

# Luke 1:68-79 "The Benedictus"

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, your word said that the Holy Spirit came upon Zechariah and he was able to prophesy. And Father, we aren't asking that we can prophesy. Although if you give us that gift, Father, help us to say yes. But we acknowledge before you, Father, that we desperately need the help of your Holy Spirit for us to understand your word. And so we ask, Father, that you would continue to gently but powerfully pour out the Holy Spirit upon us this morning. May your Holy Spirit carry your word into the depths of our hearts, into who we are. And we give you permission, Father, for your word to do its renewing, converting, renewing, reviving, forming work in us. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

Some of us present have enemies. Some of us present have enemies. In fact, the matter is, is that some of us who are here have people who hate us. I'm not going to say everybody here has enemies or everybody here has those who hate us. But I would, I mean, I just know for a fact, that's something that some of us have to live with. And also, if we're very honest, some of us are seen as enemies by other people.

[ 2 : 3 9 ]     And some of us are seen as haters, hateful people by other people. That's how they would perceive us. And some of us struggle with hating others. Or feeling in enmity with others. And maybe some of us should struggle with it, because we don't. We just give in to it. We give in to hate.

We give in to seeing the world as, or certain groups of people or individuals as our enemies. And by the way, when I'm saying this, it doesn't mean that there aren't real enemies and there aren't real haters. But we struggle, or should struggle with how exactly to deal with it.

The Bible text that we're going to look at today actually speaks into this with great wisdom and great comfort and great help. And it also does it in the context of dealing with something else that we struggle with. When I talk to people about Christianity, one of the, if you get past a couple of surface conversations, at some point in time, these are people who are outside of the Christian faith, at some point in time they will raise with me their great objection to the Christian faith, which is the problem of evil. Why does God allow evil in the world? Why does God allow suffering in the world? In fact, I've had some people who were sort of on the outside of the Christian faith, were teetering on the edge of it. I'm thinking of one barista just about a year or so ago, who actually wanted me to sit down with him and have a coffee with him because he wanted to believe, but he had problems with that. And so it's a very, very common problem. And so the text that we're going to look at today both has, it's not going to solve the whole problem of evil, but it has some, a part, I mean the whole, to try to talk about, you know, you write, people write big books like this about it, but it has something very profound to say about that problem of evil.

It's an aspect of how Christians would respond to it. And it does it by at the same time dealing with the whole problem with enemies and haters. So if you have your Bibles, if you turn in your Bibles to the text that we're going to look at today, we're looking at Luke chapter one, basically verses 68 to 79, Luke one, 68 to 69. That's basically the prime bit that we're going to look at.

And what we're doing here is we're in the season of Advent, which is an ancient Christian season of preparing people for Christmas. And what we've decided to do, not only our church, but the two churches that we have a hand in planting, one in Kanata, one in Charlottetown, we're all looking at four songs of the Savior that take place in the first two chapters of Luke as a way to understand who Jesus is and his significance. So last week we looked at Mary's song known as the Magnificat. This week we're going to look at the Benedictus or Zechariah's song. Next week we're going to look at the song, The Angels Sing to the Shepherds After Jesus is Born. And then the week after that, the Sunday before Christmas, we'll look at Simeon's song, the song that he sang while he was in the temple over the baby Jesus. And just another thing about this, for those of you who are a bit of history nerds, or you're looking for things that have some depth to them. This song that we're going to look at right now, which is called the Benedictus commonly, if you want to find musical settings for it, that's what you would look up under Benedictus. This has been part of Christian worship since,

[ 6 : 10 ] I mean, probably right from the beginning, but from the early 700s, when they began to codify, you know, in monasteries and for priests and for congregations, the types of, the way they would read the Bible and pray together in the morning, and the way they would read the Bible together and pray in the evening. The Benedictus has been part of that rhythm since the early 700s. So for 1300 years, many Christians have thought, if you want to spend some time reading the Bible and praying in the morning, you should have on top of your Bible readings this, because it's going to have a very important way of forming you. And I'm not going to answer all what you'll see why we go into it, why that would be that this is viewed as something which is very significant. And so, just before we start reading at verse 69, what's the context? Why does Zechariah burst into song in a book which is a very, very realistic book, and is going to have, as the book progresses, it's going to have people really filled with hate, it's going to have a grisly death, it's going to have people whipped, it's going to have somebody, you know, stripped naked, it's going to be very realistic, but Zechariah bursts in the song, and what's the context after that? Well, if you go back and you read the Luke from the beginning, you'll see that Luke was a pagan who became a Christian.

So he used to worship the gods of Rome or Greece, he becomes a Christian, we don't know when, and he decides that he's going to talk with the eyewitnesses and look at official records and write a true true biography of Jesus, and that's what we have. And he begins that by describing the story of Zechariah, who was one of the ironic priests. So last week we looked at Mary, and Mary was a nobody, living in Nowheresville, okay? But now we go to Zechariah, and Zechariah is a somebody, he's a very important person, he's well-educated, and he's a priest, and he's doing a sacrifice in the very holy of holies, right in the very center of the temple, and while he's doing that, an angel from God comes and says to him, and this is actually a real, it's a whole other sermon topic by itself, because Zechariah is very old, and his wife is very old, and the angel says to Zechariah, Zechariah, your prayers have been answered. You're going to have a baby.

Why is this such an interesting thing for us? For us? I mean, he probably stopped praying for a baby 20, 30 years ago. He forgot that he'd been praying for a baby. He'd given up on that, but God hadn't forgotten. God just said, yeah, I'm going to answer, you know, in a sense, go to heaven, Zechariah, what God would have said to Zechariah, yeah, yeah, I was going to say yes, I just wanted you to wait 30 years before you had the baby, that's all.

One of the things that will be probably really cool for Christians is we'll go up to heaven, maybe thinking about all these prayer requests we never had answered, and God said, no, no, no, no, no, here, let's just look. Remember you prayed this, you know, in 1995, and I answered it in 2005. You just didn't notice that I answered it ten years later. Anyway, so, but, so God says, God through Gabriel says, you're going to have a baby. Answer your prayers. And Zechariah does not believe the angel, and gives a bit of a defiant pushback to it. And, and, and God says other things about the baby. He's going to have this huge role. He's going to be from God. He's going to have this huge role in preparing for the, the, the Messiah. But Zechariah doesn't believe it. And so the angel said, I'm going to strike you dumb, so you can't speak. And, and if you go and you look around a little bit more careful, I'm going to take away your ability to hear and your ability to speak until what I have foretold comes to pass. So Zechariah goes out of the temple, and he can't speak, and he can't hear. And so people realize that he's received a vision. He finishes his tour of duty, goes home. Elizabeth, his wife, gets pregnant. Then in the story, the next thing happens, the same angel appears to Mary. We talked about that last week, the virgin birth. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth.

And it's after that that Mary sings her song, the Magnificat, that we looked at last week. And, and now the story continues. Elizabeth is pregnant. She gives birth to a baby. Zechariah still can't hear, and he can't speak. And the, all of her friends, the whole village is all really excited, and they want to name the baby Zechariah, because it's a baby boy. And she says, no, his baby, the name's going to be John. And they said, there's nobody in your family called John. What on earth are you doing? And so actually, if you just look up above from, from verse 69, verse 68, look up to verse 63, and see what happens when they go and speak to Zechariah, verse 63. And Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, his name is John. And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, his mouth was open, and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them laid up in their hearts, saying, what then will this child be?

[11:15] For the hand of the Lord was with him. That's sort of important in terms of remembering how it is that Zechariah would not be. One of the things about Luke's gospel is that Luke wrote his gospel on eyewitness testimony, while eyewitnesses were still alive who could correct it.

And then we go in verse 68, and his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, and now we get to the Benedictus. But you can see why it is that he bursts into prophetic language. Now, here's the thing. True confession, when I was reading this text, you probably had a hard time understanding what was going on. I do too.

It's actually a very interesting text. It's one long eight-verse sentence in Greek, followed by a long four-verse sentence in Greek. Any editor, if Luke was bringing this to an editor in 2025, they'd cross it all out, and they'd tell you, these sentences are too long. I can't follow all the clauses and how they relate to each other. You need to rewrite it. Well, it was written at a time when nobody did that, and we have this long sentence. And so, just to be honest, for me, when I say morning prayer, and when I read this text, I, in a sense, the words just sort of flow over me and in me, and I pick out different pieces of imagery from it. But I've never actually, until I was preaching, I mean, I've preached on it before, actually tried to figure out how to explain it to you, how that sentence all works with its clauses all over the place. So what I'm going to do is we're going to read this, we're going to read it, and I'm going to imagine for a second that, you know, Zechariah read it, then, you know, wrote it down and read it, and then he had somebody who was, said, Zechariah, just, just, could you, could you read it out for me again? And I just want to pause you periodically to ask what's going on. So here's, here's how the sentence works. And, and remember, we're going to eventually get to the enmity and evils and haters, and, and here's, here's how it works. Zechariah begins by saying, blessed be the Lord, sorry, blessed be the Lord God of Israel. That's how he begins, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, like a word of, of exclamation and praise. And, and now before he goes on any further, the, the, the person just taps on, oh, no, no, no, Zechariah, before you go any further. Okay. Why, why, why are you saying that? And why are you saying it in such a way that you think I should learn this and I should say it? Like, why did you say it? And Zechariah says, oh, well, just look, uh, first, um, just, just look at 68b. He said, so I said, blessed be the Lord God of

Israel. And then I say, for, that's why, why should you bless the Lord God of Israel? It's because he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant, David. That's, that's why you should say, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because he's just, he's done that. He's doing that. He will do that. Visited here means, uh, it's like an act of grace and redeemed means delivering us from slavery and horn of salvation. That's like a, think of a really, think of a huge elephant and its tusks. Think of a rhinoceros with its tusks, uh, an animal in, uh, in full power that uses these things to, to defeat its enemies. And that's what God has just done and he's going to do. And that's why you should say, uh, blessed be the Lord God of Israel.

Uh, and now Zechariah does something like me. So I, I get my sermons debriefed, periodically. I'm part of a group of people who debrief each other's sermons. And, uh, one of the things that people point out about my sermons is I always have asides that I just gave you an aside right now. And, uh, but then people say, well, if you know, George, George actually can't speak very long without making asides. Like he does come back. I mean, sometimes he says, what were I talking about?

[15:20] But I come back. So in a sense, Zechariah, he does an aside here as well. And that's, what is the aside? We'll look at verse 70. The aside is, by the way, so to speak, you know, this visiting and redeeming his people and, and the horn of salvation. This is all as he spoke, verse 70, by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. That's a bit of an aside, by the way. You know what I'm just talking about?

I'm giving you this prophecy right now, but it's actually just what the prophets of old have all said. And it's actually really interesting. Here's another thing. If you were to be writing this, you know, clickety, clickety, click, you'd get a, uh, a red line. Is it a red line? You'd get a red or blue line underneath, uh, that sentence and it wouldn't like it. Uh, and that's because if you look at it again, verse 70, it says, as he spoke with the, by the mouth singular of his holy prophets, plural and, and Google and all wouldn't like that. They'd have marks over it. You have to correct it.

But that's actually one of those things where, uh, Zechariah would just ignore it because it's really an important thing is that God is the one. It's, it's him. And ultimately all the prophets were just one, all they were speaking on God's behalf. It's ultimately God who speaks, but that's just an aside. And then, um, and then, uh, somebody says in an introduction, okay, uh, okay, uh, Zechariah, blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Okay, that, that's really good. Uh, and you give me the reasons why, and you give me that little aside and now all of a sudden, I don't know, maybe that's a proof text for George having asides all the time. Uh, but, but why, what, what exactly is going on, uh, with, uh, with, uh, why did he visit us and redeem us and raise us up? And then you look at verse 71 and he explains why he sent a horn of salvation, why he visited and redeemed. He explains it in verse 71.

It, well, okay, all this happened 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.

That, that's why he's doing that. That's why he's visiting us and redeeming us and a horn of salvation. And, and it's what he spoke about through the prophets. He did it so we could be saved from our enemies, verse 71, and saved from the hand of all who hate us, verse 71 still. And he did it to show that he's full of mercy, just as he's always told people. And he does it to remember his holy covenant.

[ 17 : 44 ] And remember here means to dwell on it. And it's to say that he just, this is like a reassurance to us that we might forget the covenant we have with God, but God never forgot it. He always dwelled on it and thought about it and pondered it. And this is him acting in light of the promise he made in this covenant and all these other promises. It's showing what's about to happen and is happening, is showing these things as, as, as being true. That's the reason why God is doing it.

And then you might say, okay, uh, that's really good, but okay, there's a whole pile of covenants. Like, is it the covenant with Adam? Is it the covenant with Noah? Is it the covenant with, uh, uh, you know, Abraham? Is it the covenant with Moses? Like what, what covenant are you talking about?

Well, uh, Zechariah says, well, no, no, here, just look verse 73. This is the covenant I'm talking about. The oath that he swore to our father, Abraham. That's the covenant we're talking about.

The one that he gave to our father, Abraham. That's the one I'm really focusing on. And if you, uh, know what that is, this is where it's, this text is so interesting because on one hand, it is so deeply, profoundly Jewish all the way through. It is soaked with imagery from, uh, from what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh and what we call the Old Testament. It's so deeply Jewish, right? Even the fact that it begins with blessed be the Lord God of Israel, uh, that it's very deeply Jewish. And, but now all of a sudden it, it throws it open to a whole bigger world. If you just turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 12, verses one to three, you'll see what it is that he's referring to, which is going to be really important for the rest of the story. Genesis chapter 12, one to three. Now the Lord said to Abram, because he was called Abram before God changed his name, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

Uh, go from where you are a pagan and worship the moon. That's a whole other thing, but that's what Abraham was. He was a moon worshiper, a pagan. He worshiped the moon. And, uh, he, and God says to him, go away from all of this. Verse two, and I will make of you a great nation, a great people, and I will bless you and I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing. And here's the verse in particular, which is really important, right? And this is before, before the covenant with Moses. It's before the covenant with David. It's the basic root covenant, which is important to us. And it's in verse three, I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse. And here's the, here's the thing. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. All the families of the earth shall be blessed. Moon worshipers and Jewish people, everything in between are ultimately going to be blessed by what is going to happen. I'm going to begin to do through you. So you go back now to, to Luke. And so that's the covenant, he said, you know, there, you know, it's all to the covenant that God is going to do. And it's the covenant about Abraham.

[ 20 : 54 ] And so then, you know, somebody might say, okay, that's interesting. Like what's a covenant? And, uh, you could say, well, a covenant like the, a covenant is like a relationship and it has terms, so to speak. And what it's saying is that God would like to enter into a deep relationship with human beings like you. And, uh, in this relationship, it's going to be, there's going to be benefits to it. And God is going to make promises to you. And, uh, and that's, that's what a covenant is. And so we might say, okay, well, like that sounds, in fact, actually a lot of Canadians would say, that sounds like a very Canadian idea. I'd love to sit down on two sides of a table, God on one side and me on the other side. And I'd like to say, okay, God, we're going to have a covenant, like a contract, like here's my terms. God says, you know, here's my terms, you know, and then you have another, well, how about, you know, we take these out, cross this out, you know, double that. And, and, you know, and then God gives you back. No, no, I want you to cross that.

No, no, no, no, no. Is that what's going on? No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. How? You've misunderstood the covenant. Well, how have I misunderstood the covenant? Well, that's in verse 72 again. Uh, yeah, verse 73, right? The oath or the, to the, for the covenant that he swore to our father Abraham. And here are these three words that are really, really important, to grant us, to grant us. And this word grant is grace. God doesn't count, weigh your merits, He pardons your offenses. God isn't having a negotiating session with you. God is going to create this covenant relationship purely and utterly out of grace and mercy to people who don't deserve it, and he's going to do something whereby you can come into this covenant relationship with him, and however you understand redemption, however you understand salvation, however you understand any of those types of things, it isn't just to take you out of bondage or darkness or slavery just for you to do whatever you want. It's to take you out of that into a deep relationship with God, a covenant relationship. He pledges himself to you, and he does this purely and utterly out of grace. That's what Grant implies, purely and utterly out of grace. I mean, even think about it that you go back to Abraham. Abraham was worshiping the moon, and God came up while he's worshiping the moon and said, I'm going to offer you a covenant. You can be mine. Forget the moon.

Forget all those pagan deities. You can be mine, and I'm going to do this. I make the promise, and then you go back and see it, and he fulfills the terms, and there's all that other type of imagery that goes along with it, and so you might then pause and say to Zechariah, well, okay, what exactly is it that God graciously and in mercy granted to people?

And then you just say, well, that's in 74. That's what I was saying next, Zechariah would respond. He, you know, verse 74, that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, there's that word enemies again, might serve him, that is God, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. That's what he's granting us. That's what the covenant will be. It means that he's going to deliver us from enemies. It means that we can actually come into this covenant with him and serve him, and that he's going to create a covenant world where you live without fear, and holiness means that he sets you apart as his precious possession and treasure for all eternity, and righteousness means that he's going to make you right with him, and right with each other, and right with creation, and we do all of this. This whole covenant means that we always live the rest of our lives in this covenant with God before him, in his presence. He's not the God who is really distant. He is the God who's right here amongst us this morning. He's the God who's with you when you do your day. And Zechariah would smile, and he'd go, okay, now there's a pause. The first sentence has come to an end. It's a bit of a pause.

Maybe Zechariah takes his breath before he launches into the second sentence, which is now only four verses long, not eight verses long. And in this little pause, we see there's going to be a bit of a change of direction, but it's still all explaining that beginning bit. Like if you go back up where it says, blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Why?

[ 25 : 29 ] That's the four. It's still coming around. What's another reason? What are further reasons why we should bless the Lord God of Israel? There's going to be a change of direction. Now, what's happened up to now has been a whole series of images and metaphors and abstractions. And if you think about it for a second, if you go back and just take a step back and think about it for a second, we've seen all of these things. We see these things around us all the time. You can't read stories or watch movies without seeing these things. Like constantly, what is always, what are going on often in movies? People being delivered out of bondage. You know, private detectives, cops, war movies, delivering people out of bondage. Vampire horror movies, delivering people out of bondage against great evil. We see the conflict between, you know, in a sense, you know, justice and righteousness and injustice. And we see hatred and we see it being dealt with. And those are the constant themes of movies all of the time. And it's really interesting if you think about it that, you know, these, and even in fantasy things, in science fiction novels, these types of ideas of redemption, deliverance, covenant, how does the classic successful American movie end after the bad guys are defeated?

The hero and the heroine kiss. With the implication, what? They're going to be in a covenant. That's how they end. Those are the movies we like. We don't like movies like The Wall, spoiler alert, where the bad guys win and everything is completely and utterly depressing. And you know, that's the way the movie is because critics give it a 98% score and audience has a 22 score or 12.

Always a sign of a terrible movie when the critics give it a high score and the average audience doesn't, right? And that's just showing how sophisticated they are, you know, about all of this and the problem of evil. And that's because where on earth do all of these happy ending stories of redemption and deliverance for, where do they come from? And some people might say, well, George, that explains Christianity. Like people like stories like that. So Christians wrote a story like that. But what we have before us and what's going to be a turn in the whole direction next is all of these abstractions are going to become historical. Because this is introducing us to a biography, a story about a man named Jesus who lived in a particular time and place. And this story is for every person in every time and place. But it's not a story from nowhere. It's a story from somewhere to everywhere.

And what Christians would say is this, no, no, you've got the cart before the horse. You don't understand. You should ask yourself in a world like this, why is it that we love stories like this?

And what you should understand is not that the gospel is just one more story like this, but because the gospel is true, it's speaking about something in human experience and human longings. The truth of the gospel explains why it is that people love stories like this. That's how you should understand it.

[ 29 : 09 ] So let's look. There's still going to be abstractions, but it moves in a very, very different direction. Verse 76, it's a new sentence. And now you just have to remember the context which I told you in Zechariah is now holding his little baby, John, now known as, eventually known as John the Baptist. And he's holding little, he's holding little John like this. Sorry, I wasn't supporting his head. His head was flopping off the edge. His head's over here. I'm holding up his head so it just doesn't flop around. And now he looks down at this little baby, this little baby. And we have verse 76, and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High. We have all these abstractions.

Now it's right back to Zechariah's time, and he's looking at that little baby, and he said, you will be called the prophet of the Most High. And now you might say, well, why will he be known as this? Like, why will this little baby be known as the prophet of the Most High? And Zechariah would say, well, I cover that next. Look at verse, you know, the second part of verse 76. Notice that little word for. Why will he 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. That's why you will be. And by the way, here is a text that says that right at the beginning of Luke's gospel, Jesus is taught as God.

John the Baptist is going to go before Jesus, and he's, and this Zechariah is saying he's going before God. It's a text that teaches the divinity of Christ. And what it's saying is that John the Baptist is going to go to be the one who says, listen, salvation is coming, and this salvation is going to involve the forgiveness of your sins. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. That's what, that's what my job is, is just to point the way. And by the way, here's the thing, and this is why John is the last and the greatest of prophets. If you go back later on and read John's gospel, all the other prophets were seeing images of the Messiah through all these imagery and, and complicated ways, and they were seeing it off in the future. But John the Baptist was one who was one day standing there, and as Jesus is walking by, and he's maybe just come from lunch, and because he had a beard and there are no mirrors, he might have a little bit of tabbouleh and a little bit of pita and maybe even some hummus in his beard. And as he's walking by, John the Baptist says to the people around him, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. First words about Jesus, behold the

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's what John the Baptist does. Points right at Jesus. And so that's what the Messiah is going to do. And so, and, and so people might say, why did God have John the Baptist as his messenger, and, and why is it that God actually wants this to be the message that will prepare people for the Messiah? And, and, and, and, and Zechariah would say, well, no, I deal with that right next, right? That's, I anticipated your question. Look at 78. Why does God want to have somebody like John the Baptist? Why is it that God wants to have salvation and deliverance? Why is he wants to have your sins forgiven?

Verse 78, because of the tender mercy of our God. And the word mercy there is, for those of you who know a little bit about the Old Testament, I can't pronounce it the way Jewish people would, it's chesed. There's like a couple of spitting noises in there that should be existing to, to try to communicate it, but it says God's faithful covenant mercy and love towards people. And that, who, who is God? Who is, why is it that we should say, blessed be the Lord God of Israel? We should say that because the God of Israel is a God of tender mercy. That's who he is. And it's not just an abstraction. He's going to make it all very, very real and very, very powerful. And then you might say to Zechariah, well, how will this forgiveness happen? And then he says, well, I continued on to that. I anticipated your question.



[ 33 : 34 ] Look at the first part, because of the tender mercy of our God. And then I very, say the very next thing. It's very interesting. The sunrise shall visit us from on high. In other words, the light from God, that's going to be like the dawning of light in a dark world, that's going to come down from God amongst us. And you can think of John chapter one. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him, and him was life, and the life, you know, and all that. And then the light comes down. And Jesus is the light of the world. A light that comes not from the light around us, not from the light of our creativity, but a light that comes right from God into our world. And it is this coming of the light into the darkness of who we are that is part of how it is that God saves us. He grants us this to make us people of the light. That's what we should be, people of the light.

And that's what he just says, because you might say, well, what is it that he will do? Look at verse 78. He will give light, verse 79, I should say, to those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace. Now, very, very briefly, very briefly, this very, very, very beautiful and powerful text. What we see here is that when we put our, what God's desire is, that he wants to turn us from enmity with ourselves, enmity with others, enmity with God, from that to peace with God. He wants us to deliver us from doom to security and life.

He wants to deliver us from slavery into freedom, free citizens, not just freedom, but free citizens in his kingdom, the kingdom of love and the kingdom of mercy. He wants to deliver us from darkness to light. He wants to deliver us from death, certain death and doom to unending life. He wants us to walk in the light to the light, and he will deliver us and give us his salvation. He grants us all of these things, and all we can do is receive it. It's been a longer sermon than I intended, but I need to say a couple of things about my beginning. And here's a couple of things about the problem of evil and the problem of enmity. The problem that my secular friends have with the problem of evil is they might think that that ends up being a good reason not to believe within God, but all it leaves you is in a thin, desolate, despairing place. Evil still exists, and then you die.

And there's absolutely no comfort in it. One of the things which is so brilliant about this, and this is just part of the whole ending, just a tiny part of the whole answer that Christians have to evil, is that Christians say, no, no, death doesn't win, and God will judge all the evil and enmity and hatred in the world. And we know that as a guaranteed fact. It does not get a pass. It will be dealt with.

And I have not only the comfort and the hope that it will be dealt with at the end of the end of the end of the end, but God doesn't just sort of talk about this as abstractions, because this is the beginning of the gospel that goes all the way through the rest of the story, all the rest of the story, when you see things happening to Jesus, bad things happening to Jesus, and not only in Luke's, but the other things, Herod wanting to kill him as his young child, and imperial power, and hatred of authorities, and there's this story for you to enter into, to understand that everything you see in this story is all about God bringing light into the world, and bringing deliverance from slavery, and the defeat of enemies, and hostile things, and this is all, and so we not only have a knowledge that at the end it will all be made right, that everything sad will become untrue, and that God gives us a story to dwell on as we undergo the hard problems of life, and at the end, and not only that, but he calls us into a relationship with

[ 37 : 49 ] Jesus, and Jesus' people to walk with us amidst the evil and hard times. Secularism or this?

My secular friends, don't you wish this is true? And it is true. Jesus did rise from the dead. He did vindicate what he said, and it says something else as well about this, because you see, the idea that at the end of the end of the end of the end, that God will judge all evil and all enmity. It doesn't create within Christians, it shouldn't create within Christians, an idea that says, okay, well, I don't care about the injustice in Canada, I don't care about the injustice in my community, I don't care about bullying, that's somebody else's problem, I don't have to worry about those things, because God's going to deal that at the end, I can just turn a blind eye. No!

Because you know that God thinks these things are important and they will judge it, you and I should rise up and stand against injustice and evil. Whether it's just quietly say no or something more dramatic, that we are not silent.

And the other thing which is so delightful about this story, because some people will say, George, you say all of those things, but it's filled with all that enemy language and everything like that, and doesn't that just create within Christians this type of sense that there's us and all the others, and we other everybody else in the world? And no, no, no, no, no, no, no, because you need to understand why is it that God, the Son of God, why is it that Jesus comes to earth and actually dies on a cross? It is because God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but that they would turn from their wickedness and live. He's in the business of turning enemies into his friend. He wants enemies to become part of his covenant people. So it's not just a matter, like at the earlier service, I prayed about the great persecution going on in places like China, but in particular about that going on in northern Nigeria. And I not only pray for the Christians undergoing it, but I also pray that their persecutors would stop persecuting and turn to Jesus, and that's how we are taught to pray for enemies. And then there is the most remarkable thing of all about this text,

Christ. And it completely undercuts any talk as if this is othering. You see, before I became a Christian, I was God's enemy.

[ 40 : 27 ] Enemies aren't out there. It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord. It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord. The light has to come into my darkness.

Jesus has to deliver me from my slavery. There are no others, there's just, there's just sinners.

And that's how I have to understand the text. You know, in a sense, and I'm not saying this to downplay the fact that some people here are really in the midst of maybe some very terrible evil.

But John Maxwell famously said that if you could kick the person most responsible for your problems really hard, you wouldn't be able to sit down for a week. Because a lot of times it's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord.

So just in, you know, in closing, there is no better time than now to give your life to Christ if you haven't given your life to Christ. To say, God, I want this salvation and this light to come into me.

[ 41 : 38 ] And I want to be part of your covenant people. And I want to know and learn as part of this covenant people, Father, what it means to walk with Jesus as my light and in his light and know that I am walking towards light.

And I want to be, I want to be used by you to reflect your light into a dark world. And so, Father, and in your mercy, I give myself to Jesus and there's no better time than now to pray such a prayer.

And you could pray that us as a congregation, we are soaked in the scriptures and have the scriptures form us. And could you pray that we as a congregation, that we are an outpost of God's covenant and that what characterizes us is that in a dark world, we are light and life, offering light and life, not out of superiority, not out of condescension, but out of humble fact that we have received such mercy ourselves and we want others to receive and live that as well.

I invite you to stand. Thank you. You know, one of the wonderful things just before I close in prayer is that, you know, one of the wonderful things is that once you grasp how this song introduces all the things that are going to happen in the gospel and what it is that Christ does for us, turning us as enemies into his friends and his covenant people, taking me who is dark and bringing his light into me, and to know that that is what Christ has done, it creates a safe emotional place for us to deal with the crap in our own lives.

There is no darkness you will ever discover about yourself that God did not know about, that Jesus did not know about, and that he does not desire to shine his light even more deeply into it.

[ 43 : 32 ] No other message gives you such a profound place of safety to deal with the crap and mess in your own life, knowing that he loves it when you say that to him.

He wants you to walk in the light. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you so much for Jesus. Thank you, Father, that we have, that you have provided a way to understand who Jesus is and what he's accomplishing for us on the cross in this whole story and history of the gospel.

We thank you, Father, that you desire to turn enemies into your covenant people, that you desire to walk with us and have us serve you without fear and with confidence and with joy, and we ask, Father, that you bring the gospel deeply, more and more deeply home to our hearts and bring this story ever more deeply home to our hearts, that it might form us, that it might shape us, that it might propel us, that it might draw us, that we might breathe it and eat it and live it and dwell in it as we walk with Jesus and as you become more and more central to our hearts.

That day by day, we desire to shout out, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. And all God's people said, Amen.