

The Promised Saviour

Luke 1:67-80

Covenant Waterfall, Christmas Day 2021

Read

Pray

Introduction

I'm sure most of us would agree that it's been a crazy year! Violence, lockdowns that never seem to end, drama in our government, tough economic climate, various personal challenges all of us have faced.

Perhaps we've been tempted to think that if only there was a new president or government that would come in and grow the economy, restore our freedoms to us, stop corruption, then we'd live in peace and prosperity, happily ever after.

There was a similar expectation in Israel around the time of Jesus. The Hebrew prophets of old had prophesied that God would send them a King, a Deliverer, a Saviour who would save them from their enemies. Because of this the Jews expected an earthly king who would bring "salvation" - come and chuck out their Roman oppressors, bring them political freedom, independence and prosperity – that they would all have a piece of land with their fig tree and vine and live happily ever after.

Yet this was not the kind of salvation that God had in mind. What did God have in mind then? A salvation not from earthly oppressors, but from something much more fundamental, something that deeply affects every single one of us to the core of our beings, even if we don't realise it. Salvation from sin. This infection that we all have, causes us to be turned in on ourselves, to want to live independently from God, in rebellion to him, instead of lives that truly glorify him.

This Christmas morning we are going to look at this passage from Luke 1, Zechariah's prophecy. What we'll see here is that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's covenant promise to visit and save us from our sins.

- God visited and redeemed his people
- God remembered his covenant

A. God visited and redeemed his people, vv.67-68

Some context: the first person which Luke's Gospel introduces us to is Zechariah, he was a priest who served in the Temple in Jerusalem. His wife was Elizabeth, unable to have children. Angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah – wife is going to have a baby, who will be the forerunner of the Messiah – John the Baptist. Understandably, Zechariah finds this hard to believe as his wife is old and barren. Result – he is prevented from speaking until everything is fulfilled. Soon, Elizabeth falls pregnant, just as the angel had said.

In the meantime, Elizabeth's relative, a young virgin named Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, received a visit from angel Gabriel too, telling her that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and she will conceive and bear a son, who will be called Jesus (Yeshua) = salvation in Hebrew, Israel's promised Messiah.

Eventually Elizabeth gives birth to a son, and on the eighth day when was to be circumcised, Zechariah, his father, tongue is loosed, and the first thing he proclaims after months of silence is this majestic prophecy concerning the coming Messiah, the promised Saviour of Israel, Jesus, and his own son, John the Baptist. Traditionally called the Benedictus – first Latin word of the prophecy for Blessed: vv.67-68:

“And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people...”

The prophecy starts off by blessing the name of the Lord, praising the God of Israel. Why? Because he is about to fulfil thousands of years of promises to his people. He is going to visit and redeem his people. Here we have the heart of the Christmas message: God has visited us. God has drawn near to us. How has God visited us? He has come into our world from the outside. He has put his Son in the Virgin Mary's womb. This is the mystery of what we call

the Incarnation: that the Eternal God took on flesh, he humbled himself from the glories of heaven and was born as a lowly baby in a manger in Bethlehem. God has come to dwell with us, to visit us. That's why Jesus' name is called Immanuel = God with us.

Why has God come to visit us? Rest of verse 68 – to redeem his people. Every other religion or philosophy – it's up to us to reach up to God. How? Through our good works, various spiritual techniques, practices, morality – through these things, supposedly climb up the ladder to reach the Divine, become more like him, earn our salvation.

The uniqueness of the gospel message of Christianity is that it's the complete opposite to this. Not us who have to reach up to God, but instead, God has come down to us in Jesus Christ. Why did God have to come down to us? Though we deceive ourselves in thinking that we can reach God on our own terms, actually impossible. Why? Because we are all born dead in our sins and trespasses. Outside of Christ, we are unable to seek God because we're his enemies and our bent is to rebel against him, not seek him. It's because things are so bad that he has to intervene to save us from death and sins, by reaching down to us, taking on flesh, to live the perfect life that none of us could live and die the death for sins that we all deserve.

This is what redemption means: someone paid a price to release us from slavery. This is precisely what Jesus comes to earth to do, as our Promised Saviour, to pay with his own life in order to release us from this slavery to sin and death, restoring us to our God for all eternity.

B. God remembered his covenant, vv.69-75

How did this all come about? How did we get into a position where we needed God to visit and redeem us in the first place? How do we know that this Christmas story is not just a bunch of myths devised by men? What we will see in the rest of Zechariah's prophecy is that the coming of our Promised Saviour was planned in every detail in eternity past, by God himself. Not myth either – see whole of the OT anticipates all of this. This is why v.70 of this prophecy says that God's holy prophets from of old spoke about these things. OT prophets looked forward to the coming of God's promised Saviour.

In order to understand all this clearer, go back right to the beginning: Adam and Eve, our first parents, in the Garden of Eden. There, God had blessed them with everything they could possibly want – a beautiful garden providing for all their needs, each other and he as their God, they as his own beloved people – all living in abundant life, perfect peace harmony. Life as it was meant to be.

But then the serpent deceived Adam and Eve, they sinned, obeying the serpent, instead of God. Result? Tragedy. Because of their sin – expelled from paradise, estranged from God, sentenced to death. God’s justice – penalty of sin is death. All mankind under a curse - death and sin – spread to all of us– that’s why we’re all affected by sin, that’s why each of us will one day die.

Yet God in his grace did not abandon them in their sin and leave them to die. He made a covenant, a promise in the Garden in Genesis 3:15, that one day he would send a seed of the woman, a descendant of Eve, to crush the head of the serpent, breaking the curse and dealing with sin, and restoring God once again to his people, saving them.

From that point on, the rest of the OT anticipates this covenant promise of God to send a Saviour. Here in Zechariah’s prophecy we see how this is so. Vv. 72-75:

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.”

God’s holy covenant, his oath that swore to Abraham? Thousands of years before Christ, Genesis 12, God called out a man named Abraham, made a covenant with him, made a promise, that he would be the father of many nations, that through him many nations would be blessed, his own people would inherit Promised Land, a new Eden, where God would deliver his people from their enemies and once again be their God and they his people. Start to see here, God’s promise unfold.

It’s this covenant with Abraham that Zechariah is talking about here in Luke 1 – this promise that God would deliver his people from his enemies and might serve him without fear in a new land, he as their God, they as his people.

More details about God's plan to save his people unfold after Abraham. Zechariah refers to these in vv. 69-72:

“(God) has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 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...”

A thousand or so years after Abraham, God made another covenant promise to the King of Israel, David, one of Abraham's descendants. In 2 Samuel 7, God promised David that through one of his sons, his descendant, he would plant them in their own land where they would no longer be disturbed by their enemies. God would also establish David's house – his kingdom, his dynasty, as an eternal kingdom. One of David's sons would reign forever over this kingdom. This son would also be the promised seed of the woman who would come to crush Israel's enemies.

It's glimpses of this promise that we see here in Zechariah's prophecy too – that salvation for God's people would come from the house of David. That a descendant of David will crush Israel's enemies and show mercy to God's people.

What is Zechariah's point in all this? He, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is saying that all these covenant promises that God made to his people over many generations, to Adam, to Abraham and to David, that he would send a Saviour to his people – he has not forgotten those promises, but indeed he has remembered them! In his tender mercy, he has not forgotten his people in darkness and sin, but has sent a Saviour! Now, in the fullness of time, it's all about to be fulfilled! How so? Through a child born of a virgin, Jesus, the promised Saviour, the Messiah. This is why the opening verse of the NT (Mt 1:1) reads: **“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”**

Jesus, a descendant of Adam, Abraham and David, is born in the ancestral town of David, Bethlehem. He is also the promised seed of the woman, the One whom God promised thousands of years before who would crush the head of the serpent, break the curse, forgive us our sins, save us his people from our enemies (sin & Satan) into a new eternal Promised Land, a new Eden where no longer cut off from God, but instead God himself will dwell with us forever – he our God and we his people.

Conclusion

If we're honest with ourselves, our tendency is to think that we can get right with God on our own terms. Perhaps we pride ourselves on being a good person, having good morals and behaviour, perform the right spiritual practices, meditate, think positive thoughts – don't harm anyone, just try and do good to all. Think doing these things will make us right before God.

Problem with these attempts at reaching up to God on our own terms is that it leads to us either feeling self-righteous and smug that we've ticked all the boxes and earned God's favour, or we realise that it just seems impossible to keep doing good things, so give up on God and just live how we please.

The truth is that nothing we can do can make us right (justify us) before God. Nothing. How come? Lose sight of how holy God really is. Even our best of efforts will always fall short of God. Why? Sin has touched every part of our being – our motives, actions, words, desires, meaning that even our supposed good works are like filthy rags before God. This is why Romans 3:22-23 says, **“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”** Because of this, like our father Adam, we all deserve to face God's wrath, all deserve to die and be forever expelled from his presence, face an eternity in hell. Not God being cruel and unfair, it's merely his perfect justice. Sin has to be punished.

Where does that leave us? Hopeless? Realise that nothing you can do can make you right with God? What hope do we have then?

Thankfully Romans 3 doesn't end with v.23. It carries on in verse 24 saying, all have sinned and fall short of God's glory **“and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”**

This is the good news of Christmas. Not good food, family, presents, love and good cheer – as great as those things are. The good news is that God has remembered his covenant promise by visiting and redeeming us through Jesus Christ. God has come down to us! Though every single one of us deserves hell, because of his tender mercy (v.78), he sent

Christ to earth to be a light to those of us who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (vv.78-79).

Friends, brothers and sisters, repent and receive Jesus Christ, God's promised Saviour, the Word made flesh, Immanuel. He took upon himself the punishment for sin that you deserve and died a death on the cross. Yet on the third day he rose again, crushing the head of the serpent: breaking the curse, the power of sin and death – forgiving us our sins, justifying us, making us right before God, reconciling us to God as his own sons. This we cannot earn or work for, we can but only receive it all by faith as a gift of grace. So trust in Christ and receive the greatest gift this Christmas - his grace, his Spirit, the promise of eternal life in the heavenly Promised Land – where he will dwell with us in peace – our God and we his people.

Amen