

# Song of Salvation

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 December 2020

Preacher: John Lau

[ 0 : 00 ] 2020 has been an unusual year, but a good year for us to learn Agile as a church. We had just experienced some easing of restriction still due to another outbreak of COVID-19 in the Northern Beaches.

We are moving back to online gathering this morning. Another good thing out of such a strange year would be fewer people would have lost their voice because we cannot meet together. I remember when I was much younger, I would meet up with friends over the weekend and we would go karaoke to sing at the top of our voice and drink for the whole night till dawn. On Monday morning, we are often very quiet because we have lost our voice. We would gradually get our voice back over the week, but we lose it again in the weekend. We are terrible at saving our voice, let alone saving ourselves. We can lose our voice over sininess, and we can lose it due to sickness.

[ 1 : 08 ] It can also happen to us due to some exceptional reason. In our passage today, we meet Zechariah, who lost his voice for about 10 months.

And it was because God has something special planned. Imagine what would daily life be and relationship between Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth be like during the 10 months of pregnancy. They have been married for a long time and would have gotten used to communicating with each other. And now they have found a new way to communicate. We see Zechariah at the point of him getting his voice back after 10 months.

He was unable to speak in silence. It is a time also where God starts to speak to his people again after being in silence for more than 400 years, since he has last spoken through the couple of minor prophets, including Malachi, towards the end of the Old Testament.

God broke his silence through the angel Gabriel, as Eve has shared with us. He spoke to Zechariah and Mary to foretell the birth of two significant people, John the Baptist and Jesus.

[ 2 : 30 ] We are at the point of significant changes in human history. The birth of John the Baptist and Jesus also means significant changes to whoever will believe in the message they bring and in Jesus.

I want to give voice to three changes to highlight them from today's passage. Change from fear to anticipation. From loss in sin to serving him.

And from darkness to light. God broke his silence through the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah that he and his wife will have a son while in their old age.

And Zechariah won a sign as proved that it will happen, as the angel Gabriel said. So he was silent and not be able to speak until the pregnancy is fulfilled, until the prophecy is fulfilled.

This questioning of God's power and instruction is typical of humans all through the ages. After God created the first couple of humans, Adam and Eve, they were presented with a question, did God really say?

[ 3 : 46 ] They were tempted and encouraged to question what God has said. And they failed to uphold God's word and other things that did not come from God's mouth and end up doing what God asked them not to do.

The result was when they heard the sound of God, they hide from God. They were afraid and ashamed to see God. People become fearful of God because they know they have not obeyed God's word and have broken their relationship with God.

And it is impossible for anyone to fully obey God from that point onward, except Jesus, the Son of God. The whole Bible is about how God worked on keeping his relationship with his people and how people keep turning their back on God.

Instead of treachering their relationship with God, they treasure each other people or things more than their creator. Things such as traditions, reputations, fame and fortunes. Instead of carefully listening to and following his words, they put words in God's mouth and follow a God of their own imagination. God is the one who speaks to his people, who lay out everything to his people to ensure that they have a working relationship with him.

[ 5 : 15 ] But we are the one that keeps doing things our way and breaking that relationship. We try to silence God and we refuse to listen. God gave his people the silent treatment because they did not believe or obey God's words and prophecy.

They even questioned God's love for them. They questioned in Malachi 1-2, after God said, I have loved you, they asked, how have you loved us?

Humans do not honor or respect God. The whole Bible shows us how people are going back and forth with God in their questioning. And that questioning still happens today.

When we hold disrespect and disregard towards someone, it will not be easy to build a relationship. What is often left would be fear and contempt.

Especially when we deliberately disobey someone or twist their words or misrepresent them.

Whatever relationship we think that we share would be very shallow and superficial.

[ 6 : 34 ] So how is your relationship with God and others? Luke 1-6 told us that Zechariah and his wife had a good relationship with God.

Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the laws, commands, and decrees blamelessly. God had so mercy towards Zechariah and Elizabeth by granting them a son at their old age.

And they seemed to have a good relationship with their neighbors and relatives as well because they came to share the joy in the birth of their son. However, 1st 12 still tells us that even Zechariah, righteous in God's eyes, was gripped with fear when the angel appeared to him.

We should maintain a sense of fear and respect towards God, our Creator. Our healthy kind of fear and respect will stop us from being contempt and becoming a fool.

Prophet 1-9 says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instructions. A healthy kind of fear will help us to listen up with attention to details.

[ 7 : 54 ] It will not paralyze us, but help us to do the right things. The right kind of fear is enabling, is attentive. Zechariah was kept from speaking for 10 months, but he made sure Elizabeth got the instruction of the angel regarding what name to call their son.

He made sure history did not repeat itself, that his wife upheld God's instruction and did not add anything to it like Eve.

As both Elizabeth and Zechariah confirmed their son's name in his John, Luke says in verse 64, immediately his mouth was opened and his son set free.

He began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were filled with oil. And throughout the hill country of Judea, people were talking about all these things.

Everyone who heard his wonders about it, asking, What then is this child going to be? For the Lord's hands was with him. Can you imagine what kinds of anticipation Zechariah and Elizabeth have been through up to this point?

[ 9 : 12 ] They did not have any outro sound back then, even though they may be able to tell from different signs, such as the shape of the belly, whether the baby is a boy or a girl.

Was it run for girls and pointed for boys, or terrible morning sickness in the first three months for boys or the other way around? I have to ask my mom. They would not know that firstborn is a son or not until he was born.

But when he was born, great anticipation awaits them. And the neighbors and the relatives share their anticipation. The anticipation of what is to come, what is this child is going to be.

More so, the anticipation of what God will do with humanity through Jesus our Lord. We'll move from fear and an uncertain relationship to a great anticipation of what he will do with our life.

The key to that change is our Lord Jesus. His arrival repairs our relationship with God. He placed his Holy Spirit in those who believe in him to help us to turn and obey the command of God so that we can change from fear to anticipation.

[ 10 : 37 ] And we will also change from loss in sin to serving him. At the birth of his son, when Zechariah holds firm to the instruction of God by naming him John, God broke his ten months silence.

And Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and unable to speak again. He prays and prophesies from verse 68. Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he said through his holy prophets of long ago. Salvation from our enemies and from the hands of all who hate us.

God is no longer silent. He has spoken and he deserves all our praises because he has come to his people to redeem them. A horn can also mean a strong king.

So he has raised a strong king to save his people from their enemies. The greatest enemies of humans are sin because it breaks our relationship with God.

[11:57] However, with the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, our enemies have been dealt with, we can get back to a great relationship with God. As I have indicated before, God's plans of salvation was foretold in the whole Bible, spoke through his holy prophets all through the ages from long ago.

We need to be safe because of our broken relationship with God. We need God to come and save us because we are bad at saving ourselves.

We cannot save ourselves. And like Adam and Eve, after realizing what they have done, we are running away and hiding from God instead of running towards him.

How do I know that? Because we still try to hide from the sound of God. We tend to spend lesser and lesser time to read the Bible, to let God speak to us.

we are letting other people or things to be our small letter G, God, instead of making sure God, the creator of the world, is truly the ruler of our life.

[13:10] We spend less and less time into reading God's word, but more and more time in social media, checking out the latest posts. We spend less and less time in praying to God, but more and more time in replying emails or checking out the latest Netflix.

Do you really need your Netflix account? For some who read the Bible and pray, it was more to cock in and tick the box that we have done so, to make us feel at ease with ourselves.

But there's no growth in our relationship with God. How do I know that some of us still lost because we cannot confidently cry out, come, Lord Jesus, come.

We worry about how God looked at us. Our eyes still fix on what we have or have not done. And we serve God out of fear or to earn God's favour and the acknowledgement of others instead of serving out of gratitude of our hearts.

But God had come to change all that. He comes to save us. He has come to us to remove our fear by doing with the roots of the problem, our sins.

[14:33] He has overcome our enemies and set us free for a purpose. Verse 72 say, He come to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, to rescue us from the hands of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

we are saved to serve him, to become God's full oneness like Zechariah's son John the Baptist. It reads on from verse 76, 6, and you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

We are called to give God's people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. What do you know about how people are saved?

How are our sins being forgiven by God? How does someone get right with God? The answer to these questions are the most fundamental for any Christian.

Peter urges in his letter in 1 Peter 3, 13-15, who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

[16:10] Do not fear what they fear. Do not be frightened. But in your hearts, reference Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

But do this with gentleness and respect. We are saved to serve by telling others about the great salvation that awaits them. We are saved to serve by answering questions about our hope.

If you are not sure how to do it, please speak up. Don't remain silent and treat God with contempt. Stop living in fear, but instead live in anticipation of the great things God will do in your life.

Cling to Jesus. Look into his word. Speak to him in prayer, so your sin will be removed and you will be safe and free to serve him.

Speaking up is very important. Imagine Elizabeth did not speak up about the name of their child. The relative and neighbors would not have asked Zechariah to confirm the name, and he would not have the chance to demonstrate his determination to obey God's instruction fully.

[ 17 : 36 ] What Zechariah and Elizabeth were instructed to do was groundbreaking and atonish everyone there, because what they were doing was breaking with tradition.

Instead of following the tradition to call their son Zechariah, which means God remembers, their son's name is John, which means God is gracious and merciful.

Holding on to tradition could be one of the signs of someone living in darkness instead of the light. Instead of being guided by God to live a daily renewed life, they remain in the dark by thinking that they are okay because of their tradition.

Because they have done religious deeds or because my family has always been Christian. It's like saying, God has been quiet for 400 years now.

We are used to the silence. God broke the tradition with John the Baptist. He is appointed from birth to speak up for God, to bring light into darkness of this world.

[ 18 : 55 ] And you, my child, will be called prophet of the Most High. For you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

Because the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven, to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

the rising sun has come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

The rising sun is referring to Jesus, who is soon to be born at this point. The birth of Jesus offers transformation to those lost people who are living in darkness, meaninglessly porting through life to a life with abundance.

One of the ways we know people are living in darkness is when we value tradition and convenience more than God's instruction and commands. When we hold the way we used to do certain things with greater significance than obedience towards God's instruction through his appointed messenger.

[ 20 : 20 ] it's at the time that we step away from light and step into darkness if we value tradition and convenience.

To deal with COVID-19, we need to go online to keep each other safe. We need to be agile and follow the health advice and guidelines of our government and our diocese.

We are having church online only today. it's a testimony of how hard we have worked in keeping each other safe at St. Paul's. So, when it's safe for us to meet face to face again, what will be your anticipation?

It's, of course, more convenient to stay at home to watch a live streaming of church. Some of us will have to continue meeting with us online because of health reasons.

But will you be choosing to stay home and not coming to church together face to face because you cannot have your usual cup of tea or have to wear a mask to sing?

[ 21 : 32 ] It's your usual way of doing things stopping you from obeying God together together to worship him. one of the ways for us to get from darkness to light is to speak up about things.

Things that are not right according to God. To confess the wrong doings, the sins in our life and repent. Repentance means turning.

Turning from your tradition and look back to God's words and instruction. Turning from being a consumer to live a life of a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

Turn to pursue discipleship. When Paul speaks up about his life and the works of God at the end of Acts in chapter 26 verse 20 he said, first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and all Judea, and then to the Gentiles preach that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

To change from darkness to light, we need to acknowledge our sin and repent. True repentance is not done in the dark. It's demonstrable.

[ 22 : 59 ] It's not saying sorry and keep going without any changes. Jesus offers transformation from living sinful, unholy life to lives of righteousness.

The birth of Jesus is much more than giving us a reason to get together, to eat food and exchange gifts. The birth of Jesus is a reminder of the monumental changes that God is bringing into all of us, which begins in salvation.

God saves us from a life of meaninglessness to be his servants. How is your relationship with God and others?

Jesus comes to change out your life. What changes and growth have you got to show that Jesus is in your life? What anticipation do you hold?

What service have you offered to God? Is a life full of light as bright as a new dawn sun? It will if you stop hiding and run towards the light.

[ 24 : 13 ] Let the Son of God, Jesus, take hold of your life today and let's walk on the path of peace that God offers us all. Amen.