

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 15th December 2024 am

TITLE: "Worship without fear" TEXT: Luke 1 verses 57-80

SERIES: "Christmas 2024 Scripture references from the ESV

Luke 1:57-80: ⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbours 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, enquiring 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 neighbours. 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. 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

If you had lost the power of speech for nine months, what do you think would be the first words out of your mouth? The Bible tells us that **'out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks (Luke 6:45)**. After nine months of silence, out of our mouth would come all that we had been storing up in our heart over that time. What would that be?

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were both old with no possibility of ever having a child. An angel from God appeared to him when he was serving in the temple on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The angel told him that his wife would

bear a son and he was to call him John. Zechariah's response was unbelief. He could not believe the promise of God that the angel had delivered, and was struck dumb until the day he would see this promise fulfilled. Nine months later, Elizabeth gave birth to the 'impossible' child. When the time came to name him, the people wanted to call him Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth said he was to be called John, as the angel had told them. Zechariah was consulted and wrote the name John.

Immediately, he was able to speak again (v64) and the first words out of his mouth were words of praise to God:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.

During the nine months of silence, Zechariah had been able to contemplate both the character and the work of God.

- That contemplation of God in his heart, along with the work of the Holy Spirit, led Zechariah to praise God as soon as his tongue was set loose.

Here is an example for us to follow so that we too might have a heart that is so full of wonder and awe because of who God is, that our mouths delight to praise him. The overflow of the Spirit of God within us will result in praise to the God we delight in.

It is possible for us to sing Christian songs and hymns, but to delight more in the act of singing than in the God we are singing about. We can love the hymn but fail to love the God of the hymn.

How do we avoid making any act of service the greater delight? How do we ensure that the praise of our lips is the overflow of a heart that delights in God?

Zechariah's song (The Benedictus) helps to answer that, revealing God's ultimate purpose in salvation.

The ultimate purpose of God in salvation is to put his glory on display for his people to see and delight in.

We often narrow salvation down just to salvation from sin, but this song praises God for salvation from both physical and spiritual enemies (vv68-71). The horn speaks about God's strength, but who is this horn?

The horn of God's salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the strength of God to rescue his people from their physical enemies (v71).

Zechariah had different enemies to us, but, in every age, there are people who hate God's people because they hate God and are controlled by Satan. When Jesus returns, he will rid the world of all who hate him and his people. The world will be recreated to be a place where we can live without hostility.

However, Zechariah does not just speak about the enemy without. He also speaks about our sin (v77), the enemy within. The salvation that Jesus brings is spiritual salvation from our sin, so that we are granted forgiveness and are set free to love and obey God.

- This salvation from sin comes first and it is the salvation we experience now
- This is the salvation that opens up the ultimate salvation from Satan, death and our physical enemies.

The salvation that Jesus secures by his strength and purchases through his blood is a complete salvation from all our enemies.

This complete salvation of God reveals the character of God.

As the Holy Spirit causes the truth of God to come alive in our hearts so we are set free to worship God from our hearts.

What does God's salvation reveal about the character of God? Here are just three of the many aspects.

1. **Salvation reveals God's mercy (v71).** The salvation that God secures for us through Christ is a glorious display of God's mercy. Mercy is always undeserved. God's deliverance for his people is not something that is deserved. Israel could not expect it through their own righteousness. Their frequent rebellions against God meant they regularly needed to be delivered from physical enemies. During times of great prosperity, Israel forgot God, disobeyed his commands and copied the world they lived in.

Because God is jealous for his people, he is not willing that they should love and worship created things instead of him. He brought calamity on them, in the form of enemies who would attack them and leave them poor and hungry. He would take away the things they were loving in place of God. In their distress, they would cry out to God,

and his response was always to raise up a Judge who would deliver them from their enemies.

- Did they deserve to be saved? No! It was an act of God's mercy alone because God is a merciful God.

It is still the same today. The world is a broken, scary place where we suffer because of our sin. We live in a world that is under a curse because humanity as a whole has chosen to rebel against God.

God is under no obligation to deliver us from any of the suffering we experience, were it not for the obligation he has put himself under by his own free gracious commitment to his people.

Every act of deliverance we experience is always an act of God's mercy alone

If your life is currently a mess because of your own foolishness and sin, then you can still cry out to God and seek his mercy. You do not need to try and clear it up yourself before you come to him.

- Go with the mess of your life and simply say 'God, be merciful to me a sinner'. Then experience his deliverance.

As those who have received mercy, we are able to show more mercy to others, as we seek to serve, rescue and forgive other undeserving people.

2. Salvation reveals God's faithfulness (v68). Zechariah praises God because he has not abandoned his people. For centuries, the Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah who God had promised in the scriptures. They had waited, and waited, with the expectation that God would keep his promise. The message delivered to Zechariah by the angel was the first time God had spoken for 400 years. Then 6 months later, Mary visited Elizabeth and announced that she, too had heard from God through an angel. Even though she was still a virgin, she was pregnant with God's child through a miracle of God. These humble people must have been excited as they began to realise that

God's promised Messiah was about to arrive.

God had not abandoned his people but was coming to visit them in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the long wait, God had not forgotten his promise to his people (vv69-70).

He is a faithful God who is faithful to his promises

Zechariah sees that God coming with his salvation is a fulfilment of the message God had spoken to the prophets of old (vv72-3). He had promised to remember his covenant to his people and show them mercy. The salvation God brought through Jesus Christ 2000 years ago shows his faithfulness to keep that promise.

- We can trust God to keep all his promises because he is faithful
- He is faithful not just to his promises, but also to his people.

When God commits himself to his people, he commits himself to them forever.

Whatever we are going through, Jesus has promised that, if we belong to him, he **will never leave us or forsake us** (Hebrews 13:5). We can be sure that he will never abandon us, no matter what we are going through even when it is a result of our own foolishness and sin.

God does what he promises to do.

3. **Salvation reveals God's purpose (vv74-75).** Of course, God means to rescue us from Hell, but that is not his ultimate purpose. The reason for our deliverance is so that we will serve God. The word serve is often translated as worship, that is to pay homage to a deity.

**This homage to God is worship without fear,
in holiness and righteousness for the rest of our days.**

Fear stops us from doing particular things:

- Fear of human enemies who ridicule us for following Christ will stop us from serving God. If we are afraid, we will not worship him by speaking about our faith or standing up for the truth in his word.

God comes and sets us free.

We see how weak these human enemies are in comparison to the God who created them.

We are set free from fear to speak about our faith and to speak up for the truth.

- When we feel overwhelmed by the enemy of our sin, we can be afraid to come to God knowing that he is holy. We feel we have no right to sing the praises of this holy God with lips that have sinned against him.

Christ has set us free from this enemy.

In his death, all our sin has been atoned for and we are clothed in his righteousness

We are set free from fear to come before the holy God and sing his praises.

We are set free to live like this all the rest of our days on this earth and on into eternity.

Zechariah's song teaches us: **God's ultimate purpose in salvation is to put his glory on display for his people to see and delight in.**

What is our response to God's mercy, faithfulness and purpose? It surely must be to trust him and praise him.

Throughout Zechariah's long months of isolation, he undoubtedly

- pondered the promise of God to give him a son
- pondered the promise of God to send Messiah
- pondered the commitment of God to his people to come and deliver them

As he pondered, faith began to rise in his heart. When the time came, now believing God could do the impossible, he made his statement of faith by writing what the angel had spoken. In that moment of faith, his tongue was loosed,

he experienced the Holy Spirit and burst out in praise to God

What is true for him can be true for us too. As we ponder the work of God, so we will have eyes of faith to see his glory:

His mercy, grace, love, goodness, justice, faithfulness and uniqueness as one God in three persons.

As faith is exercised, we will experience the Holy Spirit leading us in heartfelt praise of God.

We can all cultivate a heart that is in awe of God. Though we have not lost the power of speech for nine months, in our noisy world, we need to make time to be silent and ponder his greatness as it is revealed in our own salvation and throughout history. In our western world, we have loved the world more than we love Jesus and we need to repent of that. We need to make time to ponder God.

- Take one aspect of God's character as revealed in salvation, turn it over in your mind, and think about the ways that God has shown you mercy
- Consider how often you have needed his mercy, regularly falling into the same sin over and over again.

- Ask the Spirit of God to help you understand that aspect of his character so that you are able to grow in that truth of who God is.
- Ask him to make your heart alive not just to that truth but to the God of that truth.
- As your heart begins to rejoice, express that joy in praise, prayer and telling others about Jesus.

Salvation reveals God's mercy and God's faithfulness

Salvation reveals God's ultimate purpose:

To put his glory on display for his people to see and delight in.

God has set us free to worship without fear.