

ZECHARIAH'S SONG

Luke 1:57-80

Sermon for Peace Church

December 7, 2008

PURPOSE / MAIN IDEA – to invite people to sing the songs of the season with Zechariah – as people brought from death to life, serving Him without fear, praising our covenanting keeping God, declaring Jesus as the HORN & DAWN of salvation

I. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Let's open our Bibles to Luke 1.

1. ... Cause we're not only singing our songs of the season with Jean de BreBeuf & one another here, we're singing them with characters from Scripture.

- Last week - Mary's Song – she sang with the life of Christ in her, in fellowship & testimony with Elizabeth ... praising God for His salvation come to earth.

(i) This evening we sing with Zechariah – whose song too is recorded in Luke 1.

The song itself begins at verse 68.

But in order to sing this song with Zechariah, we need to go all the way back to verse 5 – to meet Zechariah and understand the background to this song.

2. *Read vv. 5-10*

This was a big event! There were approximately 20,000 priests in Israel at this time – descendants of Aaron. Since there were so many priests, they were divided into groups that served in the temple at Jerusalem only 2 weeks in the year – with various duties allotted to each priest.

So Zechariah's group (the division of Abijah) are in Jerusalem. And for an ordinary priest like Zechariah, the greatest privilege they could have would be to be chosen by lot to burn incense on the Altar in the Holy Place of the Temple. (This is not the Holy of Holies which was enter only once per year – on the Day of Atonement – by the High Priest.) The Holy Place was the room outside that Holy Place. The altar of incense was located just outside the curtain dividing the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

So Zechariah is chosen for this great privilege. What the priests would do – (a group of them) - is ascend the steps leading into the Holy Place, from the courtyard outside (where sacrifices were made). They would then spread coals on the golden altar, arrange incense, then depart to leave Zechariah alone with God. Zechariah was there to offer his prayers of intercession for God’s people. He’d put the incense on the coals of the altar as a powerful, beautiful symbol of the prayers of Israel rising to God.

And while he was doing this, outside in the courtyard of the Temple, a great multitude of people waited laying face down on the floor in prayer, praying with the priest who was representing them in the Holy Place. They were waiting for that priest to come back and then bless them with the Aaronic blessing to close the time of intercession: *“The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”*

3. But here’s what happens: **Read vv. 11-18**

While Zechariah’s praying – NOT for a baby for he & Elizabeth – they were beyond those years to reasonably hope for a child (maybe in their 50’s – though someone else wrote 70’s), an angel shows up.

“Your prayers are heard” – Zechariah’s praying for the deliverance and salvation of God’s people - their restoration, their hopes of the kingdom of God on earth.

... and those prayers will be fulfilled through a child that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear.

- (i) The child would be a son – to be named John (whose name means, “The Lord is Merciful”) ... and he would fulfill the very last prophecy of the Old Covenant, uttered by Malachi (400 years before = a long time for God to be silent)
 - = in the spirit & power of Elijah, he’d prepare the way for the Messiah to come, turning the hearts of the fathers to their children & the disobedience to wisdom!
- A. ZECHARIAH CAN’T BELIEVE IT! = too much, too big, too incredible

4. So ... **Read vv. 19-22**

This is a funny scene to picture – (kind of like charades) - Zechariah trying to explain how he met an angel ... then giving the Aaronic blessing ...

5. **Read vv. 23-25**

... 9-10 MONTHS LATER ... Go to vv. 57

II. ZECHARIAH'S SONG

Read vv. 57-80

- v. 61 – They're having a NAMING CEREMONY!
- v. 63 – "John" = The Lord is merciful

1. From Zechariah's song, let's first note WHO WE SING ABOUT in our songs of the season. He gives us TWO IMAGES OF THE MESSIAH:
 - (i) Verse 69 – In him, God has raised up a HORN of salvation.

Our NIV notes that the "horn symbolizes strength"

 - A. There are a number of references in the OT to the horns of the wild ox:
 - a. Dt. 33:17 – *In majesty, he (Joseph) is like a firstborn bull; his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations, even those at the ends of the earth.*
 - B. "The horn of salvation" therefore means that, through this Messiah, God will defeat His enemies: Sin / Satan / & Death!
 - He will gore them
 - He will throw them aside – like those rodeo bull-riders sometimes get tossed by the horns of a bull. The horn is the INSTRUMENT that the strength of the bull uses to throw the cowboy out of the ring!

Jesus is the HORN of SALVATION!
 - (ii) The other image of the Messiah is down in verse 78.

There he's described as "THE RISING SUN" come to us from heaven ... to shine on those living in darkness & in the shadow of death (Isaiah 9) ... and to guide our feet in the path of peace (He is the Word who is a LIGHT unto our path – Ps. 119)

 - A. Other translations of this title:
 - "The DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH" – KJV
 - "The morning sun from heaven" ... the first light ... the DAWN from on high.

(This is WHO our songs of the season are about!)

One commentator writes: *What a beautiful and fitting title for the Messiah. It speaks of a new day and fresh start. Above all, it speaks of hope. Jesus is God's sunrise breaking in on those who sit in darkness, shining on those lingering in the shadow of death, and leading us, one step at a time into the ways of peace.*

2. Second, note WHAT his salvation brings.

Verse 74 – Not only deliverance from our enemies, but ALSO: *“It enables us to serve God without fear - in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”*

Through this Messiah, we are made righteous – and our hearts are CHANGED – we serve God, not out of DUTY, but out of joy & love.

- (i) One day a hospital visitor in India saw a nurse tending to the sores of a leprosy patient. He said, “I’d never do that for a million dollars!” The nurse answered, “Neither would I. But I do it for Jesus ... for nothing!”

A. The Heidelberg Catechism asks: *If we’ve been delivered from our misery by God’s grace alone through Christ & not because we’ve earned it, why do still do good?*

And answers: *We do good because Christ is renewing us to be like Himself and to show we are thankful to God for all he has done for us – so that he may be praised through us. (# 86)*

In our salvation ... through the Messiah ... we serve God without fear of condemnation – and in righteousness all our days.

Verse 77 – we have knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of our sins!

... SO SING! SING THESE songs of the season!!!

3. TO WHO?

- (i) To GOD – *Praise be TO THE LORD (v. 68), the God of Israel.*

Zechariah praises God because He answers prayer (going all the way back to that Holy Place)

He’s a God who is faithful to His covenant; his promises to Abraham (v. 72)

- (ii) Zechariah also sings his song TO HIS SON (v. 76)
= calling him forth to be a prophet of the Most High ... to prepare the way for the Lord.

A. Yes, John the Baptist had a unique role in this. He was the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy.

B. But we can ALL find a calling in this role:

Through our words & actions, preparing the way for people to meet the Lord.

Isaiah described John's ministry as MAKING STRAIGHT PATHS for the Lord (ch. 40) – raising up valleys, and making every mountain & hill low.

I think of that to mean: LIFT UP those who are lost in self-despair, guilt, shame – those who struggle with their self ...

... & KNOCK-DOWN those who are equally lost in SELF-EXALTATION.

= make a straight way for the Lord; go before Him!

ZECHARIAH'S SONG GIVES US THAT CALLING

III. CONCLUSION

So let's sing with him this season. HOW?

1. Verse 64 – Zechariah sings – as a person whose tongue was formerly mute.

These are his first words after 9-10 months of silence. Can you imagine not speaking for that length of time?! (Some Christian retreat centers offer silent WEEKENDS for spiritual health – this is 10 months!)

BUT THEN HIS TONGUE WAS FREED!

Christian, you too sing as someone whose tongue has been brought from death to life!

- (i) In Zechariah's doubt, he was judged by being made MUTE
- (ii) In God's mercy, his tongue was loosed to sing praise to God.
 - And name his son, JOHN – "The Lord is Merciful"

2. So sing with Zechariah about the "Dawn from on High"

"We've a Story to Tell to the Nations"

That'll turn their hearts to the right, a story of truth & mercy, a story of peace & light.

For the darkness has turned to dawning,

And that dawning will turn to noon-day bright.

For Christ's great kingdom has come to earth ... the Kingdom of Love & Light.

AMEN!