

Redemption At Last**Luke 1:57-80**

Most people love babies. It doesn't matter that they come out looking all wrinkled and slimy or that they spit up or sleep a lot. I love that we have things like cell phones that can take pictures so that it can instantly be sent to people in our contact list. It only takes a few clicks to insert a picture of Junior on facebook. We love babies. We love pictures of babies. We love having our picture taken with babies. We love that some have loads of hair when they are born. We love that some are bald as a billiard ball. We love their chubby little cheeks or the little dimple in their chin. We love the soft skin and the smell of baby powder.

Watch two mothers pushing strollers towards each other in the mall and you will find that they invariably will make eye contact and smile broadly. They glance in each other's buggy, make a little aww sound as they pass and secretly think to themselves, he's cute or she's cute but my son/daughter will grow up to be a brain surgeon or rocket scientist or a billionaire athlete.

We love babies, especially when they're not crying. Bring a baby into a room of complete strangers and instantly a crowd will gather. Bring a baby to church and people line up to get a chance to hold him or her. It's a fact of life.

Please turn to our text found in **Luke 1:57-80**.

There is a public witness

There is a prophetic word

There is a private working

I. THERE IS A PUBLIC WITNESS – v. 57-66

Our story is about a baby, a special baby. For years this couple tried having a baby but to no avail. If this story took place in our day their doctor may have told them to go see an infertility specialist.

The visit wasn't promising. They would have been told that it was physically impossible to conceive. That was the story of my brother and his wife. They were told they couldn't have children. What do doctors know? They have four beautiful children with 6 grandchildren and one on the way.

Zachariah and Elizabeth were unable to have any children - that is until the Lord performed a miracle and in their old age she conceived because nothing is impossible with God. Let me remind you here that the same holds true today. God is still in the business of performing miracles today.

Though the conception was miraculous, the birth came in the normal order of things. After about nine months, the time came for Elizabeth to give birth and just as the angel said, a son was born to them. At the time of his birth crowds gathered and when they gathered in witness to this special occasion they praised God.

A. They Praised God – v. 57-58

Our text says that when the baby was born, neighbors and relatives came to see. It was a great day of celebration. This was no ordinary birth. Everything surrounding this child was miraculous. The announcement of the angel was miraculous. God had been silent for 400 years. The silencing of Zachariah was miraculous. Because of his unbelief he was stricken with the inability to speak.

The conception was miraculous. They were well past the age of having a child.

The events surrounding the birth of this baby were nothing short of miraculous and people came out of the woodwork to share in the joy of this happy couple. They realized as our text says **“that the Lord had shown her great mercy.”** They recognized that the hand of the Lord was on them.

Is that our response when we see God do special things for someone? Do we gather around them and rejoice in God's mercy toward them?

In the original language the intent conveyed here is that there was continuous joy at God's blessings. Many gathered around this couple to share in the joy of God's mighty work on their behalf. But there was more than just mere excitement around a birth. God was going to show His mercy not only to a couple, He was also showing mercy to the world. That truly is cause for us to rejoice.

They praised God.

They were also perplexed.

B. They were perplexed – v. 59- 64

In fulfillment of the Old Testament law, Zachariah and Elizabeth being the righteous and blameless couple they were as we saw in **verse 6**, took there little bundle of joy to get him circumcised. This wasn't just a custom that separated them from the other nations identifying them as the called of God. It was part of the covenant that God made with Abraham. You can read about this in Genesis 17.

Here's what Unger's Bible Dictionary has to say about this ritual. "Circumcision was formally enacted as a legal institute by Moses (Lev. 12:3; John 7:22-23)...During the wilderness journey circumcision fell into disuse. This neglect is most satisfactorily explained as follows: The nation, while bearing the punishment of disobedience in its wanderings, was regarded as under temporary rejection by God, and was therefore prohibited from using the sign of the covenant.

As the Lord had only promised His assistance on condition that the law given by Moses was faithfully observed, it became the duty of Joshua, upon entering Canaan, to perform the rite of circumcision upon the generation that had been born in the wilderness.

From this time circumcision became the pride of Israel, they looking with contempt upon all those people not observing it (Judges 14:3; 15:18; I Samuel 14:6; Isaiah 52:1). Circumcision was used as a symbol of purity of heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ezek. 44:7)."

As part of the covenant made with Abraham, circumcision was the sign that the covenant would be kept by his descendants. This was a physical reminder of the spiritual act that we need to exercise when it comes to our own heart, where, as Christians, we put off as it were, the old nature.

Zachariah and Elizabeth "**observing all the Lord's commands and regulations**" (v. 6) took him to be circumcised. This was done typically by the father or by another trusted male. Something that grew as a custom but not stipulated in the law was to have witnesses attest that it took place. Remember that according to the law only 2 or 3 witnesses were required to substantiate a matter. When it came to circumcision the custom became to have at least 10 witnesses.

An undisclosed number of people came on the eighth day to witness the rite of circumcision. Also customary on that day was to give the child a name. In our day we name a child before he or she leaves the hospital so an official birth certificate can be given. Most parents like to name their children. Sometimes family or friends like to offer suggestions. Maybe it's a family name or some name that has special meaning to both Mom and Dad. We pour over name books and work through various combinations of names to see what flows.

As I understand it when I was born, if it was a boy, Dad wanted his first son to be named after him – Howard Everett. Mom on the other hand, didn't want to call out the back for a 5 year old Howard Everett to come to dinner (no offense to the name Everett). She liked the name Paul. So that's what it became. The first and middle names of my siblings come from family or friends.

In our text we find that the witnesses wanted to name the child. "**Name him after his father.**" There is little evidence in history to suggest that this was the custom. Maybe they thought Zachariah rolled off the tongue nicely.

In the original Greek, you need to understand that Elizabeth's response is emphatic. The word "no" carries the idea of "indeed not" or it's just not going to happen. She then says that his name is going to be John. At this point they are perplexed and make the statement that it doesn't make any sense to give him a name that no one else in the family had. So they went over Elizabeth's head and asked Zachariah.

What do you say Zach? What's his name going to be? implying that they wanted him to side with them. He got out his spiral notebook and wrote that his name was in fact going to be John. It's not because he was appeasing his wife in the matter, it's because the angel had told him what to name him.

v. 13 "Do not be afraid, Zachariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John."

Naming children in those days and in that culture had special significance. It spoke of something about their character, who they were. The name John would have special implications to those who heard it. *It means God has been gracious.* Though he would be the one to give witness to the coming Messiah who would take away the sins of the world, his name alone was a testimony of God's grace.

As soon as Zachariah penned the name, his tongue was miraculously loosed and he was able to speak, immediately praising God. For nine months he couldn't speak. Wives, I don't know if that is a good thing or a bad thing. Maybe he wondered if he would ever speak again, but when he got the chance the first thing to come out of his mouth was praise to God.

There is a story about a monk who joined an order where they could not speak for an entire year. At the end of the year they could say one sentence. When it was his turn to speak he said "the food is awful." After the second year he said, "the bed is hard". After the third year he said "I resign". The head monk looked at him and said "well no wonder

you want to leave, you've done nothing but complain ever since you got here."

The first words Zachariah chose to utter were words of praise to the only One worthy of praise.

Let me just say that what comes out of our mouth is a reflection of what is in our heart. Zachariah had obviously spent some serious time in quietness pondering the power and majesty of God.

How about you and me?

They praised. They were perplexed.
They pondered.

C. They Pondered – v. 65-66

Did you ever have anyone ask you what you wanted to be when you grew up? Maybe you wanted to be an astronaut or a fireman or a policeman. Maybe you wanted to be a fashion designer or doctor or nurse.

Robyn knew she wanted to be a nurse. Ask David and he will tell you he wants to be a scientist and study bugs or animals. So far he has a praying mantis, a cicada, bumble bee, grass hopper and some big locust thing he picked up in Florida.

How about you?

By everything that was happening, the people gathered at John's circumcision party knew that he was going to be something special, but what they did not know. Notice **verses 65-66 "The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, 'What then is this child going to be?' For the Lord's hand was with him."**

The child is eight days old and they could already tell that the Lord's hand was with him. I'd like that to be said of me. "Wow, God sure has His hand on

Howard, I wonder what he's going to do with his life?"

Maybe your parents had big plans for you, to aspire to some profession? They planned the stuff you would do to get you there, paid for lessons and special tutoring and then you decided to do something else. Remember Hermey from the Christmas classic *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*? He didn't want to be an elf even though that's what he was groomed to be. He wanted to be a dentist.

How many of you know that Zachariah and Elizabeth already knew what John would become when he grew up? Look back at vs. 14-17.

That's quite a resume.

He will be a joy and delight to his parents.

Many will rejoice at his birth.

Both of those came true when he was born.

The rest would come in time.

He will be great in the sight of the Lord.

He will be a Nazarite.

He will precede the Lord.

He will be like Elijah.

He will help restore family relationships.

He will prepare people to meet the Lord.

The crowd may have pondered what John would become, but his parents already knew. There was a public witness that praised God, they were perplexed by his name, and they pondered what he would become.

Let me conclude this thought with a point I hope is obvious but needs to be said anyway. If you belong to the Lord, He has His hand on you to do some task. **Do you know what it is and are you doing it?**

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship..."

For a number of years I knew I was not where God wanted me to be. I knew God wanted me in ministry, but I wanted to do my own thing. One

day I was in a casual conversation with the assistant Human Resources director who was a brother in Christ. He knew I wasn't where I needed to be and he said "Howard, you need to get right with God, finish your schooling and get back in ministry."

You may be doing what God has called you to do driving truck, pounding nails, nursing, writing computer programs, retired. Then again, God may want you doing something else. Don't hesitate to do it because the Lord has His hand on you.

Next we see there was a prophetic word.

II. THERE WAS A PROPHETIC WORD – v. 67-79

This is a song by Zachariah speaking about three covenants using quotes and allusions from the Old Testament. We aren't going to go into a lot of detail here, just give some highlights.

There is the Davidic Covenant.

There is the Abrahamic Covenant.

There is the New Covenant.

A. The Davidic Covenant – v. 67-71

Notice importantly that when he begins to speak, he is filled with the Holy Spirit. We said last week that before the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit would fill a person for a specific task. I believe here the task of Zachariah is to validate the special nature of John who would fulfill prophecy in his own right. I also believe that the words of Zachariah at the prompting of the indwelling Holy Spirit, verify that the Lord is coming to bring salvation. Salvation would come through the line of David.

Being a priest, Zachariah would know what the Old Testament had to say concerning the covenant made with David.

I Samuel 7:4-16 (12-14)

David wanted to build a house for God. God wanted to build a house for David. The Davidic Covenant was more than just a promise that his son would sit on the throne. This house, his seed, would have a king to sit on the throne forever. It was the promise of an heir who would rule for eternity. This expanded the Abrahamic covenant by identifying that the king to reign would come from his family line – the line of Judah, David’s family. It had both present and future implications.

Jeremiah 23:5 “Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land.’”

Because Mary had spent three months in their home, Zachariah would know that the words spoken to her by the angel Gabriel, would fulfill the promise that the Messiah would come through the line of David and that Mary was a direct descendant of David. For this Zachariah gives praise to God. The Lord has come to redeem His people. The Lord has raised up a horn of salvation. A horn speaks of strength or power and victory. He was praising God, not only because He kept His Word, but also because He would redeem His people. God was fulfilling His promise to David.

Zachariah also spoke of the Abrahamic covenant.

B. The Abrahamic Covenant – v. 72-75

Genesis 22:16-18

The difference between this covenant and Davidic covenant is that while the Davidic Covenant is universal in scope, the Abrahamic Covenant was national in scope. It was specifically made with Abraham and his lineage. It was conditioned on Abraham leaving his land and family to follow the Lord to a place God would show him. With that there was a fourfold blessing. 1) His family would increase to a numerous people without count, 2)

there would be material and spiritual prosperity, 3) Abraham’s name would become great, and 4) he would not only be blessed by God, but through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed through the Messiah that would come through his family tree. That was the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12 and further strengthened by the promise that they would have a son in chapter 15.

John MacArthur adds that this “covenant is preeminently a covenant of mercy, revealing that God is gracious and compassionate to undeserving people. The stream of mercy that began with God’s blessing of Abraham flows down through the centuries to provide forgiveness, redemption, and eternal blessing to all who have faith in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He adds that “a correct understanding of it is essential to properly comprehending all of redemptive history.”

This covenant is important to understand because it lays the groundwork for the New Covenant that will come in the New Testament through Christ.

The New Covenant is spoken about in **verses 76-79.**

C. The New Covenant – v. 76-79

Matthew 26:26-28

This is the essence of what we will do in just a few moments as we celebrate communion together. This is the symbol of the New Covenant. This covenant was brought about by Christ and was promised in the Garden of Eden when God promised that someone would come to redeem mankind back from sin.

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; and He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.”

This was fulfilled in Christ's victory on the cross. Satan struck the heel of Christ by His death on the cross. But victory came at the cross when His shed blood paid for the sins of mankind with the final victory coming at the resurrection. That is when He crushed the head of Satan.

Where the Abrahamic covenant was a covenant that would be built on the law ratified when it was given to Moses, the New Covenant is a covenant of grace. Of the various covenants given in the Old Testament, none of them provided a measure for salvation. The covenant made with Noah promised that God would never again destroy mankind with water. The covenants made with Abraham and David spoke about salvation but did not give provision for how salvation was to be obtained. The New Covenant not only shows the need of salvation but how to obtain it. Only through the New Covenant is there a provision for salvation.

Read those verses again. **vs. 77-79**

As Zachariah points out, the source of the New Covenant is made possible through the mercy of God. Without His mercy through the sending of His Son to die for us we would never have been given the New Covenant and we would never know the forgiveness of sin and the salvation that would come through Christ.

Each covenant was ratified through the shedding of blood. The death of what was sacrificed symbolized the seriousness to which the covenant was to be taken. The covenant was sealed by blood. Both parties walked between the sacrificed animal to affirm the covenant. The shed blood also served as a reminder of what would happen if either party broke the covenant. Death would occur.

When a person enters into the New Covenant by faith in the finished work of Christ's shed blood on the cross that person is delivered from the power, the penalty, and the presence of sin.

John MacArthur writes "The New Covenant thus provides the essential things that all the other covenants lacked – a new heart, power to obey God, fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins."

While the Davidic Covenant was universal in scope and the Abrahamic Covenant was specifically for Israel, the New Covenant is a covenant established for the individual. It is personal. It is for the "whosoever". That person must believe by faith in the Lamb of God who came to take away sin. He is the only way, the only truth, the only life. If by faith you believe in Him, you have everlasting life.

Zachariah prophetically announced that John would go before the Lord proclaiming salvation and the forgiveness of sins only through Him. The Lord is the answer to man's hopeless and helpless condition, otherwise destined to be forever lost. But God established a New Covenant through Christ so that by faith we can be saved and have eternal life. Zachariah is stating that his son, John, would announce the coming of the One through whom this New Covenant would be established.

There is an important word that surfaces in this passage. It is the word redeem. There are three words in the Greek language that convey different aspects of redemption.

One means to buy in the marketplace. Because of sin man is a slave sold into slavery under the sentence of death but subject to redemption by the purchase price of the blood of a redeemer.

The second means to buy out of the marketplace. The slave is purchased and removed from further sale speaking of the finality of the work of redemption.

The third word, the word used in our text, means to loose or set free.

I Peter 1:18-19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life

handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

I Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”

I Peter 3:18 “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteousness for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...”

Everyone needs redemption because we are all slaves of sin. We are all condemned to die. The same price was paid for everyone. One person didn't require a greater price than another. The price was the same for everyone. God provided for the price of redemption because He knew we couldn't pay for it. He paid for the demands against sin. When we accept the price that was paid on our behalf, then we were forever set free never to have to return to that former state of being a slave.

Zachariah prophesied that John would go before the Lord showing people they needed a Savior and then pointing to who that Savior would be. He would tell them that forgiveness for sin is possible because God's mercies are tender. It was a prophetic word that Zachariah spoke when his tongue was finally loosed. When he first heard the news from the angel, he doubted and wanted a sign. When he could finally speak again he could only sing. Do you praise God for His salvation?

One final point in this passage about the baby is seen in the last verse.

III. THERE WAS A PRIVATE WORKING – v. 80

We know that Zachariah and Elizabeth were quite old when John was born, but we don't know how old they were when they died. This verse tells us that he lived much like Elijah did, out in the desert.

It was in this time that God was grooming him for the task ahead – to be the forerunner of the Lord. John would use the things he knew best to challenge people to repent. He would call them vipers or speak of being spiritually dry like the desert. It was in this season of time that he grew mighty in spirit, a spirit that would need to be bold in proclaiming God's Word to a spiritually dry people, people complacent in their own religiosity. It was to awaken souls that were spiritually asleep. The Lord had His hand on John.

Sometimes God takes us to the desert to mold us and teach us for His assigned purpose. **Are you willing to stay there until God is ready for you to appear to become strong in spirit?**

I think the big lesson in this passage is not just the need to praise God for the redeeming us through His Son Jesus Christ. Indeed that is worthy of our praise. I think the lesson for us is that like John, we have been called to announce that the Lord is coming and to challenge people to be ready by receiving the gift of salvation through Him, to experience the mercy of God.

Will you be His spokesman? Know that as you do, the Lord has His hand on you.