

Luke 1:57-80 - Breaking the Silence

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. Thank you all. Beautiful song with some of the words of our passage this morning. If you'll turn with me to Luke chapter 19, verse 13.

It's Luke 19, 13. Thank you. Somebody got that. Just kidding. We're not that far into Luke yet. Some of you are football fans, so I thought I'd just make sure you were awake. We're actually in Luke chapter 1 still. That would be a better place to turn and leave the football behind for now. The rest of you who are quoting scores to me. We are jumping back into Luke this morning. Last time we were here, we looked at Mary's song of praise.

[1 : 04] The Magnificat. We saw her overflowing joy in what God is doing here. And the excitement just continues to build this week. As we show up for a circumcision and the Father starts to sing and prophesy.

Next Sunday, all the excitement and anticipation culminates in the birth of Jesus. The classic Christmas story of Luke 2 that you know and love.

So next Sunday, we're going to be celebrating Christmas in September. That's going to be during our worship service next week. We've decided to forego the trees. There will not be trees decorating.

But you can come dressed festively and red and green if you would like. We will definitely have a time with our children complete with Christmas gifts. And we'll be singing Joy to the World and various other songs that you will love.

You don't want to miss next Sunday. It's going to be a great chance to celebrate Christmas right in the middle of the fall. It'll be a lot of fun. But as we build towards that peak of joy here early in Luke's Gospel, listen to Zechariah's joy in his song here.

[2 : 14] We'll read beginning at verse 57. This is God's Word. Luke 1, 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. 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 neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What then will this child be?

[3 : 15] 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 and 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 and 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 day of his public appearance to Israel. Will you pray with me?

Holy Spirit, we ask that you would come this morning as you came and filled Zechariah. Would you come and fill my heart and our hearts that we might see and hear and understand your word?

We come not to hear a man, but to hear our God, the one who is all sufficient for us, who has given us his word. And so we pray, speak, Lord.

[5 : 13] Your servants are listening. Might we hear your word? In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. For decades and decades, you could yell and scream and make all sorts of noises in Washington, D.C.

And nobody in Baltimore, Maryland, would hear anything at all. But that all changed on May 24th, 1844, when Samuel Morse sat in the U.S. Capitol building, tapped softly on his new machine, and sent a message received by his assistant sitting in Baltimore.

Immediately, it got to him. The silence had been broken and a new era of communication begun with the telegraph machine. The content of the message that Morse sent was equally promising. What hath God wrought? Morse wrote. He understood some of the significance of what was happening. It was only 32 years later, March 10, 1876, Alexander Graham Bell made the first phone call from one room of his Boston lab to another.

In this iconic image, he's making that call to his assistant and saying a little less profoundly, Mr. Watson, come here.

[6 : 40] I want to see you. Previously to the telephone, his assistant would have been sitting in that other room in complete silence, hearing nothing at all when Graham Bell called to him.

But the telephone broke that silence and changed everything, right? Now you can't imagine living without a telephone or several carried around by people you know and love.

A long, long wait for that silence to be broken. Many centuries of human history when that was not possible. There's a long silence broken in the passage that we just read, but it's not a neutral silence like those with Morse and Graham Bell.

And it's not a peaceful silence like the silence after the kids are asleep and you sit down. Oh, relief. It's not that kind of silence.

But rather an aching silence. Desperate to hear something. To get help. And yet remaining in dark silence.

[7 : 54] Never hearing anything. Day after day. Silence. It's more like the situation faced by 33 Chilean miners just six years ago when their mine collapsed and they were trapped 2,300 feet, almost half a mile underground.

trapped in darkness and silence that for 17 days was filled by only increasing discouragement and despair.

And then one day a drill bit breaks into that silence and you've heard the story, you've watched the news, the drill bit comes in, they're able to send a message back up.

69 total days trapped before international efforts were able to bring all 33 of them back safely above ground to the light of day for the first time in 10 weeks.

Can you imagine? Stuck down there together. You may remember the sign that said it all when they came out. Mission accomplished Chile.

[9 : 05] It said. What a difference, right? When light finally breaks into darkness. When sound finally breaks into silence.

Changes everything, doesn't it? There's an obvious silence in this passage with Zechariah.

Zechariah has been silent for nine months because of his unbelief at the angel's promise of a son.

And it's highlighted by the awkwardness and the tension surrounding the naming of the child in the first part of the passage. Zechariah has been awaiting in silence the fulfillment of God's promise.

And when he obediently writes that the child's name is John, God opens his mouth and he begins to praise and prophesy. Immediately his mouth was open, his tongue loosed, he spoke blessing God.

A beautiful picture of those who believe God's word getting to declare his glory to others, right?

Many people witness this amazing scene unfold.

[10 : 13] Word begins to spread all around that something unique is happening in the hills of Judea. Zechariah has been awaiting in silence the fulfillment of God's promise.

And that highlights in this passage the deeper silence being broken here. God's people have been awaiting in silence the fulfillment of God's promises, haven't they?

Israel is used to hearing from God with great regularity, aren't they? One prophet after another just flip through the Old Testament. Book after book is prophet after prophet to God's people.

Speaking God's message to them. Offering the hope that God's promises will be fulfilled. He's coming to rescue his people. But for 400 years now there's been silence.

No recorded prophecy. Longer than the United States has been a nation. Generation after generation. Ache and longing.

[11:19] Walking in darkness, the prophet Isaiah says. Cries of desperation, but still silence. No new message from God.

And this is the message that bursts out of Zechariah when his lips are loosed. The message that that silence is being broken. His words in this glorious song often called the Benedictus reveal that God is finally and definitively breaking into the silence and fulfilling all his promises.

An amazing, life-changing, world-altering message beyond what hath God wrought. The content of what Zechariah is saying.

He's so overcome with joy he can't contain his praise. It's overflowing. Verse 68, Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, for he's visited and redeemed his people.

Try to put yourself in his shoes for just a moment this morning. Just one Israelite priest who's experienced the silence of waiting on God to fulfill his promises.

[12:37] Not just for nine months. For his whole life. Imagine yourself as a priest like Zechariah. Day after day.

Your whole life laboring before God. You've read the promises going back over 2,000 years to your ancestors.

You know the great stories of deliverance from Egypt and others but you're not seeing it. Or hearing it. You're back in the promised land, yes, but under Roman rule.

You're performing sacrifices hour by hour, day after day, trying to have faith and wondering if you'll ever hear from God. If there will ever be the promised fulfillment of all the blood you've shed.

The restoration of your people you've been hoping for and thought would come. You've got the really old scrolls. You read them but God seems to have gone silent as far as you can tell.

[13:42] And then God speaks. And at first of course you hardly know what to think, what to do with it. But as His Spirit unfolds before you over months of your own silence, the meaning of the angel's amazing promise.

You begin to see that there's a grander story unfolding than just you and your wife having a son. It's the hope of Israel coming to fruition. This is the culmination.

This is going to be mission accomplished. God has broken the silence. He is rescuing us and He's fulfilling all His promises. That's what's happening.

This is it. The big moment we've all been waiting for in silence. Let's think back for a few minutes as Zechariah does into the story of God's people in the Old Testament.

The good news is that God is finally and definitively breaking into the silence and fulfilling His promises. But what promises?

[14:48] What's happening? What's about to be fulfilled through Zechariah's son and the one for whom He prepares the way? You hear as you read through His song explicit Old Testament references.

You'll recognize the names, right? But really every verse is full of these references. Almost every word is pointing back to something. I'm going to walk through just a few chronologically. But here's the point of all of it up front.

All of these Old Testament threads. All these things that seem separate and from a long time ago. All of the promises and the workings of God with His people are coming together now.

He's saying. This is where it's all happening. This is what it's all been pointing to. Let's go back to Abraham. Verse 72.

To show the mercy promised to our fathers to remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham. Go back there for a minute. God establishes His covenant of grace with Abraham.

[15:54] His relationship with His people. He does it with Abraham all the way back to Genesis 12. The Lord says to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the

land I will show you and I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. God ratifies this covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 as he passes through the animals while Abraham sleeps.

and then in Genesis 17 he comes to him again and says I'm going to establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

What has God promised Abraham in this great gracious covenant that he's entered into with him? perhaps most obviously a land right?

A place to call home which indicates rest and provision for his people. Secondly a people a great nation as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore right?

[17 : 21] Finally let's call it relationship. God promises to be their God generation after generation to have this gracious and unique relationship with his special people and the outcome of all of this of course the result of God's unique relationship with Abraham and his descendants is that all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

That's God's promise it's going to be for everyone everywhere it's big stuff right? Well as those promises develop through the Old Testament there are ups and downs with how they seem to be turning out.

Abraham's descendants the nation of Israel gets taken into captivity in Egypt not the promised land Abraham has been shown but while they're struggling there for generations in slavery interestingly we see that it's there that Israel begins to grow into a great nation right?

so numerous that the Egyptians are afraid of them just note in that that God often works to fulfill his promises in the midst of pain and darkness where he may otherwise seem distant and silent he's working and he's fulfilling his promises the exodus deliverance of God's people out of Egypt is yet another thread referenced by Zechariah multiple times verse 68 blessed be the Lord the God of Israel he's visited and redeemed his people a reference to the exodus what is he doing?

he's delivered us that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us verse 74 that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days do you hear the echoes of let my people go that they may worship me that's the deliverance Zechariah is talking about God's famed action on his people's behalf bringing them away from their enemies in Egypt but there have been other enemies for God's people since Egypt haven't there Zechariah says God is showing up again to redeem that's what's happening it's like Egypt all over again he's delivering his people well they leave Egypt and God's people arrive in the promised land after a long trip but they struggle to thrive there without a leader time and again they wander after other gods and they suffer defeat at the hands of other nations in Yahweh himself fighting against them at that time judges says repeatedly in that book there's a refrain over and over at that time there was no king in Israel everyone did what was right in his own eyes over and over again

[20 : 34] God's people wandering away from him with no one to lead them back to him well eventually God gives them a king and another promise verse 69 references one of these kings he's 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 David a king to lead God's people after their God right who follows after his heart and a promise given to David that his descendants would reign over Israel forever remember 2 Samuel 7 what does God say to David I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body I'll establish his kingdom he shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me your throne shall be established forever another promise to God's people through

King David a king offered the promise of protection power and influence as a great nation and through the prophets who keep talking of David's line over and over it's the hope of Israel and a king in the line of David who will reign forever but when Zachariah is here that's that's yet another promise that seems to have faded the line has been lost in the shuffle over the years hasn't it as the people have wandered from God time and again not just the people but even the Davidic monarch has been taken into captivity away from the promised land he doesn't seem to be ruling at all maybe we're not such a great nation after all and where is the God of gods who promised a special relationship with us we don't feel so special in Babylon under the thumb of a cruel king for those

Israelites who've listened to the prophets over the years the promise is that God will indeed work despite the failures of his people despite their wandering God will be faithful to his promises he will bring a remnant back from exile the prophets say to rebuild the nation in the promised land with a unique relationship with Yahweh and featuring a Davidic king reigning eternally over God's people and all of it happening for the sake of the good and the blessing of all the nations the Messiah is coming the Messiah is coming the Messiah is coming the prophets keep holding out that hope this is how all the promises will finally and definitively be fulfilled for generations now that's that's what prophets have been saying there's one to come the promised king will come he will redeem he will rule justly he will deliver

God's people and there will be one to prepare the way for him the prophets say they've been saying this for generations then 400 years of silence and now at long last Zachariah says that one to prepare the way that's my boy that's my son verse 76 you child will be called the prophet of the most high for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways pretty weighty words for an eight day old child listen to what Zachariah is prophesying God is breaking into the silence he has remembered he has acted he is keeping his promises to Abraham and redeeming his people like he did in Exodus sending the king in David's line it's happening right now and why how because of the unassailable character of Yahweh he remembers his covenant verse 72 and remembering for God is not merely an intellectual activity is it he takes action remembering means he acts on their behalf all of this because of his tender mercy verse 78 his faithful covenant keeping love don't you love that phrase his tender mercy he is a God who brings salvation forgiveness of sins why because he is full of tender mercy because he sees the broken and the hurting and those in darkness and he gently and compassionately stoops to rescue a weak and needy people verse 78 continues the Messiah will dawn that's what it means will come to us as light into our darkness as a voice of hope into the silence of our despair the fulfillment of all the promises of this merciful faithful

God who's entered into covenant with us and is now keeping all his promises do you see why the excitement and joy are building here just in the first chapter of Luke the king is coming now to those of us waiting in silence walking in darkness a light has dawned all the threads are coming together here and now our God is confirming his special relationship he will give us the rest and provision and protection and blessing will flow once more to many wonderful news that Zechariah proclaims so what about us have you ever been in a place where God seemed silent where you were longing waiting to hear him speak where you were waiting and waiting for him to show up and fulfill his promises

[27 : 28] Francis Schaeffer famously wrote of God he is there and he is not silent that's true in a great book but sometimes it feels like he is silent doesn't it you can feel the darkness and silence in your own heart and life and you don't hear the voice of God or see his light I remember feeling that way myself after we miscarried our first pregnancy the grief of the loss the disappointment of joyous expectations dashed the darkness and the pain that we felt acutely then I remember longing for God to speak for him to speak something that would give me hope something

I could hold on to for him to speak something that would allow me to give comfort to my heartbroken wife that that wasn't trite that didn't belittle our pain but but that helped we cried a lot we slept a lot and we cried some more maybe you can recall a time like that in your own life maybe God seems silent because your adult child has wandered away after years of prayer and instruction from you and you're longing for God to remember his promises and act on your behalf maybe it's the dark silence of depression that you can't even explain but it feels like you live in a soundproof box that no light can penetrate and no hope can ever come in you're just stuck there maybe you're indulging in sin right now and something you know is running away from

God but there seems to be no hope of turning around you feel you've left him so far behind and he doesn't seem to be calling you back anyway you don't hear that maybe life has become so busy that you haven't heard from God in a long while the constant noise around you makes you feel you you've had silence from him since shortly after you met him years ago maybe all the way back in college and then life happened and you never hear from him anymore maybe for you it's that you've never heard God speak at all as far as you're concerned he's never broken his silence you've been in and around church for for years maybe you've sat in these pews many times and you've you've prayed prayers in the middle of a worship service and they've they've sounded like God if you're even there I want to believe you're there but I

I just don't know what would it even sound like if God spoke into your life perhaps he is speaking to your heart right now maybe you're hearing his voice telling you that in Jesus he has spoken into this world and into your life the writer to the Hebrews starts his letter this way listen to these words Hebrews chapter 1 at verse 1 long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world the son is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature and he upholds the universe by the word of his power after making purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs he has spoken to us by his son and the rest of the passage says there is no other no better no greater message that he could send for us to hear even if he sent an angel to us this morning the message would not be better than the one he has sent the light into our darkness the voice of hope into our silence is Jesus himself who entered our world who endured our pain and came to speak life and hope and joy to us he's the radiance of the glory of God the exact imprint of his nature he made purification for all of our sins mission accomplished that's what

God's speaking to us in him I've done it it's finished I often sit around hoping to hear a new message from God you may do the same thing hoping that he'll speak something that will change me looking for a new message a new direction but but he often speaks that very old message in a fresh way when we are grieving that miscarriage over time he spoke to us through friends who came and spoke words of comfort from the pain that they had experienced that was similar to ours they loved us cried with us and offered us that hope I wanted to hear God speak why to tell me why it happened

[34 : 19] I wanted a promise from God of when things were going to change when we would have another child how things were going to happen that's what I wanted him to speak but he didn't then he reminded me from his word in the mouths of his people that he loved me that in Jesus he did exactly what Ron celebrated with us earlier in the service that he entered our pain and bore our sorrows that he had done that and the pain didn't just all of a sudden go away in that moment but I heard that old message break into my silence in a fresh way because all God's promises all of them are yes in Jesus 2nd Corinthians 1 remember he's not just one message that God's sending out there he is

God's definitive message and God still speaks perhaps that same message in a fresh way to you God still speaks maybe this morning in Zachariah's song God is speaking to you maybe for the first time this morning you can hear him saying that he loves you so much that he sent his son to die for you the word made flesh speaking to you and now his written word speaking clearly to you this morning don't ignore his voice don't miss his call to you there's no greater message he could give you than Jesus himself he has sent his son for you his promise is that in doing that he's announcing blessing to many who don't deserve it who could never earn it to all kinds of people that he will welcome into his family because of his beloved son maybe you've heard

God before but you're so stuck in your sin that you need to hear again in Jesus that there is forgiveness of sins and a relationship with a God who promises to fix the mess you're dealing with himself so that he can be your God and the God of your children after you too that is the kind of relationship he wants he promises your sin is not too big even though it feels that way to you he crossed heaven and earth in Jesus to reach you to cleanse you even now he stands at the door and knocks do you hear him calling you back won't you turn back to him there's life there and sin leads to death he says come back child come home to your father busy one hear

God in Jesus speaking his promise of rest to your weary soul you and I must slow down regularly to hear it it's the only way I've been able to figure it out because I'm one of those busy ones where my life moves quickly and I love to function on that I have to slow down slow down open his word listen to him speak depressed soul Jesus comes to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death a promise to be your loving king who with the tender mercy of God guides you into peace you thought was impossible to feel ever again is his spirit speaking softly into your turmoil this morning there's hope remember

Jesus you can trust me once and for all in Jesus God speaks rest a family welcome to many love you can count on protection provided by the one who knows what's best for you joy of being used to bring his blessing to others may our hearts that are waiting and waiting hear him and trust him let's pray holy spirit we ask you not for a new message this morning we don't need a new message but

we do need new ears this morning we need to hear you speak might you work through your word as you so delight to do might you speak clearly and may we hear may we hear a message of comfort of grace of hope and may it give us joy beyond any joy that we have known in this day in all of our lives may for the first time perhaps we hear and know a

[40 : 22] God who is for us a God who would have relationship with us holy holy spirit bring light into our darkness speak into what feels like a silence that will never go away change us forever we ask speak through Jesus we pray in his name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org thank you