nothing will be impossible."

We are directed to understand the way that God saves sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And although God's mercy extended to us had nothing to do with our own goodness or ability, we now are called to serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness!

As we focus on Zacharias's expression of praise spoken over 2000 years ago, we rejoice that God continues to work according to what He has promised!

God's work of salvation has not changed!

In the midst of the very dark days in which we live, we seek the advancement of the glorious message of salvation and kingdom of our Lord.

I want to emphasize 5 things from Zacharias's prophecy and expression of praise and the final verse summarizing much of John's life.

1] THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AND THE TRIUNE GOD

The greatest doctrines that we believe about the Triune nature of God and the person of Jesus Christ are not "easy doctrines."

We don't believe them because they are so simple.

They are logical, of course, but they are not simply built on human reason.

We believe them and seek to understand them because they come from the Word of God.

In our text we have reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 67.

Verse 68 speaks of the Lord God of Israel, a reference to the Triune God.

In verse 76 and following we have a focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have already noted how the term Lord is used to speak of God in general or perhaps specifically of the Father, and Lord is used to refer to Jesus.

Angel of the Lord - verse 11

Thus the Lord has dealt with me - verse 25

The Lord is with you - verse 28

Maid servant of the Lord - verse 38

Mother of my Lord - verse 43

Fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord - verse 45

It is true that it did take time for the early church to come to grips with the best way of expressing and understanding the truth of Scripture.

There were important councils - Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon - that met to summarize what we believe about the Triune God and the person and work of Christ.

But the foundation of this truth is not the opinions of men, but Scripture.

And our conviction that Scripture is true is based on the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit as is emphasized in verse 67.

John Calvin stated here:

This was a remarkable instance of the goodness of God, that not only did Zacharias recover the power of speech, which he had not enjoyed for nine months, but his tongue became the organ of the Holy Spirit.

Just a brief comment here on verse 67 and the timing and significance of Zacharias's prophecy.

MacArthur made a very good point on this beautiful statement of praise saying:

When Zechariah was struck mute in the temple (v. 20), he was supposed to deliver a benediction (*see note on v. 21*). So it is fitting that when his speech was restored, the first words out of his mouth were this inspired benediction.¹

Look back to verse 64.

Luke 1:64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he spoke, praising God.

We assume that the words of praise are what we find here in verses 68-79.

It is possible that these words were spoken at another time, but it would seem that while many were gathered for the circumcision of John and his naming, Zacharias spoke these words.

The word blessed in Latin is the word **benedictus**, which is why this passage of Scripture is sometimes called the Benedictus.

2] TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF THE ESSENTIAL NEED FOR THE SAVING WORK OF GOD

Verse 5 references the political background of Israel in the days of Herod the king of Judea.

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 19344.

I mentioned in our second sermon on Luke that Herod was not a Jew.

He was half Edomite and half Arab, but he was a very clever and wicked man.²

Herod was the most powerful king of Israel since Solomon and like Solomon built a most beautiful temple and many, many other splendid buildings.

Herod's reign started in about 37 B.C.³

There is some question about the best date for his death.

According to conventional chronology, Herod died in 4 B.C. This would mean that Jesus had to be born around 6 B.C.

There is good reason to suggest that Herod died in 1 B.C. putting the birth of Jesus around 2 B.C.⁴

Politically then the situation was a mess in Israel with Rome exercising ultimate control, and Herod and his descendants being involved in other political matters.

The priesthood was also very corrupted by political and religious matters.

The Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection dominated the High Priesthood.

No wonder then is the description in verse 79 given of **darkness** and **death** and the need for **true peace**.

² <https://www.hope-of-israel.org/herodsdeath.html>

³ <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/the-daniel-9-24-27-project/4365-the-first-year-of-herod-the-great-s-reign>

⁴ <https://www.hope-of-israel.org/herodsdeath.html>

We see here that Zacharias was given an understanding that the most important need for Israel was not simply political or economic changes or improvements but salvation.

Look at verse 77:

To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins.

The word salvation as it is used in Scripture does not always mean salvation as we speak of it in terms of salvation from sin and deliverance from the wrath of God.

But clearly that it is usage here.

Zacharias understood by the work of the Holy Spirit that what was most needed was God's saving work!

Yes, Israel had many other needs and concerns, but without salvation, what does it matter?

We believe that Scripture speaks to all matters of life.

We never want to restrict the message of Scripture to just so called "spiritual matters."

However, what must be our greatest and first concern is God's work of salvation.

When you lose the message of the gospel, you will in the end lose the message of all of Scripture!

Liberalism finds its foothold when the gospel is in anyway made not so vital as other aspects of life.

Missions becomes more generally focused on doing good.

The devil is a master at confusing the issue and deluding the church to lose its focus and speak on good in general or service without the essential message of sin and salvation.

Pray that as a church and ministry we will never lose our focus on the true understanding and proclamation of the gospel.

3] GOD'S SAVING WORK, THE OT AND NT BROUGHT TOGETHER BEAUTIFULLY

The language that we find in these verses is rich with OT themes and expressions.

Zacharias is a Jew, a true son of Abraham, and so he speaks this way.

But Zacharias, not surprisingly because he is filled with the Holy Spirit, understands that God's promises, covenants, and deliverances of His people throughout their long history is all focused on the coming of Jesus Christ.

The verb **visited** is an important word to consider.

The story of Ruth shifts from Moab back to Israel because Naomi heard while she was in Moab, that the LORD had **visited** His people by giving them bread. (**Ruth 1:6**).

Look at verse 78 also - with which the Dayspring from on high has **visited** us.

Zacharias is emphasizing that with the birth of John and soon the birth of Jesus, **God was drawing near to His people in a special way and dealing with them in grace.**⁵

This theme of visitation is also connected with the spread of the gospel to the nations as we see in James's speech in Acts 15:14.

Acts 15:14 Simon has declared how God at the first **visited** the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

⁵ Beyer, *TDNT*, s.v. "ἐπισκέπτομαι, ἐπισκοπέω, ἐπισκοπή, ἐπίσκοπος, ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος," II:605.

Redeemed is a verb used only three times in the NT.

Luke 2:38 And coming in that instant she [Anna] gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Heb. 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Zacharias is of course filled with joy that he and his wife have just had a baby.

But we observe that Zacharias understands that according to the OT, the Messiah was not of the house of Levi but was of the house of David.

Luke 1:69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,

God is bringing to Israel a powerful savior!⁶

I love verse 70 which shows that this is the message of all of Scripture since the **world began** or as some versions read **from of old**.

Luke 24:25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" **27** And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

⁶ NET Bible

Verse 71 speaks of being saved from our enemies, from the hand of those who hate us.

Countless times in the OT, Israel was saved from her numerous enemies.

But we know that this deliverance was not God's ultimate work as vital as it was.

Being physically rescued is good, but it is not the most important thing.

Zacharias understands that God's work of deliverance was to preserve God's promise of the Messiah and was to picture the work that only the Messiah could do.

Military victories were not in vain, but they were not the main purpose.

Behind all of God's work is His mercy and his holy covenant and the oath which He swore to Abraham.

Lev. 26:42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land.

The reference to an oath in Heb. 6:17 and Luke 1:73 comes from the passage we read earlier from Genesis 22.

Gen. 22:16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son* – **17** blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. **18** In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

And we notice so beautifully that God's work of salvation leads then to the calling that we as God's people are to serve our great God without fear and in holiness and righteousness.

Isn't this such an incredible summary of what we find in all the later letters of the NT?

The chief focus of just about every epistle is that since we are saved by grace, in response we are to live a life of obedience.

John Calvin so beautifully understood this in his commentary by providing a long list of citations:

“God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness,” (1 Thessalonians 4:7.) We are “redeemed with a great price,” (1 Corinthians 6:20,) “the precious blood of Christ,” (1 Peter 1:18,19,) not that we may serve “the lusts of the flesh,” (2 Peter 2:18,) or indulge in unbridled licentiousness, but that Christ may reign in us. We are admitted by adoption into the family of God, that we, on our part, may yield obedience as children to a father. For “the kindness and love (φιλανθρωπια) of God our Savior toward man,” (Titus 3:4,) “hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly,” (Titus 2:11,12.) And so Paul, when he wishes powerfully to exhort believers to consecrate themselves to God, “in newness of life,” (Romans 6:4,) and, “putting off, concerning the former conversation, the old man,” (Ephesians 4:22,) to render to him a “reasonable service,” “beseeches them by the mercies of God,” (Romans 12:1.) Scripture is full of declarations of this nature, which show that we “frustrate the grace” (Galatians 2:21) of Christ, if we do not follow out this design.

4] THE INCREDIBLE CALLING GIVEN UNTO JOHN

Zacharias clearly knew his precious son was not the savior, but he did understand as Gabriel had clearly made known to him the important role that John was given.

What was John's calling?

John would be a **prophet of the Highest**.

He would **go before the face of the Lord** to prepare His ways.

What could ever be a greater calling than this?

Look back to verse 17.

Luke 1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *“to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,”* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Notice then three verbs in verses 77 and 79 which in Greek have the same grammatical form of infinitives:

1] to give knowledge

2] to give light

3] to guide our feet

Clearly salvation, forgiveness, mercy, light, and peace come from God alone, but is John the one giving knowledge and light as the forerunner of Christ?

Here is my suggestion. John would be the one who would give knowledge of salvation to Israel by preparing the way for Christ.

And then in verse 79, the verbs give light and guide our feet into the way of peace, in my opinion, much better connect with **Jesus** than with John.

The heart of John’s work was first calling for the Israel to recognize her sin and need of forgiveness. John’s second work was then directly pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 3:3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,

John Calvin wrote of verse 77:

Proud men attempt to forge and manufacture a righteousness out of the merits of good works. True righteousness is nothing else than the imputation of righteousness, when God, out of free grace, acquits us from guilt.

In verse 78 this salvation and forgiveness is so beautifully connected with the mercy of God and the visit of the Dayspring from on high.

The word **Dayspring** comes from a Greek word that means either **east** or **rising**.

I think the translation **day spring** originally comes from Tyndale's translation of the NT and then is found in the Geneva Bible and the King James translations.⁷

It is a beautiful picture that our Lord is described as the coming of a new day, the **Dayspring**.

This is the only time this description is used of Jesus in the NT, but it connects with a number of OT passages.

Is. 9:2 The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

⁷ <https://biblehub.com/tnt/luke/1.htm>

Is. 60:1 Arise, shine;

For your light has come!

And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,

And deep darkness the people;

But the LORD will arise over you,

And His glory will be seen upon you.

3 The Gentiles shall come to your light,

And kings to the brightness of your rising.

Mal. 4:2 But to you who fear My name

The Sun of Righteousness shall arise

With healing in His wings;

And you shall go out

And grow fat like stall-fed calves.

Isn't the unity of Scripture such a beautiful testimony to its truth and divine origin?

Truly there is nothing else that could compare!

5] JOHN'S PREPARATION

Last week I called attention to the final part of verse 66, **and the hand of the Lord with him.**

In the womb and right after his birth, John was already fulfilling his role.

But we consider that most of John's life was spent in preparation for what was a very short ministry.

In verse 80 we read that John grew.

The same verb is used for Jesus in Luke 2:40.

John also became strong in spirit.

This same description is also used for Jesus in Luke 2:40.

This is a description of physical and spiritual strengthening.

John did not live a life of splendor in Jerusalem or another city. Rather he lived in the deserts of Judea until the time he was manifested to Israel.

This is not to say that the desert is holy. This is not justification for living a monastic life.

Rather, John lived in the deserts or the wilderness because he was a **second Elijah**. This is where the Lord called him to be in his time of preparation.

What was John doing while in the wilderness?

We can say he was focused entirely on the incredible calling of preparing the way for the Lord Jesus Christ.

His time of preparation in this case was much longer than his actual time **in service**.

But we know that what matters most is faithfulness, obedience to God's calling.

It is not how long you serve that is as important as doing what God calls you to do.

Though God may give you many years of life, your most significant work might be very short.

CONCLUSION

In the midst of the very dark days in which we live, we seek the advancement of the glorious message of salvation and the spread of Christ's kingdom!

1] Importance of praise

2] Importance of knowing all of Scripture and its fulfillment in Christ

3] Same message of salvation and promise of hope

Prayer

Hymn 226

BENEDICTION - HEBREWS 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.