

GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

Message 5

Text: Luke 1:57-80

Date: 2/23/2014

INTRO: In this series of messages we are following in chronological fashion the life of Christ, or the good news of the Messiah. We were introduced to the whole account of the life of Christ by Luke and John. We then went to Luke and he gave us a lot of detail on the conception of John the Baptist, the promised forerunner of Christ. He then told us of the conception of Jesus Christ, some six months after the conception of John the Baptist. Shortly after this, Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Here we have an elderly woman who is miraculously expecting, and a young woman who is also miraculously expecting, and they both understand each other and are a comfort to one another.

But now Elizabeth is about to be delivered and she will have a lot of company, and Mary knows it will be in both their best interests that she should now leave, and go back home. Luke, in his Gospel will now give us some of the historical events surrounding John the Baptist's birth. After John is born, Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, gives an amazing prophecy. And we will be looking at those two points this morning.

But before we begin, I want to read for us 1 Peter 1:10-11. Listen to what Peter writes about the Gospel, which we are just beginning to study. He says, *Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.*

The story of the life of Christ we are considering in these messages was something the OT prophets searched into diligently. How they must have longed to see and hear the things that happened in the life of Christ. That life is what we call the Gospel. It is the good news. It is salvation. And this salvation the angels desire to look

into, but they can only go so far. They cannot experience salvation, and I think I have found out why and someday, if I get that all together, I will give a message on it. You see the account before us is a most amazing account, and so is the salvation revealed in this account.

C. Birth Of John The Baptist (Luke 1:57-80)

1. Elizabeth's deliverance (Luke 1:57-67)

Before us then, this morning, is Luke 1:57-80. We begin with Elizebeth's deliverance in verses 57-67. In these verses we have the account of the birth of John the Baptist. But let us begin with verses 57-58 (read). After Elizabeth delivered her son, the neighbors all gathered around. Here is a well known godly couple, and in their old age, the Lord has been gracious to them. You can imagine all the talk and excitement in Ein Karem. You can imagine what took place in Zacharias's home for the next number of days. And we noted in the last message that Mary has left to escape all this publicity.

So, let us read 59-61 (read). Jewish males were circumcised on the eighth day. Here John's Jewishness is permanently stamped. Let me quote from Eedersheim here. He says, "We can scarcely be mistaken in supposing, that then, as now, a benediction was spoken before circumcision, and that the ceremony closed with the usual grace over the cup of wine, when the child received his name in a prayer that probably did not differ much from this at present in use" 157).

So, according to Eedersheim, the benediction would have gone something like this, "Our god, and the God of our fathers raise up this child to his father and mother, and let his name be called in Israel Zacharias, the son of Zacharias. Let his father rejoice in the issue of his loins, and his mother in the fruit of her womb as it is written in Proverbs 22:25, and as it is said in Ezekiel 16:6 and again in Psalm 55:8, and Genesis 21:4." These Scripture passages would have been quoted in full during this benediction.

Well, I expect that it was during this naming by the priest that Elizabeth spoke up and said, "Oh, please wait a minute. I'm sorry, but he won't be called Zacharias. We are going to call him John." Now I can just imagine, all the Jewish mothers attending this special occasion, and how the chatter of a sudden has greatly increased. And they said, "But Elizabeth, none of your relatives have that name. Why would you call him John? We Jews don't do it like this."

Now I must insert here, that these are not Mennonites, even though they insist it should be a name in the family. Don't tell David Cloud I said this, but these aren't even Baptists. These are Jews. But you might conclude from this what I have told you before, and that is that we might be quite closely related to the Jews.

Well, I suppose after things don't settle and the chatter increases, and though there are only about a dozen Jews there, there are 35 opinions, that the old Rabbi lifted his hand, and slowly things calmed down. Then he said, "Now Zacharias can't talk, but he should have some say in this matter too." So look at verses 62-64 (read).

Eedersheim says, "It was all most fitting. The question of unbelief had struck the Priest dumb, for most truly unbelief cannot speak; and the answer of faith restored to him speech, for most truly does faith loosen the tongue" end quote. Is it not unbelief that keeps our tongue quiet?

So, a miracle took place right here. Zacharias, who had not been able to talk since his experience in the temple some nine months earlier, suddenly speaks up. And I suppose after he spoke for a while, they had the traditional cup of wine after the naming of the baby.

Now look at verses 65-66 (read). You see, we have here the preparation of the Messiah for the world. This thing was noised abroad, and fear fell on all the people. You can imagine that for the next while, all through the hill country around Jerusalem people were talking. They might

have said things like, "Do you remember during the feast of Tabernacles when Zacharias, from Ein Karem served in the course Abijah at the altar of incense and he couldn't speak any more? Have you heard that they have a son now, and that Zacharias can speak again? What do you think this all means? Do you think we may expect something to happen out of all this? And so talk went abroad. You see, it says that all those who heard this kept these things in their hearts and said, "What kind of child will this be?" But verse 66 says, "And the Lord was with him." It must have been evident from a young child that John, who was to become the Baptist, was not an ordinary child. Even from a young age, the hand of God was upon this child.

2. Zacharias' prophecy (Luke 1:67-79).

Well, our second point is Zecharias' prophecy in verses 69-79. After the naming of the baby, Zacharias is filled with the Holy Spirit. So, let us read verses 67-80 (read). Zacharias begins like this, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel..." You will note that the verb 'is' is italicized. That means it is not in the original text. The verb, when it is left out, is to be understood. I believe the verb here should be, "Blessed be". Or in modern English, "May the Lord God of Israel be blessed."

There are two different words in the original NT which are both translated to bless. That causes some confusion. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" the word 'blessed' is *makarios*. But here in our text the original word is *eulogeetos*. This word comes from two words eu, meaning well, and logos, meaning words. So it is good words or well speaking. I would translate it like this, "May the Lord God of Israel be well spoken of because..." and then Zacharias lists the reasons.

The first reason then is because the Lord God of Israel has visited His people. You see, for 400 years the prophets had been silent. God had not sent any. Let me put that in perspective. That is

about 250 years more than Canada has been in existence. And now, in Israel, after these many long years, God has once more visited His people. Now we need to understand here that Zacharias is not talking about his son, John here, but about Jesus Christ, who has already been conceived and will be born in just three months from this time. So Zacharias gives a number of reasons why God should be blessed. The very first reason because God has visited His people Israel.

The second reason the Lord God of Israel was to be blessed or well spoken of is because He has redeemed His people. Now, Zacharias was prophesying here. Through the One who was to be born in just three months, God would redeem His people. Jesus Christ, of whom John was the forerunner, who was also the son of Zacharias would be the Redeemer.

Now we must spend a little time on this word, to redeem. There are also two words translated to redeem, but again, they do not both mean the same thing. The word 'exagorazo' is translated to *redeem*. It means to buy something back or out. For example, a slave could be bought out of slavery and set free, if the owner got the right price. But the word *lutrosis*, which is used in our text and which is translated 'to redeem' here means 'to release on receipt of ransom.' So exagorazo is the paying of the price, lutrosis is the actual deliverance or setting free. In the context, the deliverance spoken of is the deliverance of Israel from their enemies. But this deliverance will ultimately extend beyond the Jews and encompass the whole world. For God so loved the world... So, the Lord Jesus both paid the price to buy us out, and He also sets us free from our sins. Now if there ever was a reason to speak well of the God of Israel, here it is. He has visited and redeemed or set His people free!

Now let me make a note here. In the OT the word 'atonement' occurs 70 times. It means to cover. You see, before Jesus died for mankind, sins were covered, they were atoned for; but they were not actually put away. The price had not yet been

paid for redemption from sin. But in the NT, the word atonement does not occur at all. The KJV has it once in Romans 5:11 but it is actually the word 'reconciliation'. After Jesus died to redeem man from sin, sins were no longer covered. When a sinner repented and believed in Christ after Jesus died those sins are removed entirely.

So we go to verse 69 (read). The third reason the God of Israel is to be blessed or well spoken of is because He has raised up a horn of salvation for Israel, and ultimately us. Now when it speaks of a horn, the horn symbolizes power. Christ, through His life, death, burial and resurrection has the power over the devil and the devil has to let us go free from sin when Christ becomes our Savior through repentance and faith. And the God of Israel raised up this horn of salvation in the house of His servant David. That is of the tribe of Judah.

So let us read verse 70 (read). God had foretold this Messiah, it says, since the world began. God Himself prophesied in Genesis 3:15, the coming of the Redeemer. From there on prophecy after prophecy has been given of the coming of the Messiah.

Then we note in verse 71 for whom this redemption was originally meant (read). When Zacharias says, 'we', and 'us', he is speaking of Israel. What Zacharias' prophecy centers around is the coming of the Messiah to Redeem Israel. You understand that at this time Israel was standing at the end of the 69th week of Daniel and at the threshold of the 70th week. After this 70th week the kingdom of God would be set up on earth and the Messiah would rule from Jerusalem. Of course, we now know that because the Jews rejected their Messiah when He did come, the 70th week was postponed, and the Church age entered.

So let us read verses 72-73 (read). Performing the mercy of verse 72 was the sending of the Messiah to deliver Israel. This had been His covenant with Israel which He made with Abraham. It is found in Genesis 22:15-18. We won't read it

as Daryl spoke to us about that last Sunday. But verse 73 speaks of these verses in Genesis 22.

Verses 74-75 close this long sentence which began in verse 68 (read). This great deliverance God was to grant to Israel was to take place in order that they, having been delivered out of the hand of their enemies might serve the Lord without fear. This speaks of the time we know as the millennium. Zacharias looked forward to the deliverance of the people of Israel being from their enemies so that they might serve God without fear, and in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives. This is with reference to the long awaited kingdom of God on earth, when Messiah would rule from Jerusalem. Zacharias, like all other OT prophets did not foresee the Church age which came in because Israel rejected this very Messiah that was now about to be born.

Now I want you to notice that verses 68-75 are all one long sentence. Let us read it like that (read). Then verses 76-79 are on a different note but are also one sentence (read). Zacharias is now talking to his newborn son, the baby that they have just circumcised and named. And he says, "And you, child..." So he tells this baby, John, that he will be called the prophet of the highest. Jesus later tells us in Matthew 11:11 that John was the greatest prophet that had ever yet lived. But then He says something very interesting, and that is that the least prophet in the kingdom of heaven will be greater than John the Baptist. What would make John the Baptist a greater prophet than any other prophet before Him? How could he be greater than Daniel? Or Isaiah? And what makes the least prophet in our age, the kingdom of heaven, greater than John the Baptist? For years I puzzled on this question until it dawned on me what makes one prophet greater than another.

You see, what makes one farmer greater than another? Well, he has more land and more machinery than another. What makes one logger greater than another? Well, he has more machinery

and logs more meters of wood than another. What makes one grocer greater than another? Well, he has a bigger grocery store or he has more stores than another. What makes one prophet greater than another? Well, he has a greater message. How did John's message exceed all other prophets? Well, they all said, "The Messiah is coming." John said, "The Messiah is here!" Twice, John when He saw Jesus, said to those around him, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Once he added, "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world." No prophet had ever been able to say that before! You see, those prophets had all said, "He is coming." But John said, "He is here!"

But, how is the least prophet in the kingdom of heaven greater than John? Well, the OT prophet said, "He is coming." John said, "He is here." The least prophet in the kingdom of heaven has the four Gospels. He says, "He was promised; He has come, and He was crucified, buried and resurrected and He now sits in heaven with God Almighty, waiting to come again!" Not even John the Baptist had such an incredible message.

So, Zacharias says, "And you child, will be called the prophet of the Highest." The verse then goes on like this, "...for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways." That is also what we read in the last two verses of the OT. And to prepare the way of the Lord, John will, according to verse 77, "give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins." Now let me ask a question here. Do we get the remission of sins by the knowledge of salvation, or, as this text says, that we get the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins? Well, the Jewish people were steeped in religious sins and others as well. Before they could understand God's plan of salvation for them where He would come and rule in the Messianic kingdom, they would first have to have their sins forgiven. Repentance and forgiveness of sins would open the Scriptures up to them so that they could understand all of salvation, not just the forgiveness of sins.

And so John would go before the face of the Lord to prepare the way for Him by dealing with their sins so that they would be able to understand this great salvation. And verses 78-79 will tell us how he will do this (read). The message of repentance, which John will bring, which leads to repentance will come through the tender mercies of God.

Verse 79 now is very significant, for here, for the first time we have direct reference to the fact that this salvation will be for the Gentiles as well. So, turn to Matthew 4 (read 12-16). Here is Galilee of the Gentiles, and it is here that Jesus did most of His preaching and teaching. When I spoke to Rabbi Gershon Solomon in Israel, he is the head of the Temple Mount Institute, he pointed out how the future temple is meant to include the Gentiles as well. And in these Gospels we see that this salvation Zecharias is speaking about will come to the Gentiles as well.

3. John's preparation for ministry (1:80)

We come now to verse 80, the only verse of Scripture we have on John's life between when he was eight days old, until he began to minister at about 30 years of age. This verse says of John the Baptist, "So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel." We expect that John's manifestation to Israel most likely came when he was about 30 years old. Now, what we are told here is that John was in the wilderness or deserts until he began to preach. And we may ask, what did John do during that time he was in the desert? Well, I believe he went to school. I believe he had a burning drive to know the Word of God. I believe by the time he was thirty years old, he understood from the prophets what lay before them.

And just what did he do in the wilderness? Well, it is believed that he went down into the Dead Sea area, around En Gedi, where there was a very religious sect of Jews. There were among the Jewish people three main sects; the Sadducees,

the Pharisees, and the Essenes. There was one more, the Zealots, who believed in a political takeover of Israel. But the Essenes lived around En Gedi, close to the Dead Sea, down in the desert.

Now F. B. Meyer writes like this of the Essense, among whom it is believed that John spent much of his time, "The aim of the Essenes was moral and ceremonial purity. They sought after an ideal of holiness, which they thought could not be realized in this world; and therefore, leaving villages and towns, they betook themselves to the dens and caves of the earth, and gave themselves to continence, abstinence, fastings, and prayers, supporting themselves by some slight labors on the land. Those who have investigated history tell us that the cardinal point with them was fain in the inspired Word of God. By mediation, prayer, and mortification, frequent ablutions, and strict attention to the laws of ceremonial purity, they hoped to reach the highest stage of communion with God. They agreed with the Pharisees in their extraordinary regard for the Sabbath. Their daily meal was of the simplest kind, and partaken of in their house of religious assembly. After bathing, with prayer and exhortations they went, with veiled faces to their dining room, as to a holy temple. They abstained from oaths, despised riches, manifested the greatest abhorrence of war and slavery, faced torture and death with the utmost bravery, refused the indulgence of pleasure."

And it seems here John was educated. Now our last verse has said that John grew strong in spirit. What we have in John the Baptist is a man of conviction. No doubt in his days of training he learned of Daniel's 70 weeks. He saw that they were within less than three years from the beginning of the 70th week. He saw that in that 70th week the judgment of God would fall and God's wrath would be poured out on living mankind.

He noted the stench of sin arising from the corruption of false humility, and the deep seated

religious pride of the Scribes and Pharisees. He saw sins of the envy and jealousy and bitterness, the deep seated hypocrisy among the people, and it seems he could have panicked to think that this sinful nation could be brought to repentance in just over 2 years. No doubt that when he preached, he preached with an intensity and earnestness no people alive in Israel at that time had ever heard. They had not heard it in some 400 years. And the substance of John's message was sin and the solution in his message was repentance. But before we see him preach, we will look at the birth of Christ.

CONCL: So, let me just in brief tell us what we have covered of the life of Christ. The Gospels of Luke and John have introduced us to our subject. Then Luke told us about Zacarias and Elizabeth, and the conception of John the Baptist, and then he told us about the conception of Jesus Christ. We have just looked at the birth of John the Baptist, and at Zachariah's prophecy which took place at that time.

Then we considered briefly what transpired in John's life until he was about 30 years old. I recommended that during his 30 years he was being prepared to seek to turn the nation of Israel, and prepare them for the Messiah. And I believe that having learned of the prophecies of the OT what was to happen and that now they were within less than three years of where the wrath of God was to come, he saw a nation so steeped in sin that he could hardly fathom that repentance could be achieved in the short time that they had left. And so, in our studies, John is on the verge of beginning his preaching.

But we will go back in the next message and see the events surrounding the birth of Christ, until He too is about 30 years of age. It is like this, that the Bible begins the Gospel story.