

Luke 1:57-80 The Preparation

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[0 : 00] Gospel, Luke chapter 1, and we're going to read these verses 57 through 80, 57 through 80 of Luke chapter 1. Luke chapter 1, I'm beginning to read at verse 57. This is the word of God.

Now, the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they would have called him Zechariah after his father. But his mother answered, No, he shall be called John. And they said to her, None of your relatives is called by this name.

And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he 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, and he spoke, Blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea.

[1 : 26] 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. 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, and 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, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

And the child grew, and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the days of his public appearance to Israel. Amen.

This is the reading of God's inspired, inerrant word. Let's turn in our Bibles, please, to the Old Testament, to Isaiah, the prophecy of Isaiah, and Isaiah chapter 6.

Isaiah chapter 6. We're going to read the whole of the chapter. It's not a long chapter, but it's a chapter that reminds us of the holiness of God.

[3 : 27] It's a chapter that reminds us of the sin, and the blindness of the people. All things that we see echoed, picked up on, by Zechariah, by John's father.

Isaiah chapter 6. I'm beginning to read at verse 1. This is the word of God. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost.

For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

[4 : 49] And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send?

And who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am. Send me. And he said, Go and say to this people, Keep on hearing, but do not understand.

Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the hearts of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn, and be healed.

Then I said, How long, O Lord? And he said, Until the cities lie waste, without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth, or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

[6 : 00] Amen. This is the reading of God's, inspired and errant word. Let us turn. Let's turn in our Bibles then, please, to Luke chapter 1.

Luke chapter 1, in these verses, 57 through 80, verses 57 through 80, of Luke chapter 1. It was the school's kind of closing church service, on Friday morning, so I went to school with, went to church, sorry, with Eli's nursery class.

And it's a funny experience, seeing kind of, this massive group of boys and girls, all trotting off to church. I'm used to kind of, dealing with boys and girls, in groups of ones or twos, but not groups of 30.

And even at that young age, peer pressure is a real thing. You know, we'll be walking to church, and one of them will see a puddle, and they'll jump in it. And sure enough, the next 27, 28, will all want to jump in the puddle.

Why? Because that's what their friends did. They want to be the same as their friends, whether consciously or unconsciously, they desire to fit in to the group, to be the same as their friends.

[7 : 11] It's the same with adults, of course. I'm the chaplain at Dalbedee Star. You see that on a Monday night at training, that all of these guys just want to fit in, to feel that they belong. See it at the drop-in on a Wednesday afternoon.

Peer pressure is a real thing. And we see it here as we come to these verses in Luke's Gospel. Zechariah is under tremendous pressure.

He's under huge social pressure to follow the norms of society. Everyone expects the boy to be named Zechariah after his father. And credit to Elizabeth and Zechariah, they say, No.

His name is John. We want to think about three things this morning. See three things from these verses. Firstly, we want to think about the pressure that Zechariah and Elizabeth come under.

Secondly then, we want to see the praise that Zechariah offers God. Once his tongue is loose, after this muteness is gone from him, the first thing that he does is praise God.

[8 : 17] And then thirdly, finally, we want to see the preparation. He realizes, Zechariah realizes, that his son's ministry will be a ministry of preparation. He realizes that his son will not be the Messiah, but that he will prepare the way for the Messiah.

We see the pressure, the praise, and the preparation. So firstly then, we think about the pressure. The pressure, and we see that in verses 57 through 66. This kind of opening paragraph, verses 57 through 66.

So we remember where we are in Luke's gospel, where we've got to in Luke's account of Jesus' life. The angel has visited Elizabeth. He's told her about the son that's going to be born to her.

He's visited Zechariah. He's told him about the son that's going to be born to him. The angel has visited Mary, Elizabeth's cousin. He's told her about the boy that's going to be born to her, the son of her, who would be the son of the Most High God.

And as we come to verse 57 then, it's in fulfillment of one of those prophecies, isn't it? We can easily miss this, but it's the fulfillment of one of those prophecies.

[9 : 30] Because what do we read? Verse 57, Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Now I know it sounds silly to say this, but she gave birth to a son, not a daughter.

She gave birth to a son as had been foretold by the angel. God had been in charge. God had been overseeing this whole process from the moment of conception to the moment of delivery.

And Elizabeth, in line with the prophecy, gives birth to a son. And you can imagine the joy that surrounded the village. You can imagine the joy that surrounded the whole place with the news that this boy had been born.

Isn't this great? Elizabeth, in her old age, has had a child. They've had this little boy. They all recognized, verse 58, that it was the Lord who'd shown great mercy, that it was the Lord who'd done great things for her.

And they come together with her to rejoice. Then, verse 59, the day comes for the boy to be circumcised. The day comes for the covenant mark to be placed upon him.

[10 : 44] The day where it would be shown definitively that this boy was a true Israelite. That this boy belonged to the covenant family of God. That this boy was a member of the covenant community of God.

The day when he was shown to be a son of Abraham. And this is, of course, why, as a congregation, as a denomination, we baptize the children of believers.

Because it's a sign. It's a symbol that they belong to the new covenant community of God. One of the objections that I most often hear from my Credo Baptist friends is that when we baptize a baby, they know nothing about it.

That they have no say in the matter. They can't make a decision about it. But John here knows nothing of his circumcision. He didn't decide for himself to be circumcised.

It was a sign, a mark that was placed upon him to show that he belonged to the covenant community of God. It was a sign, a symbol that was placed upon him that he would be raised as an Israelite.

[11 : 53] That he knew who his people were. baptism is a sign, is a mark for the children of believers that they will be raised in a Christian home.

That they will be raised in a Christian community in the church that they will know who their people are. Seemingly tied up with this whole process of circumcision is the naming of the child.

As they're welcomed into the community, they're officially given their name. And everyone, as they gather, presumes that the child will be called after his father. The child will be called Zechariah.

We need to understand the kind of Israelite mindset here. Names were important. Inheritance was important. Having offspring was important.

It would be your first son who would inherit the kind of family land, the promised land. It would be the first son who was under pressure to carry on the family name. If you died having no children, then your name died out from among the records.

[13 : 02] Your name died out amongst the nations. So as Zechariah has this child here later in life, everyone just assumes well, he's going to call him Zechariah, isn't he?

The family name will have to continue. The family name will have to be propagated. But credit to Elizabeth in the face of this immense social pressure, in the face of this social norms that everyone expects.

What does Elizabeth say? Verse 60, his mother answered, no, he shall be called John. There are certain lists of names that you're not allowed to call your children even today.

You know, I didn't check it before I came out, but I'm pretty sure that Hitler is still on the list of names you're not allowed to call your child, as is Satan, because it's all deemed kind of inappropriate, offensive, naturally.

So, that's almost how the people react here to Elizabeth. They say, well, what do you mean his name's John? There's no one in your family called John.

[14 : 12] You know, you're not carrying on the family name. You're not doing what we expect you to do. God has granted you this gift late in life. God has given you this boy late in life and you're going to waste it by calling him John?

You're going to waste it by not carrying on the family name? Let's sort this out properly. Let's go and ask the Father. Let's see what he wants to call him. Let's see what Zechariah makes of this mad idea.

So they get the writing tablet ready. Look, we've asked Elizabeth. She wants to call him John. What do you think? What do you want to call him?

What's the boy to be called? What's his name? And in verse 63, Zechariah effectively writes, John, John is his name. The ESV here has switched it round slightly, but in the original it's very emphatic.

John is his name. Don't think about calling him anything else. Don't think that Elizabeth's made a mistake. Don't think that we haven't, I was going to say talked about this, but don't think that I haven't written about this.

[15 : 24] his name is John. And in verse 64, his mouth, Zechariah's mouth is opened.

His tongue is loose. He's learned the lesson of obedience. He doubted when the angel told him that first time in the temple and he was struck dumb. But now that he's obeyed God, now that he's fulfilled what God had wanted, his facilities are restored to him.

And after nine months of silence, after nine months of having to write on a tablet, what's the first thing that comes out of Zechariah's mouth?

His tongue was loose, verse 64, and he spoke, praising God. He spoke, blessing God. not Elizabeth, how you doing? Not friends, it's great to see, it's great to have everyone together. No. The praise of God.

[16 : 32] The praise of God is the highest activity we can be engaged in. We see it time and time and time again throughout the scriptures. Once the mute are cured, once the lame are healed, once the eyes of the blind are open, what's the first thing that they do?

They praise God. They give thanks to God for all that he's done for them. Friends, this morning we've been set free from sin.

We're set free from the curse and the penalty of sin. Our praise of God should be resounding. And yet, how often do we come to church with that sense of drudgery?

How often do we come to church if we're honest, dreading it? But the joy that is ours is immense.

The blessings that are ours in Christ are immense. We should be walking, leaping into church Sunday by Sunday, praising God for all that he's done for us.

[17 : 44] The people finish this section with a question. They'd heard all that was done, verse 66. They laid all of these things up in their hearts saying, what then will this child be?

There's something different about this child. There's something unique. There's something that marks him out as special. because the hand of the Lord is with them.

So that's the pressure then, the pressure to call the boy Zechariah after his father, the social pressures of the time. Secondly then, we want to think about praise, the praise that Zechariah offers.

And we see that in verses 67 through 75. The praise of verses 67 through 75. So Zechariah has this kind of, what I would term, similar experience to Elizabeth.

We're told, verse 67, that he's filled with the Holy Spirit just as Elizabeth had been, just as Mary had been the previous week. And he prophesied just as Elizabeth had done as well.

[18 : 58] But we notice this prophecy begins with praise, doesn't it? It ends with a description of what his son's going to do. It ends with who John the Baptist will be. But it begins with the praise of God.

It begins with all that God has done. We see that in verse 68. Don't we? Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Why? Because he has visited his people.

He has redeemed his people. He has bought his people back from slavery. He has freed his people. He has paid the ransom price for them.

He has raised up, verse 69, a horn of salvation for us. He has raised up a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David. The horn was a symbol of power.

It was a symbol of military might, if you like. Animal horns were valued as a symbol of power. It's a similar idea today, of course, isn't it?

[20 : 02] Why do people hunt rhinoceroses to extinction? Why do people hunt elephants to extinction? It's because of the horn. It's because of the tusk. It's because of the perceived power that lies within them.

Many people will use them for medicinal purposes. They think that there's power inherent in the horn. And make no mistake here, Zechariah knows what he's saying.

he's saying that the saviour is coming. He's saying that the messiah is coming. He's saying that king David's greater son is coming. He knows that the day of salvation is at hand.

We see that in verse 70, don't we? God, Zechariah assures us that God spoke by the mouth of his prophets of old. He told them about the salvation that was coming.

that the servant of David would come and free the people. Verse 71, God spoke by the prophets, verse 70, that we should be saved, verse 71, from our enemies, from the hand of all those who hate us.

[21 : 16] Now, when we read that, and we read of the Old Testament prophets saying that, that this is what the Christ would do, that this is what King David's greater son would do, we can see why some people had the wrong idea about Jesus.

We can see why some people assumed that Jesus would be this great military hero. Because, verse 71, he's come to save us from our enemies.

He's come to free us from the hand of our oppressor. As the Jews read that at the time, they would have thought, well, Jesus has come to save us from the Romans. Jesus has come to set us free from this Roman occupation.

That's what Jesus came to do. We can see why people would think that the Messiah would be a political liberator. That he would be the one who frees us from the hand of our oppressor.

Now, of course, Jesus does that, doesn't he? But he doesn't do it in worldly terms. He comes to us today to free us from the hand of our oppressor. He does. He comes today to free us from the hand of our enemy.

[22 : 20] He does. But our enemy is not flesh and blood. Our enemy is the devil. He comes to liberate us today. Of course he does. But he liberates us from sin and death.

Jesus was not a radical revolutionary sent to overthrow the Roman Empire. But Jesus was a radical revolutionary sent to overthrow the reign of sin and death.

death. He came not to fight the Romans but to fight the devil. To overcome not the Romans but overcome the power of sin and death.

Why does the saviour appear? What does he come to do? We're told to show mercy. Verse 72. To show the mercy that was promised to our father Abraham. To remember the covenant that was made with Abraham that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed.

But notice what we read in verse 74 of this prophecy. That he's come to show mercy. That he's come to remember the covenant. He's come to remember the promises.

[23 : 38] So that verse 74. We being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear. in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Why did the Messiah come? Why was this horn of salvation raised? It was so that we might worship God. So that we might serve him.

And notice that little phrase that's used. Might serve him without fear. If we were to see God now in his holiness and his purity in ourselves our response would be fear.

We'd be abject to terror because of God's purity. Because of God's perfection. Because of our imperfection. Our response would be what we see in Isaiah chapter 6.

What does Isaiah say? We're confronted with the sight of the majesty and glory of God. What does he say? Woe is me for I am ruined. For I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

[24 : 53] And yet the saviour arises. The saviour comes so that we might serve God without fear. The saviour comes so that we might be holy and righteous before God this morning.

That's what Jesus came to do even before his birth. Zechariah saw it. He gives us that holiness, that righteousness which is not inherently ours.

So that we might come to know God. You see in myself this morning I am unholy. In myself this morning I am unrighteous and a sinner of the highest degree.

But in Christ I am holy and righteous. In Christ I can stand before the God of the universe who is holy and righteous not on my own merit but on the merit of Christ.

Christ. This prophecy then that Zechariah gives us is one of pure praise. It's giving thanks for all that God has done. It's giving thanks for the way that God has worked.

[26 : 09] It's giving thanks for all that God is about to achieve through the birth of Mary's boy. So we've seen the pressure. We've seen the praise of Zechariah.

Thirdly, finally then we see the preparation. The preparation and we see that in verses 76 through 80. And as we come to verse 76 the tone shifts slightly.

The words that are used change slightly. We see that in verse 76 and you child will be called. No longer is this what God has done for the people in the past.

No longer is this the way that God has acted in the past. This is what God is about to achieve through John's boy. what would become of him?

Well Zechariah understands exactly who his son would be. He would be the prophet of the Most High God. He is the one who will go before the Lord to prepare the way, to make straight the paths.

[27 : 14] He is the one who will give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins. He's the one who will proclaim light to those who sit in darkness.

Think of the prologue to John's gospel. How is he described? John himself was not what? John himself was not the light.

But he came to bear witness about the light, the true light, which is the life of man. John himself wasn't the light.

He wasn't the savior. He wasn't the messiah. But he is the one who points the way. He is the one who guides people to the Christ.

And I love this section because Zechariah has an accurate picture of who his son is. He has an accurate picture of who his son would be. He isn't the savior.

[28 : 29] He isn't the light. But he prepares the way for the light. He recognizes the ministry that's been given to his son and is content with that.

what's our greatest hope for our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren this morning? Maybe you're here and your greatest hope for your offspring is that they would take over the family business.

Maybe your hope for them is that they would never move too far away, that they're always close by. Maybe your hope for them this morning is that they get a good job, get a good education, get a nice spouse and a nice house.

They have a nice life. But let me gently suggest to you this morning that your greatest hope for your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, whoever, should be Zechariah's hope for John.

That they would follow the way of the Lord, that they would do the will of God. Of course, that might mean taking over the family business, that might mean staying close by, that might mean getting a good education and a good career, but it might mean letting them go, sending them overseas as missionaries, sending them as ministers for the church.

[30 : 04] But you see, friends, we can do that with great confidence because of the tender mercy of God, because of the knowledge of salvation that has gone forth.

We can be content with the role that God has given us and given to our children, but the only way we can do that is if our ultimate hope is in the gospel, is if our ultimate hope is in Christ.

Christ, we can send our children off safe in the knowledge, that Christ will not let them go.

Amen. Amen.