

Luke 1:67-79

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[0 : 00] If you're looking at the few Bibles, that is page 856. In this Advent season, we're looking at four songs, which open up the Gospel of Luke.

Last week we looked at Mary's song, the song of joyful praise. This week we'll look at Zacharias' song, the song of confident hope. Next week we'll look at the angel song, the song of good news. And on Christmas Day we'll look at Simeon's song of blessed peace. And in the way that Luke organizes Gospel and introduces Jesus to us, these are songs that prepare us for the arrival of Jesus.

And then invite us to join in, to sing along in our hearts. As I said this morning, this song is focused on the theme of confident hope. Where does your hope and confidence come from in this holiday season?

What are you waiting, anticipating, longing for? I've put Zacharias' song in context before I read it.

[1 : 08] The beginning of Luke chapter 1 tells about Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth. For many years they have been waiting, longing, praying, particularly praying for a child. But they were now a older couple, yet they were childless.

And yet one day, Zacharias was in the temple and the angel appears to him and says, God's going to give you and your wife a son. And Zacharias' initial response was, yeah right.

We're past the age. This is not going to happen. And the angel says, well yes it will. And you'll be silent. You won't say anything until it does happen.

So Zacharias is unable to speak until, and yet, the angel's promise comes true. Elizabeth gets pregnant. And verse 57, the time came for Elizabeth to give birth and she bore a son.

And soon after he was born, a debate broke out as to what the child should be named. Should he be named Zacharias Jr.? Or should he be named John, as the angel had said?

[2 : 10] And Zacharias writes, his name is John. And then his mouth is opened. Verse 64 says, his mouth is opened, his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

And this is where he sings his song. So he's been waiting, longing, hoping for a long time. And yet now he has the hope of a new beginning. So today as we look at Zacharias' song, we'll see the source of our confident hope in this Christmas season as we look at this song.

So Zacharias' song, starting at verse 67 of Luke chapter 1, let's read it together. His father Zacharias 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 a gold, 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 all his glory will be opened 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.

[3 : 41] 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.

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. Well, this song is structured in two parts. Verse 68 to 75, as you may notice, they're in the past tense.

They're talking about God in the third person, specifically talking about how God has been faithful to the promises he made in the past. And then verse 76 to 79 are in the future tense.

Zachariah is speaking to his little baby son, John. Speaking about what God will do through him in the future. And so those are the two themes we're going to focus on today.

God has been faithful to his promises in the past, number one. And two, because of that we can have confident hope as we look toward our future. So let's start by looking at the first theme.

[4 : 51] God has been faithful to his promises in the past. Now, if you have a bulletin, turn to the middle page of your bulletin. I've put in this insert to show how this first section, or how the song is arranged structurally.

Because there's a sequence of seven words in this song that appear in one, as you see, visited, people, salvation, prophets, enemies, hand, fathers.

And then they appear exactly in reverse order in the second half of the song. And so I don't think this is just a coincidence. I think this is an intentional part of how the song is structured, perhaps even a way for it to be remembered.

And when you have this kind of structure, sometimes it's called a kai of them, most often the author is particularly trying to draw attention to what's right in the middle. Or what's right in the middle of the sandwich.

Verse 72 and 73 says, He has shown the mercy promised to our fathers. He has remembered the oath that he swore to our father Abraham.

[6 : 06] In other words, God has been faithful to the promises that he made to our spiritual ancestors in the past. And I want to look a little bit at these seven words. Because I think these seven words that appear in this song, that each appear twice, they point back to a particular way that God had been faithful to the people of Israel in the past.

Now the song mentions Abraham, and it mentions David. But these seven words all points back, I think most, more than anything else, to the story of the Exodus.

Each of these seven words are key words when you think about the story of the Exodus. So first, God has visited his people. First two words. If you look at the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph's last words are, I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land, to the land that he swore, that he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Exodus chapter 4. The people believed when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel, and he had seen their affliction. And God had visited not just one person here and another person there and somebody else over there, but he had visited his people.

That is, God has come near to bless and save his people. Moses says to Pharaoh in Exodus, let my people go. Exodus 6-7, God promises, I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.

[7 : 37] So we see that God had visited his people in the time of the Exodus and drawn near to them. But he hadn't just come close to them and sympathize with them in their state of bondage.

He visits them to intervene, to rescue them from their helplessness, from their hopelessness. In other words, he brings salvation as announced through his prophets.

Those are the next two words, salvation and prophets. Again, Exodus 14-13, when the people have come out of Egypt and when they're facing the Red Sea, Moses says to the people, fear not, stand firm, and you will see the salvation of the Lord.

Exodus 15, after they've crossed the sea, the song of Moses, Moses says, the Lord is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation. And the salvation, God's work of salvation, delivering his people, has been announced by the prophets.

In Exodus, God raised up Moses and Aaron to be prophets, to speak on his behalf, to represent him, to announce his authoritative word, to announce his acts of deliverance and judgment, to Pharaoh and to the Israelites.

[8 : 52] In fact, at the end of Deuteronomy, it says, there has never been another prophet since, like Moses. Right, so God visits his people, he announces his salvation through prophets, and the result is, people are delivered from the hand of their enemies.

Those are the next two words. Again, book of Exodus, Exodus 3, verse 8, God says, I've come now to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

Exodus 14, after the Red Sea, the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians. So Moses, your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

God intervened by his mighty hand to deliver his people from the hand of their enemies. And of course, all this was according to God's promise to their fathers, their ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

That's what God says when he introduces himself to Moses in Exodus 3. I am the God of your father. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. And Moses says, this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

[10:03] So as you see, all seven of these words are key words in the story of God saving the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and bringing them out to be his own people and to be delivered from the hands of their enemies, just as he had promised to their fathers.

So that's the story that Zechariah's song would bring to mind, especially if you were hearing it in the historical context, the story of the Exodus.

But notice this. Zechariah's not just looking back and saying, and reminiscing, about what happened 1,500 years ago.

He's not just saying, oh, those were the glory days when God saved our people out of Egypt. Wasn't that a good thing, that he did so, so long ago?

No. What is Zechariah responding to? He's responding to the birth of his son. But, just as the angel foretold, when it seemed like he and his wife had hit a wall, they were helpless and hopeless, when it seemed like they had no future, God intervened to do a new thing.

[11:14] And that's what Zechariah's responding to. Basically what Zechariah's saying is, God did it in the past, and he's now going to do it again. Just like God saved his people from slavery in Egypt, he came to visit them, he announced his salvation through the prophets, he came to deliver them from the hand of their enemies, all this is like, as he promised to our fathers, he's come to do it again.

Now, Zechariah hadn't seen the complete fulfillment of God's plan yet, right? Jesus hadn't even yet been born. His son John was, it seems like, only eight days old at this point.

And yet, Zechariah saw God has begun. God has begun to fulfill his plan. He's begun to carry out his salvation.

And so in his mind, the work was as good as done. That's why he speaks in the past tense, even when he says, the Lord God of Israel has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a heart of salvation for us.

Now, literally, right? Jesus hasn't even been born yet. Yes, and he certainly hasn't died on the cross and resurrected yet. So, in that sense, God hadn't yet redeemed his people.

[12:32] But Zechariah is saying, no, it's as good as done. God has promised it. He's begun his work. And because he's begun his work, he's going to complete what he's begun.

And so I can speak with confidence about what God has promised, because he's going to carry it through completion. God had intervened in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation.

He had brought new life. And Zechariah is acknowledging here, God mercifully intervened, despite my initial unbelief. When the angel said to Zechariah in the temple, you're going to have a son, and he'll be great, and he'll be the prophet of the Most High, and Zechariah said, really?

How in the world is that going to happen? And Zechariah's acknowledging here, God's intervened. God carried out his plan, despite my initial unbelief.

You know, God doesn't always wait for us to believe in wholeheartedly before he intervenes in our lives for our good. He intervenes in his mercy so that we may come to believe and trust him more fully.

[13:40] and recognize him for who he really is. And that's why Zechariah rejoices. Because God has intervened. You know, maybe, maybe, I wonder how many of you can say, well, Zechariah, God intervened in my life despite my initial unbelief and or resistance.

And now I do believe. Now I can sing this song of confidence and hope in the God who's faithful to his promises. Just take a moment, think about what the Lord has done in the past.

Just think about your own life for a moment. Think about how it could broaden you to faith. Verse 69 mentions David. And David grew up as the son of Jesse, who was the son of Obed, who was the son of Boaz and Ruth.

In other words, he grew up in a believing family with a godly heritage. Maybe you can identify with David. Maybe you can look back for generations in your family history. You can see God's faithfulness to your parents and your grandparents and your great-grandparents.

Maybe you look back at your childhood and you can't remember a time when you didn't believe in Christ. God was there even before you knew it. He hasn't left you and He's kept you from leaving Him.

[14:55] Praise God. That's a wonderful testimony. But verse 73 also mentions Abraham, another one of the fathers of Israel.

And Abraham's story was very different. Abraham's parents and great-grandparents and great-grandparents worshipped idols. They didn't know God at all. God called Abraham out of the blue when he was 75 years old.

To leave his homeland and followed him on a journey toward the promises of God. Abraham wasn't following a well-worn path. He was a trailblazer made to breaking new ground.

Being led only by the Spirit and the Word and the providence of God. If you can identify with Abraham's story, God interrupted your life even when you weren't looking for Him.

God called you into a new family in Christ even when you perhaps didn't have much of a family left. Or perhaps your family didn't understand that. Christ called you into a new way of life following Him.

[16:00] Perhaps some of the people that you hang around with or used to hang around with think that's a little strange. You might be one of the first in your family to follow Christ but now you have spiritual fathers and others.

Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Mary, Boaz and Ruth, Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth. You know, that part of why the Bible is full of so many stories. So we can see how God has been faithful to His people in the past.

People with all kinds of different backgrounds and all kinds of different pathways to faith and all kinds of different stories that led them to where they are and all kinds of different struggles and weaknesses and challenges.

People who are both very different from us and very much like us. God has been faithful in the past. That's what He wants us to see. When we look at our own lives, when we look at others' lives around us, when we look at this church, when we look at the church worldwide, when we look at the story of the scriptures, we can see the ways that God has been faithful to His people in the past. That's the first thing you see. And the second thing we see in this song is that God will continue to be faithful in the future. That we can approach the future with confident hope in the promises of God.

[17:15] Look down again at the first half of this psalm. Verse 68 to 70 speaks about what God has done. He's visited, redeemed His people, raised up to salvation just as He spoke by the prophets.

And then verse 71 begins with the word that we, or we can translate it, it must be translated, so that we. Pointing to the purpose of what God has done.

so that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Then verse 72 to 73 goes back to what God has done. He has shown the mercy, promised to our fathers, He has remembered His holy covenant, the oath He swore to Abraham.

And then a similar phrase, to grant us that we, beginning in verse 74. And then being delivered from the hand of our enemies, that's what He already said in verse 71. And then this comes to the climax of the first half of the psalm, that we might serve Him without fear.

In holiness and righteousness all our days. You see how the first half of the psalm leads up to this great purpose of what God has done in intervening and visiting and redeeming His people.

[18:33] It's so that we would serve Him without fear all our days. You might wonder what are the enemies that Zechariah is talking about?

It talks about being delivered from the hand of our enemies. Was He speaking about external oppression or internal division? Was He speaking about political enemies or spiritual enemies? Well, He doesn't specify.

But I think in the context it seems to, the enemies seem to be anything that prevents us from serving God in holiness that is having a pure love for God and righteousness that is being faithful and just toward our fellow human beings and without fear.

Alright, what prevents you from serving God wholeheartedly without fear? That's what Zechariah says Jesus Christ has come to deliver you from the hand of those enemies that, the things that prevent you from serving God without fear.

And think about some of the fears that we experience. Fear is a very powerful thing. It motivates us in all kinds of ways. What are some of the fears that are competing for your heart this morning? [19 : 50] is it the fear of being alone? The fear of being alone can drive people into unhealthy and codependent relationships.

The fear of being alone can drive us to compulsive habits, to feel comfort, to feel companionship, even if it's from a thing and not a person.

What about the fear of being known? The fear of becoming vulnerable? If you feel like if anyone really knew you, if you would really open up to them, that they will one day turn on you.

For some of you, maybe that's a fear deeply reinforced by past experience. You've been rejected by people who were close to you. You've been gossiped about by people who you thought and said were your friends.

You've been ignored though when you became no longer useful. So we can live by that fear. We can close ourselves off. That fear of being known and being vulnerable and being rejected and constrained.

[21 : 06] So perhaps it's a fear of opposition. So what the Israelites experienced when they had left Egypt, when God had intervened in their lives and saved them, they'd become his people but then they came to the Red Sea.

In other words, they faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle that was bigger than anything they had faced before. They had Pharaoh's army coming behind them and they had the big Red Sea with no way, no seemingly, no way to look in front of them.

Have you felt that way? Do your life follow Christ? Yes, Christ has done something in the past. Yes, you've received his salvation but now you're facing something that's bigger than anything you've ever faced before.

And you don't see a way forward and maybe like the Israelites you think, why don't I just, it'd be a lot easier just making you turn right now. Go back to Egypt, go back to my old way of life, go back to the way I used to deal with things.

Fear can drive us into debilitating anxiety and paralyzing depression or it can drive us into a frenzy of anxious and panicked activity.

[22 : 26] Listen to these words. The Lord God has visited and redeemed his people. He's delivered us from the hand of our enemies that we might serve him without fear.

without being controlled by our fears. Now it doesn't mean you will never feel fear, that's probably unrealistic for most of us to expect you will never feel fear, even very strong feelings of fear, but it's saying that by God's power that we might be unable to serve him and not be driven by our fears, but be led by the Holy Spirit and by faith in him.

And it's not just sometimes, it's not just most of the time, but all our days. This is a promise for all our days, for every day of our life and every situation we find ourselves in.

we may feel fear for all kinds of reasons, but we have a God whose power and mercy and faithfulness are bigger than all of our fears.

And when we sing his praises, when we declare his faithfulness in the past and look back at how he's been faithful to me and to the people of my brothers and sisters in Christ and to our spiritual ancestors, those who have gone before us and finished the race and who are now at worshipping Jesus, we can serve him by faith instead of being driven by fear.

[24 : 04] We don't have to fear being alone because God has promised to be ever present with us, to never leave us nor forsake us. Jesus is a Savior who is interceding for us day by day, moment by moment, on our behalf.

He is our advocate before God the Father in heaven. So you can sit all day by yourself and commune with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

You can have his Spirit abiding in you in the depths of your inner being, filling you with love and light and hope and joy. We don't have to fear becoming vulnerable and being known because you know how we have God who has made himself known and who made himself vulnerable to us.

Jesus Christ knows what it's like to make himself vulnerable and then be rejected and slandered and betrayed and crucified.

And that continues to happen to him every single day. Right? God's children say we love him and yet sometimes we ignore him and reject him.

[25 : 25] He can empathize with that more than anyone else. And yet despite our rejection of him he has opened himself to us that we might know him.

That we might be known by him and be loved by him and know his grace. That he will not reject us. That he knows us already. That it was while we were yet sinners that he died for us.

And we might begin to find our security in his acceptance of us by his grace. When we have that security in knowing who we are in Christ then we can use wisdom and discernment in opening ourselves up to others.

It doesn't mean that we should open ourselves without restrictions to everyone and anyone. That's not wise. There are some people that you should not trust. And you should only trust God completely.

But when we know the security of belonging to Christ and being known by him and being deeply loved eternally loved by him then we can gradually with wisdom and discernment open ourselves to be known by others.

[26 : 37] And to be vulnerable to our brothers and sisters in Christ because that's partly how God communicates his grace to us. By a physical person. And I think one of the most powerful things that Christians can do with one another is to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another.

That's what James 5.16 says. Confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. And when you open up to another brother or sister in Christ and say this is what I've been struggling with and here's where I've been falling and failing.

And to have someone else come alongside and say if you confess that sin to the Lord why don't we speak to the Lord about that now. And you can pray and confess that to the Lord and then you can have another person say to you the Bible says 1 John 1.9 that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

We can give each other that assurance that God has promised of his forgiveness and his grace.

That's what we do when we gather every morning. Every Sunday morning we have a prayer of confession then we have songs about God's mercy and pardon and then we have that word of assurance that always comes right from the scriptures speaking to us about the forgiveness and the redemption and the assurance that we can have in Christ.

We can do that one to one and encourage one another. We don't have to fear failure when we face seemingly insurmountable obstacles bigger than anything we've previously faced because our God is stronger and he can make a way forward even when there seems to be no way.

[28 : 24] Has he not done so in the past? Brothers and sisters we can look to the future without fear but with confident hope in the promises of God.

And that's what we see in verse 76 to 79 Zachariah as it were turns to his eight day old son and speaks directly to him.

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 and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Zachariah's vision is that a new day is dawning. The sunrise shall visit us. It's a vision of a new start for God's people knowledge of salvation and his assurance of salvation and the forgiveness of their sins.

This is good news. This is the good news that the apostle Paul proclaimed throughout the world. He said, through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through him.

[29 : 40] Everyone who believes is set free from every sin of justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses or anywhere else.

And the apostle John later writes, I am writing to you dear children because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. Have you received that assurance of salvation, the forgiveness of your sins through Jesus Christ?

Or do you still live under the burden of guilt and fear of condemnation? It's perhaps one of the most powerful fears of all. The good news is that in Jesus Christ God has come to release us from the burden of guilt and fear of condemnation.

That we might have knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. This is the reason why Jesus Christ came into the world. So turn to him today if you haven't already. Ask him for it.

Acknowledge that you are a sinner and that you need his grace and receive his promise of forgiveness. And if you've done that, know that his promise is for you. Don't live like it's not true. It's a true promise.

[30 : 54] And God is faithful to his promises. This is the message that Zechariah's son John will proclaim.

Repentance, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now John's role was unique. It was to prepare the way for Jesus as a prophet.

And yet in some ways the pattern of his life is also the pattern that we are called to in some ways. His calling is not to be great for his own sake but to point to a greater one who was to come.

And if you look at Luke chapters 1 and 2 as a whole, it's the story of the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus and they're woven together but in the way they're woven together you can see that John is meant to point us toward Jesus.

Right? If you look at the beginning of chapter 1 verse 5 to 25 John's birth is announced in advance he will be great before the Lord. And then verse 26 to 38 Jesus' birth is announced to Mary he will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

[32 : 14] He will reign forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end. You see Jesus will be even greater. And then we have 57 to 66 the birth and circumcision and naming of John with relatives and neighbors rejoicing followed by Zacharias' prophecy.

But then chapter 2 the birth and circumcision and naming of Jesus chapter 2 verse 1 to 21 with not just neighbors and friends rejoicing but angels. The armies of heaven are rejoicing because God's peace has come to earth.

Simeon and Anna greet Jesus with words of prophecy. Chapter 1 verse 80 says John grew and became strong in spirit.

But then in chapter 2 verse 40 and 52 it says Jesus not only grew but became strong but he was full of wisdom and the favor of God was upon him. See if you look at these two chapters God's doing a great thing in the birth of John the Baptist but he's doing even a greater thing in the life of Jesus.

That's who he's meant to point to. John the forerunner would point to the light but Jesus would be the light. John would proclaim forgiveness of sins. Jesus would purchase forgiveness of sins.

[33 : 36] John would prepare the way but Jesus would say I am the way and the truth and the life. This is what we're called to do as believers in Christ is to have our lives point to the greatness the all surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ the light of the world the hope of the nations.

John's life wasn't an easy one. Zachariah was speaking with confident hope about his new child well that child would grow up to live in the wilderness not the easiest place to live.

He was a bit strange but Dr. Mark says that he ate focused and wild honey not sure that that's in the parents ambition for their children's diet the one little odd.

John would later be thrown in prison for speaking the truth to King Herod and while he was in prison John would have doubts about Jesus he would send messengers in Luke 7 saying are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?

And then eventually John would be beheaded by King Herod. John didn't live an easy or comfortable or prosperous life and yet Zachariah was happy at the birth of his son not because John's life was promised to be smooth and comfortable and easy but because John's life could point faithfully to the light of the world to the coming King to the great Redeemer to the Savior so as we look as we think what does it mean to look toward the future with confident hope it doesn't just mean wishing and hoping that our life is going to be easy and smooth and comfortable God never promises that but it means that by his grace our lives can point to the light of the world our lives can be rooted in the tender mercy of our God verse 78 it says that all this

[35 : 52] John being raised up as a prophet salvation and forgiveness of sins it's all because of the tender mercy of our God that phrase is that we're tender it's a word that means deeply felt compassion it's a word that's used sometimes to talk about your guts that really down deep feeling saying this word of salvation that God has promised the light of the world dawning upon us it's all because of the deeply felt compassionate mercy of our God that's what we can be confident in that's what we can be confident in that's what can sustain us above all else is the compassionate mercy of our God God's been faithful to his promises in the past so we can look to the future with confidence in them let's pray

Father we thank you for Zachariah's song we thank you Lord that you gave him Lord not just words to speak but a song to sing we pray that this song would come to resonate in our hearts Lord that we would look back at the faithfulness that you have shown to your people in the past to Abraham and Moses and David Zachariah and Elizabeth Mary and Joseph or that we would look back at the past that your faithfulness that that would enable us to look towards our future with confidence and with hope and we pray Lord that like

John the Baptist you would make us people who point to the light of the world make us people who shine with the light that you have given to us Lord we pray that you would draw near to us in our fears draw near to us in our loneliness in places where we feel the lack of hope we pray that you would shine your light upon us Lord that we might walk on the paths of peace and that we might be filled with your spirit with hope and joy believing in you we pray this in Jesus name amen