

A Father's Prophecy

Luke 1:67-79

INTRODUCTION

- A. Feodor Vassilyev, a Russian peasant who lived in the late 1700's, had a wife who is quite noteworthy.
 - 1. We don't know her name or the dates of her birth or death.
 - 2. However, in a total of 27 pregnancies, she gave birth to a total of 69 children, comprising 16 pairs of twins, seven sets of triplets, and four sets of quadruplets.
 - 3. Had reality TV been around in the late 1700's, that couple could have put John & Kate to shame!
- B. About 3 babies are born every second & roughly 95 million babies are born a year.
 - 1. There are couples, however, who desire to have one of those 95 million babies, but, for one reason or another, they cannot conceive.
 - 2. Zechariah & Elizabeth were one such couple.
 - a. While they were as righteous as could be, "they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years" (Lk 1:7).
 - b. Zechariah is a priest. He goes in to minister before the Lord & the angel Gabriel informs Zechariah that Elizabeth is going to bare him a son.
 - 1) Zechariah, however, knows far better than any angel sent from God. He knows that he & Elizabeth are too old to have a baby, and he says so: "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years" (Lk 1:18).
 - 2) Gabriel informs Zechariah that he will be silent & unable to speak until this things take place.
 - a) Apparently, Zechariah could neither hear nor speak.
 - b) The Greek term means to be both deaf & mute; the neighbors & relatives who came after John's birth had to make signs to Zechariah to know what the child would be named (Lk 1:62).
 - 3) Zechariah writes, "His name is John" on a tablet & he was able to speak immediately (Lk 1:63-64).
 - 4) The first thing Zechariah does when he can speak again is to praise God.
- C. In his praise to God, Zechariah speaks the words of this morning's text.
 - 1. READ TEXT.
 - 2. The passage we have just read is not simply Zechariah's joy at the birth of his son.
 - a. Rather, Luke records, "His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" (v 67).
 - b. The Holy Spirit plays a very prominent role in Luke's two-volume work to Theophilus.
 - 1) Of course, once you get to Acts, the Holy Spirit time & time again provides the appropriate words for the apostles.
 - 2) The point Luke makes here is that the Spirit is guiding Zechariah to offer exactly the right praise to God.
 - c. With the Spirit's guidance, Zechariah prophesied.
 - 1) In modern usage, "prophecy" refers to telling what's going to happen in the future. Biblically, however, "prophecy" has to do with speaking for God.
 - 2) Thus, what Zechariah declares here is the word of the Lord.
 - 3. This morning, we wish to examine this word of the Lord to see what we can learn about God.
 - 4. We see that God is: a PROTECTOR, a PROMISER, a PREPARER, & a PILOT.

GOD IS A PROTECTOR, vv 68-69

- A. "God is a Protector," for he saves his people. He protects them from sin & hell.
- B. Zechariah says, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."
- C. God has visited his people.
 - 1. The term "visit" in Greek means something vastly different than the term often means in English.
 - a. "Visit" in English typically means to stay with people or to stay at a place. We might say, for example, "We visited with family over the holidays."
 - b. But, the Greek term used here means something that "visit" only occasionally means in English—to

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- look after with a view of helping.
- 1) This Greek term means to go to someone in order to help that person.
 - 2) At the Jerusalem Conference, this is the term James uses to speak of God's bringing salvation to the Gentiles: "Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14).
2. Zechariah praises God that the Lord has come to help his people.
- a. In the Person of Jesus Christ, God has greatly helped his people.
 - b. It is Jesus who shows the way to the Father; it is Jesus who teaches us how to live; it is Jesus who has come to give salvation.
- D. In visiting his people, God has redeemed them.
1. The Greek is literally "made a ransom."
 2. A ransom is the price paid to release a prisoner or a slave.
 3. God stepped forward & offered his own Son to free us from the bondage of sin.
 - a. Jesus "entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12).
 - b. "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pt 1:18-19).
- E. In visiting & redeeming his people, God "has raised up a horn of salvation."
1. "Horn" represents great power.
 - a. An animal's strength is in its horns.
 - b. "I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Dan 7:7).
 2. The idea is that God has **great** power to save.
 - a. He can't just save from some little sin; God can save from every single sin we could possibly imagine.
 - 1) At Pentecost, Peter offered salvation to those who had crucified the Messiah.
 - 2) The Apostle Paul, a murderer & the "foremost" of sinners (1 Tm 1:15), had his sins removed in the blood of Jesus.
 - b. A preacher was doing prison ministry & spoke to a group of inmates about the text: "You are the light of the world."
 - 1) One of the men said, "Fellas, this morning I read in the Bible about three murderers. One's name was Moses, one's was David, and one's was Paul. We know them as heroes of God, but all three were also murderers. Look what God did with this trio of murderers! There is hope for you fellas—and for me."
 - 2) Is that not an absolutely fabulous message—that regardless of who I am or what I have done, God can save me & use me for his glory!
 - 3) Has God used his great power to save **you**? Is he able to use you for his glory?

GOD IS A PROMISER, vv 70-75

- A. "God is a Promiser" & he keeps his every promise.
- B. "As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."
1. Notice how often Zechariah points back to the sure promise of God in those verses: "As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets"; "the mercy promised to our fathers"; "to remember his holy covenant"; "the oath that he swore to our father Abraham."
 2. The point is that God had promised for ages to send a Savior. Now, he was sending John the Baptist in preparation of that Savior.
- C. In our society, we are accustomed—whether rightly or wrongly—to believe so few promises.
1. Thomas Fuller once exclaimed, "A man apt to promise is apt to forget."
 2. We don't expect politicians to keep their promises.
 - a. You can go to PolitiFact.com to keep track of politician's promises.
 - 1) They have compiled 515 promises that President Obama made during the campaign & they keep track of how well he's keeping them.
 - 2) But, don't think that they're being partisan—you can find how accurate statements from Republicans, Libertarians, commentators, bloggers, & others are.

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- b. No one on that list has a perfect rating.
- D. But, Zechariah here offers a "Fact Check" for God & God comes out perfectly—one who has kept every single promise.
 - 1. Through the prophets, God had promised that his Messiah would come from the house of David.
 - a. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness'" (Jer 23:5-6).
 - b. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this" (Is 9:6-7).
 - 2. God had promised Abraham that the Messiah would come through his seed.
 - a. "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Gen 12:1-3).
 - b. After Abraham attempted to offer Isaac, "the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, 'By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice'" (Gen 22:15-18).
 - 3. Zechariah now sees that every promise God has made concerning the Messiah is coming to past & he praises the God who "*is a Promiser.*"
- E. What if we had a God other than a "*God who is a Promiser*"?
 - 1. God has promised that he'll help me when I'm tempted, but will he do so? He's promised to forgive me when I succumb to temptation, but was God really telling the truth?
 - 2. God has promised to walk with me in the struggles of life, but was God telling the truth? God's promised me a home with him after this life, but was he honest in saying so?
- F. How great it is to know that our God "*is a Promiser*" & that he'll keep every single promise he has ever made!

GOD IS A PREPARER, vv 76-77

- A. "*God is a Preparer,*" for he sends one to prepare the way for Jesus.
- B. "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins."
- C. John's role in God's redemptive plan was to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.
 - 1. That is how the prophets spoke of John.
 - a. "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; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts" (Mal 3:1).
 - b. "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (Is 40:3).
 - c. In Mk 1:2-3, both those texts are applied to John the Baptizer.
 - 2. John's preparatory role was to "give knowledge of salvation . . . in the forgiveness of . . . sins."
 - a. John's message, in essence, was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2).
 - b. John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4).
 - c. The purpose of John's baptism & work was to prepare the Jewish nation for the coming Messiah.
- D. So what? What does God's being "*a Preparer*" have to do with me & my life?
 - 1. The salvation God so freely offers was planned by God.
 - a. God's sending his Son into the world wasn't some sort of effort at the last minute to redeem mankind, but God always intended to send Jesus into the world for you.
 - b. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4:4).
 - c. Jesus "was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you" (1 Pt 1:20).
 - 2. People die by accident all the time.
 - a. In January 1980, a seven-year-old boy was crushed to death by a giant snowball as he was playing

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near his home on the outskirts of London, England.

- 1) Anthony Bowers died when the snowball, five feet in diameter & weighing several hundred pounds, buried him alive.
- 2) Police say that he had been building a snowman on a hillside with two friends, when the huge ball began rolling away. Anthony chased after it, slipped, and was crushed by the giant ball.
- b. A freak accident that undoubtedly haunts his parents to this very day.
3. The death of Jesus was no accident!
 - a. God gave him for you!
 - b. The Father sent John the Baptizer before Jesus to make things ready so that he could give Jesus for you.

GOD IS A PILOT, vv 78-79

- A. "God is a Pilot," for he guides his people in the way of peace.
- B. "Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."
- C. These verses are rich in poetry.
 1. They picture travelers on their way who are overtaken by the night.
 - a. They sit in darkness & shadows, for they do not know which way to go.
 - b. Light comes in the morning & they are able to find their way home.
 2. Jesus is indeed light to guide our way.
 - a. Matthew informs us that Jesus lived in Nazareth in order that these words of Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Mt 4:16).
 - b. "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (Jn 8:12).
 - c. It is he who has shattered the darkness of sin & given us a way to God.
- D. The light, according to Zechariah, has two purposes:
 1. It enlightens those "who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."
 - a. In other words, this light gives us hope: this sinful, dying world is not all there is.
 - b. We don't need to live in the heartache of sin any longer; we don't need to fear death any longer. Jesus has vanquished the foe & brought us light.
 2. The light also serves to "guide our feet into the way of peace."
 - a. The coming of the Messiah was often depicted as a time of peace.
 - 1) "His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6).
 - 2) "He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Mic 4:3).
 - b. The basic meaning of "peace" is well-being. That well-being expresses itself two way in Christ:
 - 1) Jesus has brought peace between us & God—No longer does man need to be alienated from God, but man can have a close relationship with the Divine.
 - 2) Jesus further gives to us a peace "which surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7), a calm assurance that he walks with us & will stay with us as we journey in this life.
 - c. Do you know that peace this morning? Do you need to come to Jesus & gain the peace that he so freely offers?