

Hope in God's Mercy

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Today's readings are taken from Luke chapter 1, from verse 57 to Eli, the birth of John the Baptist.

! Now the time came to Elizabeth to give birth, and the Shebor's son, and her neighbors and relatives hear that the Lord has shown great mercy to her, and that they rejoiced with her. And on earth day, they came to circumcise the child, and they would have called him Zachariah after his father, but his mother answered, No, he shall be called John. And they said to her, No one of your relatives is called by this name. And they made a sign 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.

[1 : 08] He spoke, blessing God. And the fear came on all their neighbors. And all of these things were talked about through all the here country of Judea.

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, Zachariah, was filled with his 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 prophet from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us, to show the mercy, to show the mercy promise to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he saw 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.

[2 : 32] And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give knowledge of salvation his people in the righteousness of their sins, because of the tenderness of God, whereby the sun rise 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 that the child grew and became strong in the spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the days of public appearance to Israel. This morning we continue our series, topic, hope in God.

And more specifically, today we will be talking about hope in God's mercy.

There are many things that you and I have in common. No matter how old you are, no matter how old I am, all of us, we need God's mercy.

We are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world. We need mercy.

[4 : 15] The good news is that we have, we can hope in God's mercy.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the privilege that we have to share your word this morning.

We pray, O Lord, that you would illuminate your word.

Father, we pray that you would make it clear to us. We pray, O Lord, that you will build our faith as we listen to your word today.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. Three times in the passage that we just read, Luke used the term mercy.

mercy. And each time he used that term mercy, he was making a distinct point. The main thought of the scripture that we read is this.

[5 : 35] We can have hope in God's specific, promised, and fulfilled mercy.

I believe that that is the essence of what Luke writes to us in these few verses.

That we can hope in God's specific, promised, and fulfilled mercy. Today, we are going to consider this passage along three clear lines.

First, we are going to consider the very specific mercy that Luke writes about in verse 57 of chapter 1.

Luke writes in verse 57, Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

[7 : 10] Luke said that the Lord, in verse 58, had shown great mercy to Elizabeth. Before we delve deeply into these words of Luke's, let's get a sense of what it is Luke means when he refers, when he uses the word mercy.

Luke here is referring to the compassion of God.

He's referring to God's faithfulness. And Luke is saying to us that God had compassion on Elizabeth.

And here Luke is giving us a very specific instance of God's mercy. This was not God showing his mercy to anyone but Zachariah and Elizabeth.

That's the point. That God showed specific mercy to Zachariah and Elizabeth.

[8 : 41] And Luke describes it as great mercy. But there is another sense that the word mercy might be used, and we're going to see several of them.

But even as we consider the specific sense in which the word mercy might be used, we think about how it is that you and I receive something that we are not entitled to.

Or another way of saying it, perhaps we are entitled to be judged or to be punished for something, but instead, mercy, instead, forgiveness is our lot.

I want to talk about both of these within the context of this first point. By specific mercy, we mean that the mercy described here, as we said, was specific to Elizabeth and to Zachariah.

Perhaps others had similar experiences, but the text is specific to Elizabeth in the same way that you and I experience God's specific mercy.

[10 : 19] Elizabeth and Zachariah were beyond childbearing age. Some commentators say that she was perhaps at least 60 years old.

Imagine that. Imagine a woman 60 years old having a child. But this was a particularly challenging experience for Elizabeth.

The fact that she and Zachariah did not have children. Indeed, in verse 25 of Luke chapter 1, she described her situation as a reproach, meaning that it was shameful.

She was ashamed that she had no children. It's interesting how Luke introduces us to Elizabeth and Zachariah.

It's as if he wanted us to see some particular things with respect to them. We first encounter them in chapter 1.

[11 : 42] Luke describes there the fact that these two individuals were godly people. And he said of them that they kept the commandments, yet they did not have what they desired.

And he also talked about the fact that their lineage was such that they were, they could both trace their ancestry down to the priesthood, both of them.

So these godly people, godly heritage, found themselves in a circumstance where they were ashamed, where God did not, it would appear to them, that God was not hearing their prayer.

And it really begs the question, how many of us have been right there? Right where Zachariah and Elizabeth were?

Living godly lives, praying constantly to the Lord, and asking the Lord for something specific. And it appears that the Lord is deaf to our prayers.

[13 : 34] It's interesting that these two people felt that way. But how many of you see, how many of you can appreciate this account that we see in Luke chapter 1?

That perhaps while they were in doubt, perhaps while they were unaware, perhaps while they were wondering, they did not realize that God was working.

He was working it out. And as you consider, as you read this account in Luke, it was as if things lined up.

And you say, hmm, suppose their prayer was answered when they prayed it. Suppose when Elizabeth was just 25 years old and they prayed this prayer and the Lord answered their prayer, then perhaps they would not have been the parents of John.

Isn't it amazing how things walk out in our life? And remember now, we're talking about hope. We're talking about hope.

[15 : 04] And so we've got to reflect on this word hope as we consider this account in Scripture. And so the essence of the point is, this account is telling us, given what we know, how we know this story ends, it's telling us that even when our prayers appear not to be answered, that we can hope in God because He knows what is best for us, because His plans for us are better than our aspirations for ourselves, because He knows and He sees what we are going through.

Undoubtedly, they prayed for children and felt that God was not hearing them despite the fact that they were serving God.

Here it is. Zechariah was a priest. He was serving others. living a godly life.

And perhaps He, I don't know whether He also preached, but if He did, perhaps He, one Sabbath, perhaps He had to preach on the faithfulness of God.

But when you look at this account, and the Bible says that one day, earlier in this account, that Zechariah, He was not naturally supposed to be where He was.

[17 : 09] He was not naturally, it was not absolutely certain that Zechariah would be the one who would be lighting the candles.

Instead, the Bible tells us that they cast lots. it was not predetermined. It is so interesting when we look at these circumstances, when we look at what happened and transpired in Zacharias' and Elizabeth's life, and we think that all of these things are happenstance.

But behind what appeared to be happenstance, God was at work. And so today, the message to us is how many of us can look back at our own lives and recount the times when we say, you know, listen, I did not think that the Lord would have heard this or that prayer.

I was down on my luck, down to my very last. But God came through just in time. And in fact, I imagine if he had done it sooner, what the circumstances might have been.

But their desires aligned, when their desires aligned with God's purpose, God had, he revealed, he manifested his compassion towards them.

[18 : 56] God shows us mercy. He shows us compassion every day in the rising of the sun, health, our well-being.

indeed, someone says that his mercies are new every morning.

This is what Lamentations chapter 3 beginning at verse 22 says. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in him. The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

[20 : 07] It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. it is good for a man that he bear the yoke of his youth.

These words are true, brothers and sisters. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. And Luke wants us to see that.

Luke wants us to see that the Lord's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. and the Lord is faithful.

He was faithful to Zachariah and to Elizabeth, even perhaps after they had forgotten their prayers, even when Zachariah questioned and doubted.

if you're like me, you can look over your life even in this year, 2023, and see that it is painted with God's mercy.

[21 : 17] I look at my life and I see that it's painted with God's mercy. mercy that I don't deserve.

Mercy that I did not expect. God's been merciful to us. And if he's been merciful to you, I would encourage you to let that truth give you comfort, not only for today, but also for tomorrow.

because you know that you and I, we have a tendency to forget. We cannot talk about God's specific mercy without mentioning the mercy we receive when justice is truly what we deserve.

Amen. In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 4, Paul writes that God is rich in mercy.

He's rich in mercy. Justice is what we deserve. When you and I sin, justice is what we deserve.

[22 : 43] But God gives us mercy instead. Oh, I would rather have mercy than justice. Indeed, David said, listen, I would rather have the Lord's punishment than man's punishment.

Because he knew that God is a merciful God. Lord, teach us to see mercy, to see it in our lives.

Teach us to seek mercy. Teach us to embrace mercy. And also, Lord, teach us to reflect mercy as you bestow it on us.

yes, by recounting Zacharias' and Elizabeth's story, Luke reminds us that God's mercy is specific and it's individualistic.

We can hope in God's mercy, even in his promised mercy. And that takes us to point number two.

[24 : 06] the Bible tells us, and you will recall, that Zachariah, who had been dumb, unable to speak, since the angel Gabriel announced the pregnancy of Elizabeth, that he now speaks in the verses that we read.

and in the verses 67, in verses 67 through 79, is what we call Zacharias' prayer, sorry, song, and in some quarters it's known as the Benedictus.

In verse 72 of his song, Zacharias speaks of mercy having been promised.

Let's take a look at what he says in verse 72. But let's read up from verse 68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.

Now bear in mind now, this is after his son had been born, 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.

[25 : 49] And then he writes, Luke records in verse 72, to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

We can hope in God's mercy not only because it's specific to us, but also because God's mercy was promised to us.

And Luke writes of this promised mercy. Luke writes that it was promised by, it was promised to Abraham and the prophets prophesied about it.

A careful reading of the term mercy in this context would show that it goes beyond the provision that, or the definition that we talked about earlier.

Instead, the word is used in the sense of God's promise of mercy, a promise of redemption. The word used here is giving us a sense of God's promise of redemption.

[27 : 23] So God shows mercy to us by redeeming us. And that's the promise. Zacharias sets out that the promise was made long time ago, hundreds of years ago.

to Abraham specifically, he says that this promise was made to him. Thousands of years prior, the Lord promised Abraham that he would bless him and his seed, and through his seed would all the earth be blessed.

And Zacharias says to us that this mercy, that this promised mercy is now being revealed. And we heard last week when Pastor preached and he referred to Galatians 3.16 that the seed that the Lord spoke to Abraham about is very, very clear.

This is what Galatians 3.16 says. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say and to offsprings, referring to many, but to one, and to your offspring who is Christ.

The promise of redemption, the promise of mercy was referring specifically to Christ. And then Luke records that in this song that was sung by Zachariah that he says that the prophets spoke about this promise, this promise of mercy.

[29 : 31] Indeed, the entirety of the Old Testament is about this promise of mercy. It points to a Messiah who is Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

One of the prophets who prophesied about this mercy was Isaiah. And he wrote, behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son until call his name Emmanuel.

Other prophets prophesied about the place of his birth, the nature of his birth, his ministry, and his death. And of course, you all know that we receive redemption because of his death.

And here we find this prophecy of Isaiah about his death. Isaiah writes that surely he has borne our grace and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

[31 : 08] Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Promised mercy. Lord prophesied that this mercy that you and I now are the beneficiaries of will happen.

And Zachariah in his song praises the Lord that he had promised mercy. He had promised that one day this mercy would be ours.

Indeed, when we consider the Old Testament and when we consider the words of the Lord to Moses, more specifically when we consider how the Lord instructed Moses to build a tabernacle, a sacred place where his presence would dwell, he revealed to Moses the design of a mercy seat, a symbol of his mercy and forgiveness.

[32 : 45] Sacrifices, he instructed Moses, were to be made to atone for sins and the high priest was designated to carry out the duties in service to God.

And so every year there would be sacrifices. But the New Testament explains that those instructions, that those promises, if you will, were about Christ who would be born to become our high priest and would himself become our sacrifice, not annually, but once and for all.

And in doing so, he would extend mercy and grace to those who believe. we can hope in God's mercy, which was promised and is now fulfilled.

This leads me to my third and final point. And here is what Zachariah writes about this point, chapter 1, starting in verse 76.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, 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.

[35 : 00] Zachariah says that this mercy that was prophesied is now realized, is now being realized, it's now being fulfilled, and John, his son, is exhibit A of this reality, because he would be a prophet of the Most High, and he will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

And Zachariah says, this fulfilled prophecy is an illustration of God's tender mercy towards us. This one, John, who was to prepare the way for the prophesied one. John, who was to preach repentance.

John had a singular mission to prepare the way for Christ.

Zachariah describes this mercy. He says, it's tender mercy. Brothers and sisters, our God, who is all-powerful, who is all-knowing, who is God all by himself, Zachariah says of him that his mercy is tender, that he is tender towards you and me, that he condescends, loving, that he is forgiving, that he is loving.

[37 : 03] Zachariah says that the sunrise shall visit us from on high. He didn't say that this would be a candle. He said that this is going to be a sunrise from on high.

And the sunrise will be such that it will give light to those who sit in darkness darkness and in the shadows of death. Jesus is going, Zachariah says, will transform the world.

His birth would be different, unlike any other birth. Going to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadows of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace, the way of peace with God.

So we come from the place where this man and his woman and his wife were in doubt, wondering about whether they would have a child, to a place where now Zachariah sees that God answered his prayer.

God did in fact hear and answer his prayer. And indeed God is using his son to make way for Emmanuel.

[38 : 43] Brothers and sisters, we can have confidence in God's specific promise and fulfilled mercy.

I don't know what your circumstance is today, but can I tell you something else about this account that might have escaped you? the Bible tells us that Elizabeth's neighbors, that they referred to her as barren.

Did you see that specifically? They referred to her specifically as barren, as empty, as not being able to produce.

And she regarded this as shameful. But one wonders, one wonders whether there might be similar circumstances in your life today.

One wonders whether there might be a circumstance, a situation where that you've taken to the Lord and it seems broken, it seems empty, it seems barren, and others perhaps see it for what it appears to be, barren and empty and broken.

[40 : 30] Can I tell you that these words of Luke's remind us that we can have hope in the Lord, that we can take our burdens to the Lord, and as the psalm says, we can leave them there.

We can have confidence in God's mercy. God's mercy. We can have confidence in His specific mercy.

We can have confidence in His promised and His fulfilled mercy, that we are His children, that our sins are forgiven.

Yes, we know that at the pinnacle of God's mercy is the grace that is extended to us through Jesus Christ. we know although often we doubt that His mercies are new every morning.

That's what I want to tell you. I want to tell you that His mercies are truly new every morning. And even when you wake up feeling that oh my goodness, things are not going as I expect them to, just know that His mercies, His word says, that His mercies are new every morning.

[41 : 49] that the situation that you are in today, His mercies are still new every morning. And the Bible tells us that we ought to have hope, that we can have hope in God because His mercies are new every morning.

We ought to live our lives daily reliant on God's mercy. There's a song that we used to sing, I think I haven't heard us sing it in a while, but the song was written by Keith and Christian Getty, His mercy is more.

And some of the words of the song are these, what love could remember no wrong we have done. Omniscient all-knowing, he counts not their sum, thrown into a sea without bottom or shore, our sins they are many, but His mercy is more.

What patience would wait us, would wait as we constantly roam, what Father so tender is calling us home.

He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor, our sins there are many, His mercy is more. What riches of kindness He lavished on us.

[43 : 22] His blood was the payment, His life was the cost. He stood neath a debt we could never afford. Our sins there are many, His mercy is more.

Then the song ends with these words, praise the Lord, His mercy is more, stronger than darkness, new every morn.

Our sins they are many, His mercy is more. Our sins they are many, His mercy is more. Let us pray. Father, Lord, we thank you for this reminder in song that your mercy is more. Our sins though many, your mercy is more.

Oh, Lord, we pray that each one, every person carrying this message today. We'll be mindful of this truth that not one of us can go so far that we are outside of your reach.

[44 : 34] Lord, let us remember that your mercy is new every morning, every morning, oh Lord. Lord, cause us to live our lives aware of this truth that you will not let us go, that your mercy, oh Lord, is more.

Thank you, Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.