



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Sermon Notes

The *Benedictus*, Part 1

Luke 1:67-80

June 26, 2011

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 appearance to Israel.

- A friend of mine once asked me if I knew the essential difference between historical Christianity and every other religion in the world.

- After a brief pause and no answer from me, he simply said, “Every religion in the world involves man attempting to reach up to God. Biblical Christianity, however, involves God reaching down to man.”
- As simple as this answer is, it is most certainly true. Consider a well-known Old Testament story. The story of the building of the Tower of Babel represents exactly this truth. Yet, it goes a step further, showing how man, in his “attempts” to reach up to God, even tries to elevate himself to the level of God.

Genesis 11:4: “⁴Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’”

- Notice how those in Babel were seeking to “make a name for” themselves by building a structure that reaches into the heavens (that is, the physical sky).
 - Yet, the point is that man was building from the earth upwards – attempting the reach upwards – even become like gods.
 - Another way of describing all other religions of the world is that they create God in their image, rather than understanding that we are created in the image of God.
 - Biblical Christianity declares that God must condescend to us and reach downward to lift us up. God takes the initiative, and we are completely dependent upon Him.
- Therefore, the Incarnation is at the heart of the Christian story – the gospel message. God came down to man to bring us up to Him.
 - No other religion in the world makes such a claim.
 - And here in Luke 1:67-79, Zechariah – the father of John the Baptist – blesses the LORD for the coming Messiah – the coming Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

I. Zechariah Blesses God

- a. The Messiah will Deliver His People**
- b. The Messiah will Fulfill the Promises of Old**
- c. The Messiah will Transform His People**

II. Zechariah Prophecies Concerning the Preparatory Work of John

III. Zechariah Prophecies of the Salvific Work of the Messiah

I. Zechariah Blesses God

⁶⁷ *And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,*
⁶⁸ *'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,*

- In Verse 67, Luke states that Zechariah was “Filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied...”
 - This parallels Luke 1:41-44, where Elizabeth, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit as she spoke.
 - Certainly the prophetic words of Zechariah are the result of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of him.
 - In fact, John MacArthur refers to the subsequent words and prophecy of Zechariah as an “outburst of praise and worship” – the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in Zechariah.
- The first word of the hymn in the Latin version (the Vulgate) of the New Testament is *Benedictus*, translated, “Blessed.” Consequently, Zechariah’s prophecy is often referred to as “The Benedictus.”
 - The idea of blessing God for what He has done is a common theme throughout the Old Testament.

Psalm 41:13: ¹³ Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.

Psalm 72:18: “¹⁸ Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.”

▪ See also Psalm 106:48.

- Notice that Zechariah refers to the Lord as **the God of Israel**. This is not some nebulous deity to which Zechariah is referring. This is, indeed, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – Yahweh – the one true and living God.

a. The Messiah will Deliver His People

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;

- Zechariah states that he blesses the Lord for three particular reasons: (1) He has visited His people; (2) He has redeemed His people; and (3) He has raised up a horn of salvation in the house of David (to save His people from their enemies).
 - What is interesting, here, is that Zechariah speaks of the work of the Messiah in the **past [aorist] tense**, as though Christ had already come.
 - The reason for this is because, Zechariah, speaking prophetically and filled with the Holy Spirit **speaks of the future with such certainty** as to what God will do – that is, fulfill His promises – that he can rightly speak of it as though it has already occurred.

Robert Stein states, "...although 'redemption' awaits the future work of the Son of God, its certainty is such that a past tense corresponding to a prophetic perfect can be used to describe this future event (cf. 1:50)."

Thomas Dehany Bernard writes, "The retrospect of prophecy and the prospect of fulfillment are commingled in the speakers mind."

- This is a similar idea to that of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:30: ³⁰ "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."
- That is, Paul in Romans 8 clearly states that those whom God called and justified He also glorified. That is, Paul is so certain that everyone who puts their faith in Christ will be justified and glorified, that he puts our glorification in the past tense.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He visited His people.

- The statement regarding the "visitation" of the Messiah has Old Testament roots.
 - The expression of "God visiting" His people is common in the Old Testament (Genesis 50:24-25; Exodus 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; 30:12; Isaiah 23:17; Psalm 80:14; Psalm 106:4; Ruth 1:6).
 - The concept of "visitation" can either refer to God's visitation in judgment and wrath (Jeremiah 44:13), or His gracious visitation in order to bless His people (Psalm 8:4).
 - However, here, the reference is clearly to God's gracious visitation throughout the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The "visitation" Zechariah is speaking of is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ...when "the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us."

- The **visitation** of the LORD, that is, the Incarnation, represents God’s initiative in salvation. It is His pursuit of His people – reaching down to *draw* us to Himself.

Philip Ryken comments, “Salvation is not a human invention, but a divine visitation. It is not something we achieve by going to God, but something God had done by coming to us in Christ. No one is ever saved except by the grace of God.”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● He redeemed His people.
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- The first aspect of the coming Messiah’s work that Zechariah refers to is the truth that He will **redeem** His people.
- **The concept of redemption involves paying a price in order to free someone or a group of people from slavery or bondage.**
- There is no doubt that in first century Palestine the Jews were in political bondage to the yoke of the Roman Empire. They desperately sought freedom from such slavery.
 - Consequently, contemporary readers of Zechariah’s prophecy perhaps thought the “redemption” spoken of in Verse 68 was a political redemption.
 - Indeed, redemption through Christ will eventually encompass “political” redemption, as it will be all-encompassing (at the Second Coming all things will be made new and there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth).
 - However, the redemption spoken of through Zechariah is much more significant than merely political freedom.

Norval Geldenhuys writes, “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.”

- **The coming Messiah will redeem His people from the bondage of sin – the worst bondage the world has ever known.**

John MacArthur writes, “Redemption frees sinners from slavery to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:6, 17, 20), the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13; 4:5), the sinful ways of fallen men (1 Corinthians 7:23), false religion (Galatians 4:3), and Satan, who wielded the power of death (Hebrews 2:14-15) subject to God’s will (Job 2:6). The purchase price paid to redeem the elect was the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18-19).”

- Yet, one may ask, “How is it possible for the Messiah to redeem us and free us from bondage?”
- The answer is clear: “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...”

- He *raised up* a horn of salvation for us.

- In Verse 68, Zechariah states that the Messiah will “redeem His people” and here in Verse 69 he states how that is possible: **He has raised up a horn of salvation for us.**”
- Notice, first of all, that the horn of salvation will be raised up from “the house of his servant David.”
 - The coming Messiah will be the long-awaited Davidic king, fulfilling the promises of the Old Testament, going all the way back to 2 Samuel 7.
 - Furthermore, this will fulfill the anticipations of the remnant people of Israel as well.
 - Also, notice, though, that the Davidic Messiah will be **raised up**.
 - In the Old Testament, men who held the primary offices in Israel were “**raised up**”:
 - Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15,18);
 - Judge (Judges 3:9,15);
 - Priest (1 Samuel 3:35);
 - King (2 Samuel 23:1).
 - The idea is that these men were “raised up” from among the people.
 - Consequently, this phrase - “raised up” – coupled with the idea and truth that God “visited” His people presents a sort of paradox.
 - That is - the Messiah was “raised up” from among the people and He “visited” or came down from heaven.
 - But, such is the truth of the Messiah – Jesus Christ. He was fully God (coming down from heaven) and fully man (from among the people).

- Yet, not only does Zechariah say that the Messiah would be “**raised up...in the house of David**”, but that he would be the “**horn of salvation.**”
 - This phrase is derived from the Old Testament, where **the horns of an ox or bull symbolize the strength and power of the animal.**

1 Samuel 2:10: “¹⁰ The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;
 against them he will thunder in heaven.
 The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
 he will give strength to his king
 and exalt the power of his anointed.”

2 Samuel 22:3: “³ my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
 my shield, and the horn of my salvation,
 my stronghold and my refuge,
 my savior; you save me from violence.”

Psalms 18:2: “² The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
 my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
 my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

Psalms 132:17: “¹⁷ There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
 I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.”

See also Psalm 89:17, 24; Psalm 92:10; and Micah 4:13.

○ **Similarly, Christ, the “horn of God’s salvation” is the very strength and power of God.**

Darrell Bock writes, “The reference to the ‘horn of salvation’ is drawn from the Old Testament, where it pictures an ox with horns that is able to defeat enemies with the powerful thrust of its protected head (Deuteronomy 33:17). The image was transferred to the warrior who had a horned helmet to symbolize the presence of power (Psalm 75:4-5, 10; 148:14). The figure is also used to describe God Himself (2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2). In particular, the term was often used for a powerful regal (monarch or king).

- The phrase the “horn of salvation” is similar to referring to the “right arm of the LORD.” Indeed, Christ represents the very strength of the LORD, for there is no one, no power, greater in all of Creation.
- As the LORD raises up His horn of salvation, He also does so in order to judge His enemies. That is, **we are saved through God’s judgment on our enemies** (recall the parting of the Red Sea and the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh’s army).

- The Messiah has indeed come down to destroy the powers that hold us hostage and in bondage in order to free us to life of holiness and righteousness.

On August 20, 2008, an American businessman working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Wardak Province of Afghanistan, was kidnapped by a group of armed gunman of the Hezb-i-Islami (Party of Islam) militant group of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The unnamed American was then taken to a mud hut 8,000 feet up a remote mountain and held hostage for two months, with the militants demanding a huge ransom for his release. By October, the American had attempted to escape once and had little hope of being rescued. He later said, “In my mind I’d given a military intervention a one out of a hundred chance. Not that they couldn’t do it, but they’re busy and I’m not that important a fellow.”

Yet, late one night in October of 2008, on an airstrip many miles away from the remote hut where the American was held hostage, several twin sets of Chinook helicopter rotor blades were starting to turn as about 60 of America’s most elite troops prepared to prove him wrong. Members of an unnamed U.S. military task force had been hunting for the businessman since soon after he went missing. Now they were ready to act.

As night fell Oct. 14, three Chinook helicopters flew into the mountains about 30 miles west of Kabul, Afghanistan. and inserted roughly 24 to 30 special operators — most of them Navy SEALs — about three miles from the kidnapers’ hideout. This, of course, was intended to minimize the chance of being seen or heard. As midnight came and went, the operators climbed slowly toward the objective for 4½ hours. At that altitude, the special operations officer said, “You can’t exactly exert yourself too much or you’ll be spent.” The commandos ascended 2,000 feet before pausing roughly 275 yards from the target.

There they established an objective rally point — typically, the site where a special operations force stows unnecessary gear and puts security teams out while those making the final approach to the target transform into “pure assault mode.” From this rally point, an assault force of seven men stealthily crept toward the objective.

One of the commandos tossed a pebble against the hut’s tin door — a traditional way visitors announce their arrival in rural Afghanistan. Failing to wake the captors from their sleep, the special operations team quickly made their way inside the hut, and with their silencer-equipped weapons, quickly eliminated any possibility that militants would pose a problem to this rescue mission. As quickly as the U.S. Special Ops team had entered, they left, with the freed American into the Afghan night sky.

- One could rightly say that our Special Operations units are the “horns” of the U.S. military.

- Yet, as impressive and overwhelming as these U.S. military teams are, they do not compare in power to God’s “horn of salvation” – His Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- But just as the Special Operations team did in 2008, Jesus Christ – the “horn of our salvation” destroys our enemies, frees us from bondage, and takes us to where He is.

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- Yet, once again, Zechariah explains the background of the coming Messiah:

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;

- That is, the coming Messiah – or the promise of Him – was nothing new.
- God had spoken of the salvation throughout the prophets. This was the purpose of the Old Testament – to speak through the prophets in order to point towards and find its fulfillment in Jesus, the Christ – the Davidic Messiah.
- In fact, the shadows of our salvation were the acts of deliverance of God’s people, such as in the Exodus.

<p>b. The Messiah will Fulfill the Promises of Old</p>

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

- Here, Zechariah (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) continues in his explanation of the basis of the Messiah’s coming visitation: “**to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant**, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham...”
- Just as God spoke of salvation *through the prophets* He also promised mercy (salvation) to our fathers, specifically in an oath to Abraham.
 - God’s remembrance of “his holy covenant” brings to mind the story of David and Mephibosheth.

1 Samuel 18:3: “³Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.”

2 Samuel 9:1: “¹And David said, ‘Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’”

- In fulfillment of the story of Mephibosheth, God specifically remembers His Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:7; 22:16-18; 26:3, 24; Deuteronomy 7:8).

Genesis 12:1-3: “¹Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² 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. ³ 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.’”

Genesis 17:7: “⁷And I will 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.”

Genesis 22:16-18: “¹⁶and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Genesis 26:24: “²⁴And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.”

- In His remembrance of the Abrahamic covenant, God pursues a people in order to “show mercy” to them.
 - The idiom “to do mercy” is found in Genesis 24:12; Judges 1:24; 8:35; and Ruth 1:8.
 - The concept of God’s mercy is central to our redemption and the Gospel message.

- In few places in the Old Testament, do we see a more vivid picture of mercy than in the Passover and Exodus from Egypt.
 - In the act of the Passover and Exodus, God “passed over” His people and spared them from the death of their firstborn.
 - Yet, they were a sinful people and most certainly deserved death.
 - Consequently, **mercy is an act of God whereby He chooses not to give us what we deserve (i.e., death).**

- Again, in the Exodus, God spares the Hebrew people from destruction and leads them into the wilderness.
- Yet, God does not leave His people in the wilderness, for He does not merely extend mercy (not giving people what they deserve), but He also extends grace – that is, **giving people blessings they have not earned.**
- And this is theme of the remainder of Zechariah’s prophetic message – a message we will conclude next week.

c. The Messiah will Transform His People

II. Zechariah Prophecies Concerning the Preparatory Work of John

III. Zechariah Prophecies of the Salvific Work of the Messiah