

Praise And Prophecy

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 1 and verses 67 to 80. As we continue our studies in the Gospel of Luke and Acts.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Scotland has its own who's who. The who's who is a biographical dictionary published every year detailing short biographies of the 5,000 most famous Scottish people.

Now supposing the publisher got in touch with you and said to you, I want to include you in this year's who's who of Scotland.

So could you please send me 150 words describing who you are, what's important to you, and what your outlook for the world is.

[1 : 16] Now, given that this is probably going to be the only year that you're ever going to be included in Scotland's who's who, you need to make every one of those 150 words count.

every word is important if you are going to be included in Scotland's who you are, what's important to you, and what your outlook for the world is.

This is what you're always going to be remembered for. so every word counts. If I remember right, Donald MacLeod, our preacher a few weeks ago, had an entry about 15 years ago when he said that one of his hobbies was paranoia.

I'm not sure whether that's a bad memory, but I think it is. Well, between Luke chapter 1, verses 67 and 80, God the Holy Spirit gave Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, around 150 words to tell us who he is.

What's important to him and what his outlook on the world is? Zechariah, whose speech had so recently been returned to him, wastes no time.

[2 : 26] He begins, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel. You see, Zechariah doesn't really want to talk about himself at all. His entry in the who's who of first century BC Israel has little to say about who he is, but everything to say about who God is.

Let me set you all a challenge. This afternoon, the only person I think who cannot write in this building is Finn because he's only a few months old.

Why don't you take this afternoon a pencil and paper and write 150 words describing who you are, what's important to you, and what your outlook on life is, and then, when you're finished, compare it with the song of Zechariah here in Luke 1 and see how you fare.

So, as I say, he's got 150 words. Zechariah, therefore, doesn't really want to talk about himself very much. He's got a lot to say about God.

He doesn't really care to be remembered as much as he wants to point away from himself to the God who, through the Messiah Jesus Christ, saves his people from all their sins and gives to them eternal life.

[3 : 51] Now, this song can be divided into two sections. First of all, praise in verses 67 through 75 and then prophecy from verse 76 to verse 80.

This is what the grace of God, which opens our mouths to express salvation, does. That grace doesn't waste a word.

It devotes every word to the praise and the glory of God. This is what the grace of God does. It excites us about Jesus.

It makes us want to take up pen and pencil to write the kind of entry Zechariah did to make Jesus our entry in the who's who. First of all then, from verse 67 to 75, we have praise.

Praise. Now, the key verse in this first part of Zechariah's song is verse 71. That we should be saved from our enemies.

[5 : 02] That's the key phrase in this section. That we should be saved from our enemies. Remember, he's only got 150 words. Every word, therefore, must count.

And so he chooses to speak about that which is most important to him. God's salvation. He's not going to speak about himself and all that he's done.

He wants to speak about God and all he's done in salvation. He's only got a few words. He's got none that he can waste. So what does he choose to spend his words doing?

Praising God for salvation. I wonder, had we only 150 words left to speak in this world, would we do any better than to follow Zechariah's example and praise God for his salvation?

Well, in this song of praise centered around verse 71, Zechariah talks about the three aspects of salvation. Salvation from, salvation by, salvation to.

[6 : 12] Salvation from, salvation by, salvation to. In the first instance, he praises God for salvation from. From. In verse 71, he talks of being saved from our enemies.

From the hand of all those who hate us. And again in verse 74, that we've been delivered from the hand of our enemies. Zechariah knew all about the hatred of, of his enemies.

The Jews had suffered untold bloodshed at the hands of many different invading powers. Their history books are stained with the blood of their forefathers. And Zechariah understood that the salvation God would bring about in the coming of the Messiah would be understood in terms of salvation from such hatred.

From such malice. From such suffering. From such slavery. In his own pre-Christian understanding. We must remember he was, he had a pre-Christian understanding. In his own pre-Christian understanding, Zechariah is praising God for his salvation from. But we're Christians.

[7 : 30] We understand more than Zechariah did. We understand that the great enemies Christ has saved us from are not composed of flesh and blood. They're not mortals such that they can be slain by the sword or conquered by human technology.

The enemies that Christ has saved us from are the penalty and the power of our sin. The blinding influence of Satan and the fear of death.

And through his death and resurrection, our Messiah, Jesus, has saved us from these enemies. His cross deals with the penalty of our sin and the blinding influence of Satan's darkness.

His resurrection deals with the power of sin and the fear of death. Suppose we only had a few words to speak in this world. Would we not use them to praise God for his salvation from?

You'll all remember a few weeks ago there was a story in the news about a caver in England who'd been trapped underground in an incredibly small dark space for many days.

[8 : 47] For days and for hours that injured caver was experiencing the claustrophobia of underground deep darkness with little hope of rescue at all.

When he was finally rescued and brought up to the surface how thankful he must have been for his rescue from the darkness of that tiny wee cave underground.

And in the same way we want to praise God for our salvation from the guilt and shame of sin. From the slavery of sin's influence upon us.

From the crippling fear of death and of nothingness. Zechariah clearly thought so. That's why his song of praise refers so much to salvation from.

Now perhaps there are some among us who have grown shall we say spiritually cold. There are some among us who perhaps find it difficult to praise God.

[9 : 50] Let me recommend to you that you make a list of the terrifying enemies from which God through Christ Jesus has saved you.

But then secondly here Zechariah wants to praise God for how he has worked salvation or as I said earlier salvation by. Salvation by. In verses 68 and 69 he says he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

These are words which are very pregnant with significance and with meaning visited redeemed his people are words which Zechariah and all the religious people of his day would have associated with the exodus from Egypt.

Remember having been kept as slaves in Egypt for 40 years God rescued their ancestors through Moses. He sent 10 plagues he divided the Red Sea he provided for them in the desert and the wilderness he fought their enemies he settled them in the promised land the horn is an image of

power and strength the horns of an animal goading its enemies the strength of an animal is in its horn the actual Greek word here is the word keratin from which we get the substance from which we make our our fingernails it's the Greek word horn he has raised up a keratin of salvation for us its earliest use in the Bible is in Psalm 17 verse 3 my God my rock in whom

I take refuge my shield the horn of my salvation my stronghold but then please notice this point with me the horn of salvation the one through whom God will save his people will be from the house of his servant David now Zechariah isn't singing here about his son John the Baptist because he was descended from the house of Aaron the priest but the Messiah will be descended from the house of David the king let's put this evidence together God is going to perform another Exodus type salvation for his people through a mighty kingly figure who shall be descended from the house of David he will save them from their enemies by the agency of a mighty

[12 : 45] Messiah king and you know we don't really have to work that hard do we to join the dots Luke chapter 1 verse 5 we're told that John the Baptist the son of Zechariah was the lion of Aaron so he is not the mighty Messiah in Luke chapter 1 verse 27 we learn that Joseph betrothed to Mary was of the house of David next week we'll discover that Jesus is born in Bethlehem because it's the city of David and his father Joseph was of that line you know the dots are well and truly joining are they not Zechariah is not referring to his own son he's referring to Mary's boy the child in Mary's womb the one they'll call Jesus no doubt during these months that Mary spent with Elizabeth Zechariah's wife she told him all that the angel Gabriel had told her back in Luke chapter 1 verses 36 through 26 through 38 in which the angel tells her to call the name of her child

Jesus Zechariah is telling us God is going to work salvation for his people through Jesus the new mighty Moses who's going to lead his people from their slavery by his mighty power now again remember Zechariah's understanding it's not as complete as ours but consider this in these verses he is giving an almost inch perfect description of the mission of Jesus God's mighty Messiah he's using these 150 words brilliantly because he's using them to point away from himself and his son to draw attention to Jesus God's mighty saviour again let me ask you have you grown somewhat spiritually cold do you find it difficult to sing the praises of God from your heart let me challenge you to revisit the person and the work of

Jesus Christ the horn of God's salvation examine and study him to hold him up to the light as a jeweler holds up a diamond to the light and see in Jesus all the glory and the love of God but then thirdly Zechariah wants to praise God not just for what he's been saved from and by whom he has been saved but for what he has been saved to for what he has been saved to verses 74 75 that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear and holiness and righteousness all our days over the centuries life had been tough for for Jewish people who wanted to pursue their religion invading cultures I diluted their influence there had been much persecution it was very difficult to be a righteous follower of the

God of Israel national politics and culture wars as we see today had dented the hopes of an Old Testament resurgence of piety devotion to God but in Zechariah's pre-Christian mind this is what salvation unto looks like a world where God's people are free to serve him without persecution and disadvantage a world where the holiness and righteousness of heart purity are commended as virtues and not condemned as vices before we think this is purely an Old Testament wish let's remember that for which the Apostle Paul calls us to pray in 1st Timothy 2 where the reason we are to pray for kings and for all those in high places is that we may live a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way likewise in

Titus 2 we're told that Christ has given himself for us to make us a people of his own possession zealous for good works and then in Ephesians 2 we're told that we have been saved by grace and created anew for good works but then Paul's saying no more than Jesus did again and again when he commands us to let our light shine before a watching world to obey his commands and to live a holy and pure life this is for what we have been saved by the horn of our salvation Jesus Christ that we may serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives if you're spiritually cold today you may be in danger of forgetting that Christ did not die for you on the cross that you may put up your feet sit in comfort and lie back on a feather pillow but that you may serve him in holiness and righteousness all your days tell me albeit imperfectly are you making any attempt to serve

[18 : 20] Christ in holiness and righteousness are you fulfilling that for which Christ has saved you in what ways are you or are you not serving Christ Zachariah has only got 150 words he can't afford

to waffle he spends more than half of them praising God for his salvation from his salvation by his salvation to and I wonder this afternoon as we write our 150 words and I do hope that many of us have a go at this this afternoon will they be about us or will they be about Jesus let me encourage you to follow these applications consider that from which Jesus has saved us from consider the Jesus who has saved us consider what Jesus has saved us for pray these applications through repenting of any spiritual forgetfulness or coldness and resolving that from now on by the grace of Christ will follow the path of Zechariah and praise well secondly and very briefly prophecy from verse 76 to verse 80 prophecy now these verses are one long sentence Zechariah is a very old man by this point but you can kind of catch the flavour of his excitement can't you he can't stop talking and it all comes out in one long flood would that when we're as old as Zechariah was we can still get as excited as he did about salvation filled by the Holy Spirit he talks first about his boy John in verses 76 and 77 and you child will be called the prophet of the most high for you will go before the Lord it's an amazing calling this boy will be the prophet of the most high in the same line as Samuel and Isaiah and Jeremiah there can be no greater calling than that this child should go before the Messiah to make ready his arrival but what shall be the means by which he shall prepare the way for the arrival of the Lord it shall not be by political schemes or military preparedness it shall be by calling the people of Israel to repentance and faith it shall be a spiritual and moral preparation that is what must come first not the trappings of nationhood it must be a repentance of the heart that's what John the Baptist is going to do with his life he's going to preach a message as we'll see in a few weeks time of repentance and faith that which must come first that if anyone should confess their sins and turn away from their sins there will be forgiveness from the Most High the Lord is coming the mighty horde of salvation to win forgiveness and restore repentant sinners to God isn't that the role of any preacher of the word so to preach Christ to bring people people to a sense of their need of forgiveness in fact isn't that the role of every Christian your name might not be John the Baptist you may not have had Old Testament prophecies directly made about you but you have the same commission that John the Baptist did to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins our commission same as that of John the Baptist is to point people to Jesus to the Lord to the mighty Messiah of God through whom God has visited and redeemed his people by the cross and by the empty tomb we've been called to this task and lifestyle we've been equipped with a message and with the Holy Spirit's power so let's go follow John the Baptist's footsteps but then Zechariah moves on to an altogether greater prophecy in words of poetic brilliance he speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as being the sunrise visiting us from on high the world darkened in sin and suffering sunrise is about to come even as Mary the mother of our Lord begins to struggle with the labour pains so the son of God's mercy is rising upon the world not even Tennyson or Wordsworth at the very best could have ever dreamt up a more powerful image of the coming of Christ and the impact he will have upon this darkened sinful and suffering world it shall be as the sunrise which visits us from on high

[23 : 55] God's tender mercies God's compassion impels him forces him shall we even say to send his one and only son who by his mighty strength shall save his people from their enemies he will give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death he will guide our feet into the way of peace the sun shall rise it shall break the darkness and rising and in rising those who sit in darkness will see and those who are lost in confusion will be guided to the way of peace such will be the life and the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ he'll give light to the outcast the leper the demon possessed he'll guide the confused the despairing into the way of peace consider all the miracles of Jesus consider all the sermons of

Jesus we're going to be studying together as we make our way through the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts they're all summarized in this one magnificent statement he shall give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and guide our way into the path of peace now as we close I want to challenge two groups of people among us first I want to ask are there any here this morning who find themselves sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death are there any here who are confused whose hearts are restless and unfulfilled ■■■ish soT

You'll find peace, nor else than Jesus Christ, the horn of salvation, who is the prince of peace. So you need to come today.

And you need to come now. Put your faith in Jesus. Come to him with your sins. With your sufferings. With all your shadows. And let him give you life and light in him.

And then secondly, a word to those of us who are parents. Parents. We're living in very worrying times.

[26 : 35] At school and home, children are now being taught. They are number one. In effect, our schools are teaching our children to be self-centered.

Self-absorbed. No bad thing, you see. Look after number one. Consider Zechariah. Oh, he loved his son, John the Baptist.

But for Zechariah, John the Baptist was only the warm-up act to the most important person to ever live. Jesus Christ. God's mighty Messiah. Later in life, John the Baptist would point to Jesus and say of him, He must increase.

I must decrease. Tell me. From whom did John learn such an unselfish attitude? Who did John the Baptist learn from that Jesus was more important than him?

He learned it from his dad. From Zechariah. From the very beginning of his life, John the Baptist heard Zechariah, his dad, talking about how Jesus must come first in his life.

[27 : 52] The importance of Jesus. You know, by the way in which we so idolize our children by our life choices, by the use of our time, are we teaching them that they are more important to us than Jesus?

Or are we teaching them from the very first, by our words, by our works, by our choice of activities on the Lord's Day, for example, that Jesus must come first, not just to ourselves, but for them also. But in Scotland's book of who's who, it's not important that their names ever appear, but that Jesus Christ gets all the glory of their lives. Don't make an idol of your children.

Because in so doing, you'll turn them away from Christ. Rather, if you've got 150 words, or 1,050,000 words, by example, and by word, consistently point them to the Jesus who alone is the sunrise, who has visited them from on high.

The truly special one, who has won salvation for us. The one in whom we, our children, our children's children, will find light and peace.

[29 : 26] Let us pray. We worship you, O Lord, for this passage of your word. We pray for those among us who have grown spiritually cold, that you would help us to consider what we have been saved from, who we have been saved by, and what we have been saved to.

We also pray, O Lord, that you would grant us this fresh vision of the supremacy and primacy of Jesus in our lives, that our chief end in life.

Well, according to Darwinism, it is to procreate and to produce a new generation. But according to your word, it is to glorify you and enjoy you forever. Help us, O Lord, in our parenting to teach our children that Christ must come first.

He comes first to us and he must to them also. And so, Lord, be with us and bless your word. In Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen.