

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Benedictus

Luke 1:67-80

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The *Benedictus*

Scripture

We are studying the Gospel of Luke in a sermon series I am calling, "To Seek and to Save the Lost." Today I would like to study the passage in which we learn about Zechariah's song of praise that is known as the *Benedictus*, which is the first word of his song in the Latin version of the Bible.

The *Benedictus* is in fact the third of five nativity songs that Luke records regarding the births of John and Jesus. The five nativity songs are: Elizabeth's *Benedicta* (1:42-45), Mary's *Magnificat* (1:46-55), Zechariah's *Benedictus* (1:68-79), the angels' *Gloria* (2:14), and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32).

So, today we will learn about Zechariah's *Benedictus*. And then, Lord willing, we will close our Worship Service by singing a version of the *Benedictus* that is written by Michael A. Perry.

Let us now read about Zechariah's song of praise called the *Benedictus* in Luke 1:67-80:

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

**⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people**

**⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,**

**⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from
of old,**

**⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;**

**⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,**

**⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham,
to grant us**

⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our

enemies,
might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all
our days.
76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the
Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his
ways,
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit,
and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public ap-
pearance to Israel. (Luke 1:67-80)

Introduction

On August 14, 1945 President Harry Truman announced that Japan had surrendered, and World War II was over. However, before President Truman’s announcement, news leaked out that the Japanese had surrendered. There was an incredible outburst of spontaneous celebration all over the country. One report said that after the news of the Japanese surrender and before the President’s announcement, Americans began celebrating “as if joy had been rationed and saved up for the three years, eight months and seven days since Sunday, December 7, 1941.” The largest crowd in the history of New York City’s Times Square (up until that time) gathered to celebrate, while in the Garment District, workers threw out cloth scraps and ticker tape, leaving a pile five inches deep on the streets. A “coast-to-coast frenzy of (servicemen) kissing” occurred, with *Life* publishing photographs of such kisses in Washington, Kan-

sas City, Los Angeles, and Miami.¹

Even though most of us did not live through World War II, we can understand the incredible joy of the people that the war was finally over and that peace had been declared.

That is the kind of joy that Luke is communicating to us in the beginning of his Gospel. In the Old Testament God had promised his people that he would send them a Savior, someone who would deliver them from their sins, and declare (as it were) peace between themselves and God.

But for four hundred years—not merely three years, eight months and seven days—God had been silent. The people of God lived in discouragement and despair. I am sure they often prayed and asked God to act.

Then, one day God sent his angel Gabriel to a priest named Zechariah while he was serving at the Temple in Jerusalem. Gabriel told Zechariah that God was going to give him and his barren old wife Elizabeth a son who would be the messenger to the Savior. Finally, God was taking action again!

Unfortunately, Zechariah doubted Gabriel's promise that God would give him and Elizabeth a son in their old age. And so the angel struck Zechariah with muteness and told him that he would not be able to speak until the day that these things took place (1:20). And so for nine long months Zechariah was unable to hear or speak to anyone.

Zechariah went home after his service at the Temple in Jerusalem. His wife Elizabeth conceived a child. When she was in her sixth month of pregnancy her relative Mary came to visit her. By this time Mary herself was pregnant with Jesus. They had a wonderful greeting during which both mothers sang praise to God, Elizabeth singing the *Benedicta* and Mary singing the *Magnificat*.

Three months later Elizabeth gave birth to a boy. The entire community rejoiced that God had shown mercy to Eliza-

¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_over_Japan_Day.

beth by giving her a child when she was old and barren. On the eighth day when the community gathered to circumcise and name the boy, they assumed that he would be named Zechariah after his father. However, Elizabeth insisted that his name was John, which was the name Gabriel told Zechariah to give the child. The community then appealed to Zechariah. And as soon as he also emphatically insisted that the boy's name was John, which was a demonstration of his renewed faith in God, he was immediately enabled to speak, and he burst out in praise to God. There was incredible joy because God was at long last sending deliverance and peace to his people.

The *Benedictus* is Zechariah's song of praise to God. Zechariah blessed God for two prophecies.

Lesson

In today's lesson we learn that because of the prophecies made, we should bless God. We should bless God for:

1. The Prophecy Concerning the Savior (1:67-75)
2. The Prophecy Concerning the Savior's Messenger (1:76-80)

I. **The Prophecy Concerning the Savior (1:67-75)**

First, we should bless God for the prophecy concerning the Savior.

Zechariah was not able to speak or hear for nine long months, which is a long time to be mute. Finally, when he acted on his renewed faith by insisting that his child was to be named John, as the angel Gabriel had commanded him, he burst out in praise to God. Then **Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied** (1:67). There were two parts to his prophecy, one about Jesus and the other about John.

Luke gives us four truths regarding the prophecy con-

cerning the Savior.

A. *The Savior Comes from God (1:68)*

First, the Savior comes from God.

Zechariah began by saying in verse 68, “**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.**”

Zechariah **blessed the Lord God** for visiting **his people**. God had been silent for four hundred years. But now God had **visited his people**.

Zechariah was the first one in the New Testament to be visited by God through the angel Gabriel. But God’s visitation was not for him alone. It was for the people of God. By sending Gabriel to Zechariah and then to Mary, by giving barren old Elizabeth a son, and by enabling Mary to conceive and bear the Savior in her womb, God was visiting his people.

Moreover, Zechariah blessed God who had now **redeemed his people**. God was intervening in human history to save a people for himself.

The good news of the gospel is that God has acted to save us. We must never forget that we can do nothing by our own efforts to save ourselves. God must—and did—act on our behalf to save us. We are not able to save ourselves by going to God. Rather, God saves us by coming to us. And he did so in the coming of Jesus Christ.

B. *The Savior Comes in Fulfillment of God’s Covenant (1:69-70; 1:72-73a)*

Second, the Savior comes in fulfillment of God’s covenant.

God had made a covenant to send the Savior who would save a people for himself. We call this the “covenant of grace.”

Zechariah praised God for King David in verses 69-70,

“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.” One expression of the covenant of grace was made with King **David**, in which God promised him a son to establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). This son, of course, was the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Then Zechariah went even further back, to the expression of the covenant that God made with Abraham. Zechariah said in verses 72-73a, **“To show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham.”** God promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3), and that all nations would be saved through his offspring (Genesis 17:4-7). That offspring was the Savior, Jesus Christ.

So, Zechariah blessed God for the Savior who comes in fulfillment of God’s covenant.

C. The Savior Brings Deliverance (1:71)

Third, the Savior brings deliverance.

Zechariah said in verse 71, **“That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.”**

Throughout history God’s people have always had enemies. Since unregenerate people hate God, it is understandable that they would also hate his followers. In the Old Testament the enemies of God’s people included the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians.

It is possible when Zechariah praised God for deliverance from their **enemies**, he was thinking of the Roman Empire.

However, earlier in verse 68, Zechariah blessed God for redeeming his people, which is release from bondage through the payment of a price. In other words, while Zechariah may have been thinking in political terms in verse 71, he may also have been thinking in spiritual terms as well. He may have

been thinking of deliverance from the enemy of sin.

D. The Savior Enables Service (1:73b-75)

And fourth, the Savior enables service.

Zechariah expressed the goal for which the Savior came. He said that the Savior came, in verses 73b-75, **“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.”**

Zechariah may have been thinking partly in political terms. Freedom from political oppression is a blessing. However, as one Bible scholar pointed out, “Although there may be a reference here to political liberation as well, something far more glorious is meant: the whole-hearted service of the Lord in complete freedom from all bonds of sin, guilt, punishment, curse, Satan, and destruction.”²

God did not simply send the Savior to get us to heaven. God sent the Savior so that we might serve him here on earth before we get to heaven.

So, let me make it personal. Are you a Christian? If you are a Christian, how are you serving the Savior?

Some of you have heard of Nick Vujicic (vooy-chick). He was born with a rare disorder characterized by the absence of all four limbs. He was born into a Serbian family in Brisbane, Australia. His parents, who are Christians, struggled to accept him and trust God after he was born. As years passed, Nick also struggled with trusting God for himself. He said, “I challenged God. I said, ‘God, I know that I’m a sinner. I know that I won’t probably have peace until you’re in my heart. But I will not let you in my heart until you answer me, why? Why did you take my arms and legs? Why didn’t you give me what everybody

² Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 94.

else has? God, until you answer me that question, I will not serve you.”

At age 8, he tried to commit suicide by drowning himself in a bathtub, but his love for his parents wouldn't let him do it. Soon after, his mother had him read a story about a severely disabled man. That man's story made a huge impact on him. He says, "I gave my life to Jesus Christ when I read John chapter 9 at age 15, where a man who was blind from birth was coming through a village. Jesus saw him. People said, 'Why was this man born that way?' Jesus said, 'It was done so that the works of God may be revealed through him.'" It was in Jesus Christ where he found the strength to do what many thought would be impossible.

Nick now travels all around the world serving God by preaching the gospel to thousands. He says, "I thank God that he didn't answer my prayer when I was begging him for arms and legs at age eight. Because guess what? I have no arms and no legs, and he's using me all around the world."³ He also says, "If God can use a man without arms and legs to be his hands and feet, then he will certainly use any willing heart!"⁴

If you are a Christian, you should be serving the Savior because that is why he saved you.

II. The Prophecy Concerning the Savior's Messenger (1:76-80)

And second, we should bless God for the prophecy concerning the Savior's messenger.

Zechariah now spoke about his own son, John, who would be Savior's messenger.

Luke tells us three facts about the Savior's messenger.

³ See <http://gospellightminute.wordpress.com/2012/07/02/nick-vujicic-no-limbs-but-no-limits-through-jesus-christ-gospel-light-minute-59/>.

⁴ See <http://www.lifewithoutlimbs.org/about-nick/>.

A. *The Preparation for the Savior (1:76)*

First, we learn about the preparation for the Savior.

Zechariah said 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 ways.”**

Zechariah was a priest and so he was familiar with the word of God. He knew that God had prophesied through Malachi, the last prophet in the Old Testament, in Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.” Then, the angel Gabriel said that Zechariah’s son, John, would be that messenger (Luke 1:16-17). And that is why Zechariah knew that John would be the one who would prepare the way for the Savior, Jesus Christ.

B. *The Message about the Savior (1:77-79)*

Second, we learn about the message about the Savior.

In verses 77-79 Zechariah said that message about the Savior that John would preach would be **“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.”**

The **salvation** that the people were looking for in that day was largely political. They wanted to be freed from the oppression of the Roman Empire. They wanted political and religious and economic freedom. So, even before the Savior came, the messenger had to get the people ready. According to one Bible scholar, “it was necessary that John, the forerunner of Christ, should summon people to a realization of guilt and to a confession of sins, and should make as many of them as possible see

that the real redemption needed by them was deliverance from the power of their spiritual enemies—sin and the forces of darkness, so that they might escape the wrath of God.”⁵

Like the people in that day, we are usually wrong about what we need. We want to be freed from difficulties and trials and troubles and hardships. But we need to be freed from the wrath of God. That is our real need. In order to escape the wrath of God we need to believe the message about the Savior, which is that forgiveness for our sins is found only in Jesus.

C. *The Messenger of the Savior (1:80)*

And third, we learn about the messenger of the Savior.

Luke concludes this portion of his narrative with the following statement about John in verse 80, **“And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”**

Conclusion

Because of the prophecies made about the Savior and the Savior’s messenger, everyone should bless God.

You can only bless God if you are Christian. Non-Christians have no desire to bless God. But as a Christian, you are able to bless God for his tender mercy in visiting us in Jesus and providing deliverance from his wrath and from our sin.

Bless God by thanking him for the Savior. Bless God by thanking him for the Savior’s messenger, who prepared people for the Savior. And bless God by thanking him for your salvation. Amen.

⁵ Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 95.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Father, we bless you for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We bless you also for the Savior's messenger, John the Baptist, who prepared people for the Savior. And we bless you for the gift of salvation, which you grant by your grace to all who come to you asking for your forgiveness.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and bless God!