
“A Song of Salvation”

Luke 1:57-80

Pastor Timothy Song

December 13, 2020

(Luke 1:57-80)

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

⁶¹ They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ 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,

⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Core Idea: God’s great salvation through Christ deserves great worship.

Good afternoon church. We are continuing in Luke's account of the Advent narrative. Every year, we celebrate this season with anticipation. When you think of Christmas, what excites you the most? What do you anticipate the most? Is it opening gifts on Christmas Day? Are you excited about taking some time to rest from school or work? Perhaps you can't wait to celebrate with family and friends with great food and fellowship. All of these are good reasons to celebrate and look forward to. But the true meaning of Christmas is so much more than that. It's about how the coming of Jesus Christ is the coming of salvation. And we are reminded of this in today's text. So please open your bibles to Luke 1:57-80. And follow along as I read.

[Read the Passage. Luke 1:57-80]

This is the word of God. Well, here we are about nine months after an angel appeared to Zechariah in the temple. We remember that he became mute until the birth of his son because he did not believe what the Lord had spoken. But it has come true.

What do you think Zechariah was thinking and feeling? Just try to imagine what those nine months during the pregnancy was like for him. It was a time of silence, repentance, and reflection. As he watched his wife's belly getting bigger and bigger, he constantly replayed in his mind what the angel said to him in the temple. But especially the last thing that was spoken: "And he will go on before the Lord...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (v.17). What did God mean by this? This was bigger than the birth of his child. God was up to something. And Zechariah starts putting the pieces together when a relative, Mary, visits them during Elizabeth's pregnancy and tells them what God had spoken and promised to her. He realizes that the time has finally come for the Messiah. He realizes that the baby inside of Mary is the promised Redeemer who will come and bring salvation. And all Zechariah can do is keep it to himself with such anticipation.

We get to today's passage and the birth narrative really sets us up for what is at the heart of Zechariah's song. The baby is born and eight days later is circumcised. This is where the child is named John. And immediately after, Zechariah's mouth was opened, and his tongue set free and the first thing that comes out of his mouth is praise to God. He saw what God was doing but couldn't express it. It's like how during this pandemic, for those who came to worship in-person, we were restricted from singing. It's just not the same! It's all pent up inside ready to explode and that's what happened with Zechariah. At this, everyone who witnessed this began to share with others about what had happened. Something was stirring and drawing attention to all who heard. People began getting excited because they sensed God was at work. But what was He going to do?

These are exciting times. When Zechariah came out of the temple, people realized that God had spoken. That's huge because before that for 400 years, God was silent. Since the completion of the last book in the Old Testament (Malachi), God hadn't spoken to them audibly, through a prophet, or through an angel. The Israelites were left waiting. They were left feeling forgotten and forsaken. Then suddenly, God speaks to this priest, Zechariah, about how He will fulfill His promise to save His people. Imagine waiting 400 years for God. Many generations lived and died without hearing from Him. Zechariah was a priest, who until the angel appeared, never heard God speak, but, the time had finally come!

As Zechariah sings his song, Scripture says he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied (v.67). This signalled God speaking to His people once again and the message is about His plan to redeem His people. Zechariah's song is a song of salvation. He praises God for His plan of redemption. Yes, he's thankful for the birth of his son. But he views John's birth from the perspective of God's work of salvation. Read with me verses 76-77:

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...

Zechariah now prophesies about John. You can picture him holding the eight-day old baby in his arms, looking down at him saying, "And You, my child..." John will be great. He will be called a prophet of God. The child that Mary will give birth to is called the Son of the Most High. John will be a prophet of the Most High. He will be unique among the prophets because he will be the forerunner. He will soften the ground. He will till the soil of Israel's heart. He will not be the Saviour, but John will make things ready for the Saviour by teaching people how they are to be saved. John will be a giant index finger pointing the way to God's salvation from sin.

We've heard the word "salvation" spoken many times. Probably almost every sermon you've heard has mentioned salvation. For many Christians, it has become an overused word. To the point that maybe we've grown numb to what it means to be saved. I think we're all guilty of this. However, we need to be refreshed with how great salvation is. Zechariah's song helps us to see how rich and comprehensive our salvation is.

Embedded in Zechariah's song, there are four reasons why God's salvation is great.

FIRST, GOD'S SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE HE FULFILLS HIS PROMISES (VV.68-73).

Zechariah is praising God for faithfully keeping His covenant, or promises, to David and Abraham. After so many centuries have passed, God has again visited His people and revealed Himself to them in saving acts. His plan is for redemption; to rescue His people. And Zechariah, filled with the Spirit, prophesies about the two covenants. To David, this is what God promised:

"I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that the LORD Himself will establish a house for you" (**2 Samuel 7:8-11**)

The Israelites clung onto the hope and anticipation of this promise. They waited for God to fulfill His promise of deliverance; to deliver them against political powers oppressing them. Look with me in verse 69: "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David".

The “horn” of salvation symbolized a strong king who would come in power and drive out their enemies. Like the horns of a bull used to defend and attack, the “horn of salvation” will be raised in the house of David to deliver God’s people. The horn of salvation is the promised Messiah-Redeemer. Zechariah does not refer to the birth of his son, John, here because he knew that the child in Mary’s womb was the promised Messiah to come. Ok, that was the promise to David. Now, this was the promise God made with Abraham:

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (**Genesis 12:2-3**)

God’s promise of salvation goes all the way back to Abraham in Genesis! This is a promise of blessing. God will bless Abraham and his descendants (the Israelites). It’s a promise that all nations will be blessed through faith in God. The covenant God made with Abraham is a covenant of mercy; it reveals that God is gracious and compassionate to undeserving people. The stream of mercy that began with God’s blessing to Abraham flows down through generation after generation to provide forgiveness, redemption, and eternal blessing to all who have faith in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy, God kept His word that was spoken through the prophets and remembered the covenant and oath He swore.

The entire Bible is about this one thing: salvation. The Bible has one story: God visiting or coming to save His people. This was and is the plan. And God accomplished His plan through the coming of Jesus Christ. This is what Zechariah was celebrating. And this is the first reason why God’s salvation is great. Here’s the second reason:

SECOND, GOD’S SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE HE RESCUES US FROM OUR ENEMIES (V.71,74).

Salvation from enemies is mentioned twice in the song: “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies” (vv.71,74). Both incidences are linked to the covenants God made with David and Abraham. As God promised the “horn of salvation”, the strong king who will rule God’s people, the one to come would fight for them against the nations who constantly pursued them. From the time they were slaves in Egypt to when they lived in the promised land, God promised deliverance from Israel’s enemies. Even during the exile, the people of God were waiting for the coming Messiah to save them from the bondage of those who hated them.

Brothers and sisters, we are saved from our enemies, but, who are our enemies? The Bible says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

I thought of three enemies we face. First, we know that Satan is our enemy; the “spiritual forces of evil”. Satan opposes God and tempts His people. He is crafty and intends to “steal, kill, and destroy” us (John 10:10). He never sleeps and is constantly trying to get us to fall into temptation. His sole purpose is for us to disobey God and turn away from the salvation God has given us. But praise God because the devil cannot rob us of His salvation. The Lord protects us from the devil. He fights for us! Cling on to the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 which says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.

God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

Satan is our enemy. But the world is our enemy as well. The world tends to lead us into sin. When you receive God’s salvation, you are a new creation with new values and are satisfied in Christ. Therefore, whatever the world offers, it does not compare. It’s like being offered a hamburger after eating a nice, juicy T-bone steak. You would say, “No thank you” because you’re already satisfied. But every day we struggle to desire things of this world. What are the things you cherish in this world? God commands us, “Do not love the world or anything in the world...The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15,17). As Christians, are we walking hand in hand with the world or satisfied in God’s work of salvation in us?

One more enemy we have: the flesh. The flesh is that evil tendency in our inward self. Even after we are converted, sometimes the old, sinful cravings will return. We are at war! We now have two natures in conflict, and each one is striving for dominance. Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” But we confess that there are moments we do whatever we want and fall into sin. We must be reminded that through Jesus’ death on the cross, He took our sins and so, we are no longer bound by our old, sinful nature. Praise God for His accomplished work of salvation.

Brothers and sisters, have you thought of salvation in this way? God’s salvation is great because He rescues us from our enemies: Satan, the world, and the flesh.

THIRD, GOD’S SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE IN HIS TENDER MERCY, OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN (VV.77-78).

Mercy is the primary motivation behind God’s activity to redeem, rescue, and save His people. God’s tender mercy is active; it’s not just what He has done in the past. It is also about what God is doing and will do. For Zechariah, as He remembers God’s promises, He rejoices in seeing God’s mercy through speaking once again to His people. He sees God’s mercy in the birth of his son, John, in which the very name means “the Lord is merciful”. He sees God’s mercy in the coming of the Messiah, who will bring salvation to God’s people.

God’s salvation is intimate and personal. It involves the forgiveness of our sins (v.77). Why must sin be forgiven? Why is sin a problem? Because it is an offense against God, who is holy. God in His holiness and anger will punish the sinner forever unless they are forgiven. When we talk about being “saved”, we should ask, “Saved from what?” The Bible teaches us that we are “saved from God”. We need to be rescued from God’s coming judgment against the world. Unless we are rescued, we will suffer punishment in hell forever.

Praise God that we have these truths to believe and cling on to: A psalmist wrote, “You forgave the iniquity of Your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all Your wrath and turned from Your fierce anger” (Psalm 85:2-3). I love the four verbs in those two verses that address forgiveness of sins: God forgave our iniquity, God covered all our sins, God set aside all His wrath, and God turned from His fierce anger. That defines forgiveness right there.

Psalm 130:7-8 roots salvation and forgiveness of sins in the Lord's unfailing love just as Zechariah's song revolves around God's tender mercy: "Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins".

Going back to Luke 1:78, it is "because of the tender mercy of God" we are saved and forgiven of our sins. That's the only reason anyone is ever forgiven of sin: mercy. You cannot earn forgiveness. You cannot demand forgiveness. You cannot swap forgiveness with a trade. There would be no peace in salvation if we had to earn, demand, or buy forgiveness. We would only worry if we had done enough, if we were strong enough, or if we had paid enough. Forgiveness comes only by mercy. Which means forgiveness is undeserved. The only step we can take to find forgiveness with God is to ask for it. Beg for mercy, and God will show it. Confess your sin, and He is faithful and just and will forgive you (1 John 1:9).

God's salvation is great because in His tender mercy, our sins are forgiven. Let's look at our final reason.

FOURTH, GOD'S SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE HE SHINES HIS LIGHT IN DARKNESS AND GUIDES US INTO THE PATH OF PEACE (VV.78-79).

God's salvation brings light. Look with me to verses 78-79 which declares, "...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace." Through the mercy of our God, the rising sun comes which refers to the coming of the Messiah who is light. This light is Christ Himself. He is the sunrise. In our sin we sit in darkness like prisoners locked in a dungeon.

Imagine you're out in the wilderness without any flashlights and all of a sudden it becomes dark before you've reached your destination. You can't see anything in front of you; it's pitch-black. You're terrified, powerless, overwhelmed with defeat anticipating being killed by a wild animal at any moment. But then, out of nowhere, a bright light appears to show you the way so that you reach your destination safely where you can enjoy rest and peace. This is what Christ did, and continues to do, for us. The state of the world before the coming of Christ was darkness, powerless, a life filled with panic and anxiety, deadly threats by our enemies, and death. But through the coming of Christ, a bright light appears. The darkness flees. Death is defeated. And anyone who is in the Light are able to clearly see the path leading to peace. The "path of peace" is the way of forgiveness of sins; of being reconciled to God by the redeeming work of Jesus, the Messiah. This is amazing. Church, have you thought of salvation in this way? Christ shines the way to everlasting peace with God. And that's why His salvation is so great.

APPLICATION

Zechariah's song is a song of salvation. And we focused on looking at why God's salvation is so great. But how do we respond then? Well, for Zechariah, the coming of Christ who brings salvation led him to worship God. The first words that came out of his mouth when he can speak was "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come to His people and redeemed them" (v.68). A great salvation deserves great worship. He was filled with joy and praise.

Christ wasn't even born yet. But he believed that God began His work of salvation and knew it was a done deal. He knew that the baby Mary was carrying was the promised Messiah and that salvation has come.

In the middle of his song, Zechariah mentions how God's salvation "enables us to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days" (v.74-75). This is our act of worship. It's not just confined to singing songs or gathering on Sundays (sadly online for now) to sing some praise songs and hear the word of God. No, we worship God by serving Him. our lives must reflect the gratitude and joy we have in God's great salvation. Just like back in Exodus how God said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me...", we are called to worship Him because He has saved us. And we serve and worship Him without fear. There is no fear because God is the One who keeps His promises. He is the One who rescues us from our enemies. He is the One who show us His tender mercy and forgives us of our sins and He is the One who shines His light so that we can see and walk on the path of peace. There is no fear in Christ.

Let me close with this. For the Christians in this room, we've been rescued from sin. Praise and worship God! And perhaps, we must be, like John, the forerunners to prepare the way for Christ. Consider the people in your life who don't know and believe in Jesus Christ yet. Be the messenger of this great salvation. Point others to Jesus the Messiah so that He would be made known. Serve Him without fear and in holiness (knowing we belong to God) and righteousness (that we live as God's people should). And I pray that your worship and service to God is a witness of Christ's redeeming work.

For the non-Christians, you can be rescued from sin...

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, the true meaning of Christmas is about how the coming of Jesus Christ is the coming of salvation. Should not Christmas bring the same praise and worship in our lives just as it did for Zechariah? Lift up our song of salvation.

Let's pray.