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The Sermon

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Luke 1:72-80

"Praise, Prophecy, and Promises"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, we've got a great passage we're going to be looking at. What a wonderful time of the year for us to be in these opening verses of the gospel of Luke. And so I want to invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to the gospel of Luke chapter 1, and today we're going to be looking at verses 72 to 80, though I'm going to get a running start and I'm going to start, actually, in verse 67. And I want to begin, as always, by reading this passage of Scripture, and the reason we do it this way is just, really, to draw our attention to the Scripture, to the word of God, and for us to even begin with what God has recorded in His word. So, Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 67. And the title of this message is "Praise, Prophecy, and Promises."

I want to begin in verse 67: "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant - as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old - salvation from our enemies, and from the hands of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because

of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.' And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel."

This is the reading of God's word. It is infallible. It is inherent. It is inspired. It is authoritative. It is immutable. It is invincible to accomplish all of God's purposes. It shall not return to Him void. It shall not return to Him without accomplishing all His good pleasure. I wonder what that good pleasure will be for your life this day. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father in heaven, as always, we now bow before You and acknowledge You are God, the God of all truth, who has revealed Himself to us. And much has been recorded in Your word. So I ask now that You give us insight and understanding into Your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses that I have just read for you, we see the prophecy of Zacharias. We began looking at it last time, and we will look at it and complete it, Lord willing, today. And it is all about salvation. It is all about the salvation that will come to the world from God the Father by sending His Son Jesus Christ, who will be born of a virgin, and who will come to be the Redeemer of His people upon the cross. And this coming of the Christ into the world to bring salvation is so significant and so important that there must be a forerunner who will go before Him to prepare the hearts and the lives of the people to receive their King. And that forerunner is John the Baptist, and this is his father Zacharias who is making this prophecy of the salvation that is coming into the world. This prophecy is all about salvation.

The first part of it deals with praising God for this so great salvation. And we can never praise God too much for the salvation that He has given to us in His Son Jesus Christ. And then a little bit more than midway through this, Zacharias will turn his attention from praising God for this salvation to making a prophecy concerning his son and this salvation, that it will be his

son who will be a prophet, who will be an evangelist, who will be the forerunner, who will bring the knowledge of salvation. So this is all about this great doctrine and truth of salvation.

There's no one here today who does not need to be saved. Each and every one of us needs the salvation of God. Salvation is a deliverance from destruction, eternal destruction. It is being rescued from eternal ruin. And every one of us in this room must be saved if we are to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And we have been saved unto a living relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. That's what this passage is all about and it is just chock full of words of salvation.

I see redemption, and salvation, and mercy, and covenant, and holiness, and righteousness, and forgiveness, and tender mercy, and peace. These are the words that just leap off the page to me, and this is what we're going to be looking at today. And we need to remember at this time of the year as we consider Christmas that the incarnation of Christ is all about salvation. Everything else dealing with Christmas is a far distant second place. There's only one truth that is in the spotlight and in the very center of what the coming of Christ into this world is all about, and it is about salvation, the salvation that He has come to provide for each and every one of us, and that what we so desperately need.

So, what I want to do is I want to begin at the beginning again. Last time we looked at verses 67 to 71, and I'm going to briefly review this, but then we're going to extend into new territory, starting in verse 72. But what this has caused me to do is to look at this a second time and look at this, I think, with sharper focus, to be able to lay this out for you. So we're going to look at the whole. We'll take a comprehensive look at this entire passage.

And it all begins with, number one, "The praise for God. The praise for God." Beginning in verse 67, "And his father Zacharias (John's Father, John the Baptist's father Zacharias) was filled with the Holy Spirit." That means he was under the control and dominance of the Holy Spirit. He was under the power and the influence and the government of the Holy Spirit of God

that was dominating his life at this moment. And we read, "and he prophesied, saying." So what he will now say has, really, come from the Holy Spirit who is piecing together all that will now flow from his mouth, "saying," and he begins, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.'" This is where every prayer should start. This is where every time of worship should begin, by declaring, "Blessed be the Lord."

"Blessed be" means praise be the Lord, means the Sovereign One. He has a towering high view of God, the God of Israel, not the god of the Egyptians, not the god of the Canaanites. There's only one God, and that one God is the God of the Bible and it is the God of Israel, and every other supposed god (small case g) is, really, non-existent, just the result of the figment of man's imaginations. There is only one God, and it is this God.

Now you will notice the second line in verse 68, the first word is "for," and that is an extremely important word. The apostle Paul probably uses that word more than any other word in his thirteen epistles, and it is a word that introduces an explanation of what was previously said. So in other words, he praises God because, and what will be listed now are seven reasons why he praises God, and it's all caught up in the verbs. He will praise God because, number one, He has visited us; and, number two, because He accomplished redemption; and, number three, because He raised up a horn of salvation; and, number four, in verse 70, because He spoke; and in verse 72, because He showed mercy; and then, number seven, in verse 74, because He granted to us.

Please note that there is only one who is taking action in our salvation. It is God and God alone. We contributed nothing. God has done everything to save us. The only thing we have contributed is the sin that was laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ. We all like sheep have gone astray, each one of us has turned to his own way, and it is God who has had to take action, it is God who has taken the initiative, it is God who has pursued us, and it is God who has done everything that is necessary for your salvation and my salvation. So these are all verbs in the active tense. It is God who is acting on our behalf.

So, let's just look at this, "for He visited us," which means He drew near to us in the person of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He's already done this because in the womb of Mary the Holy Spirit has already conceived the human body, and the human nature is sinless of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has already come to this earth and is in the womb of Mary, and will be delivered. We will look at this next week.

And then we read in verse 68, "and accomplished redemption for His people." We need to be redeemed because we were born in the slave market of sin in bondage to sin and under the curse of the law, and redemption means that someone has come on our behalf and has paid the price to release us from our sins. The wages of sin is death, and Christ has come and died for our sins upon the cross, and He has accomplished redemption for His people, not for the whole world, but for everyone who would believe around the world, He has died for them.

In verse 69, "God has also raised up a horn of salvation." It is God who has done this. "Horn" refers to the horns of an animal, like an ox or a bull to gore an enemy. And Christ is likened unto a horn of salvation in His coming. He came on a mission, and it was to deal ruthlessly with our great enemy of sin. And upon the cross He defeated sin, He crushed the head of the serpent Satan, and He defeated death, and He set us free from this evil world system into which we were born. God did this. God raised up His Son, "and He raised Him up," it says in verse 69, "in the house of David His servant." It was according to the messianic line, the royal line. Jesus had to be born of the house of David in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, and so He was.

And then in verse 70 we read that God spoke. God spoke to us, verse 70, "and He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old." God is a speaking God. God is not silent. God is not muted. God reveals His mind to us. He speaks through the prophets of old. He's been speaking for centuries and centuries.

And what has He spoken? Verse 71, "Salvation." That's what God has spoken. God loves the word "salvation" because He loves to save His people from their sins. Verse 71, "Salvation" - and he now quotes Psalm 106:10 - "from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us." Originally when this was written in Psalm 106, the enemies here referred to the Egyptian armies that followed after Moses after the exodus when they came to the Red Sea. And God parted the Red Sea and His chosen people went through the Red Sea and came out on the other side. And then Pharaoh's armies and chariots followed after, and God caused the water to come now back down upon them and drown them.

Used in this context in verse 71, the enemies are those from whom you and I need to be saved, not referring to Pharaoh's army, but referring to our sins, and referring to Satan and his kingdom of darkness. And the salvation that God has provided, He has spoken to us about it through His holy prophets.

And so we come now to verse 72 as we begin our new exposition through this passage, and we see, fifth, that "God has shown mercy to us." Do you see that in verse 72, "to show mercy"? I mean, let's just pause for a moment. This word "show" means more than He just, like, holds up something for us to look at and observe. The word "show" here really means that God has acted, that God has done something, that God has exercised His mercy.

Now, His mercy is closely related to His grace and to His love, and the unique meaning of mercy is that God is full of compassion to those who are suffering devastation, that God is moved with pity towards those who are suffering greatly because of their sins, that God is not just sitting in heaven as our Sovereign Lord just making strategic chess moves in just a purely cognitive, intellectual way, but that God has a heart of mercy toward His elect, toward His people, and is moved and touched with their infirmities, and longs to intervene to relieve us from our self-inflicted pain and ruin because of our sin.

And so God now intervenes to show mercy, he says, "toward our fathers." "Fathers" here refers to our forefathers, our patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And the point here is that God has been showing mercy for centuries, going all the way back to the beginning of redemptive history, God has been tenderhearted toward His people. And this is good for us to be reminded of, that our God suffers with the afflictions with which they afflict us, and that God has mercy toward us.

In the middle of verse 72 we see that he remembers, "and to remember His holy covenant." Now, His holy covenant is His binding agreement, His irrevocable contract that He made with Abraham, that He would make of Abraham a great nation, and there would be many around the world who would be blessed. But Galatians 3:16 tells us that there is one seed in particular to come from the line of Abraham who would be the Redeemer of His people, and it is the Lord Jesus Christ. And so God remembers His holy covenant to send the Redeemer in the fullness of time.

The word "remember" here is what we call an anthropomorphic expression, meaning to communicate indescribable attributes of God to us in ways that we can understand in humanlike terms. God has never learned anything, God has never forgotten anything, and God has never remembered anything. God knows everything from the beginning to the end.

When he says, "and to remember," that is to communicate to us on, like, a kindergarten level in a way that we can understand that God never forgets His promises for us, that we are constantly on His mind, we are continually before His gaze, and the promises that He has made to us in His holy covenant, He will be the executor and the administrator of these promises, and He will never forget to come to our aid. That's what he is saying in verse 72, that He remembered us.

And then verse 73 just double-underscores it, "the oath which He swore," that God swore in the Abrahamic covenant means that God made an unbreakable pledge, that God obligated Himself to us, and He will keep His word, and He has sworn by Himself. There is no one higher than God

Himself upon which He can lay His hand and pledge to keep His word. In essence, He places His hand upon Himself and He swears by Himself that He will keep the oath that He made to Abraham our father. And so what is transpiring here in Luke 1 is the irrevocable fulfillment of the promise that He made long ages ago to Abraham. In fact, it goes all the way back to Genesis 3, that God has promised to send a Savior into this world.

The time is now. And Zacharias, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and Zacharias drawing upon years of the study of Scripture and his mind full of sound doctrine and theological truth, as he opens his mouth now to give this praise to God, all of these theological truths come pouring out of his mouth. It really speaks to the depth of Zacharias' understanding of Scripture and the height of his heart for God.

And so we come to verse 74, and it's the last reason for which he praises God. He says, "to grant us." And what God has granted to us, he says, is the privilege to serve Him. It's not a drudgery, it is a privilege to serve God in whatever capacity in which He places us.

And so look at verse 74, "to grant us" - that means to freely bestow to us; "us" refers to believers only - "that we," - again referring to believers only; and now he makes a slight parenthetical thought - "being rescued from the hand of our enemies." He just keeps going back to our salvation. Even as he now prepares to talk about our serving God, he inserts yet again that "we have been rescued from the hand of our enemies." And the word "rescued" here is a different word than "salvation." It's a word in the original language that means to be drawn out of danger to a secure place. And in our salvation, we have been drawn out of, really, the broad path headed for destruction and we have been brought to a safe place in Christ. Our security is in Christ.

So, verse 74, "to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies," - now note the result, the inevitable result of being rescued from our enemy of sin - "that we might serve Him." We're saved to serve. Not one of us is saved to sit. Not one of us is saved to be served. Every one

of us is saved to serve God by serving others. And he says, "that we might serve Him." Even as I serve you, in reality, there's a higher calling: I'm serving the Lord by serving you. And as you carry out your place of service for the Lord, as you serve others, in reality, you are serving God. But if you neglect to serve others, you are neglecting to serve God. And so that's how important it is that we realize we have been rescued from the hand of our enemies, that we might serve Him.

And please note, he says, "without fear." You see that at the end of verse 74, "without fear"? That means without dread, without terror. We're not serving the Lord in order to gain His acceptance and approval. He has given us His acceptance and approval because we are in Christ. And so because of this, we are liberated and freed up now to serve. We are motivated not by dread and terror, but by mercy and grace.

Now, verse 75 is very important. I don't want us to miss this, that as we serve the Lord, there's a prerequisite on our part to be used by God, and he says, "in holiness and righteousness." "Holiness" means the personal pursuit of purity, and "righteousness: literally means conformity to the divine character and will, that as we serve the Lord, it is necessary that we be walking in holiness and practicing righteousness.

More important than your giftedness is your godliness. More important than what you do is what you are. It is critically important. More important than your ministry is your integrity and your maturity. And so as we serve the Lord, it must be, this says, "in holiness and righteousness." Do you see that? So, some here today are more usable than others here today because it is mandated that we serve in holiness and righteousness.

And then, please note the next two words, this little prepositional phrase, "before Him." That means before the watching eyes of God and the listening ears of God that everything that we do, we do for an audience of one. We do because God is watching and God is listening. The Latin phrase *coram Deo*, in the face of God; every moment of every day you live your life *coram Deo*, whether you realize it or not, in the presence of God, before the

face of God. And so, even when we think no one else may see or hear what we do or say, God does. It's all before Him. And we do it for Him, right?

And then please note the last three words, "all our days." This is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which is more than the doctrine of eternal security. The doctrine of eternal security is what has been almost tritely called "once saved, always saved," though it is true, that once you are saved, you are forever saved. It's irrevocable.

But the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, it goes further than just I'm eternally secure and saved for heaven. It means that there will be a pursuit of holiness and righteousness all of my days, that I will be making progress in my growth in Christlikeness. Whether it is slow or whether it is accelerated; nevertheless, there will be always this moving forward to become more and more like Christ.

There will be growth seasons in our spiritual lives. And at times, it seems that we are advancing more; and at other times, we may be advancing not as swiftly as we should. But, nevertheless, this says, "holiness and righteousness before Him all our days." Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you shall perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." He will bring it to pass your Christian growth and development. You're responsible, but He will see that it comes to pass.

And in Philippians 2:13, Paul writes that "it is God who is at work within you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." And this will be carried out in your life all your days. And you say, "Well, what happens when I backslide? What happens when I go through a carnal season in my life?" Well, God has a wonderful way of spurring on our growth, and it is called His chastisement, and it is called His discipline, as He uses the rod of correction to bring us back to the point where we need to be. And then if even that is lagging behind, there is, for a Christian, a sin under death, that God just takes us home early. It's, from our perspective, a premature death.

And there are numerous examples in the Bible, from Moses to Ananias and Sapphira, to some of the Corinthians who came to the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner, to others. But as long as we're here on this earth, there will be a development that God will be bringing about in our lives of holiness and righteousness, and it becomes, it becomes, really, the chief confirmation that you are really saved, that you really know the Lord, that you've been born again, that there will be this outward evidence of a changed life by which you will be growing from glory to glory, from faith to faith.

So, this is the praise for God, and it's from verse 68 all the way down to verse 75, and it is eight verses, and it is seven reasons why Zacharias praises God, and worship always has its reasons. And what I find remarkable, which should challenge each one of us here today, is how Zacharias is able to articulate why he praises God. It's not just an emotion, though emotions are important in praising God. But what's driving the train, what is the engine is the theology that he knows about God and the doctrine that he knows about salvation. That is what is igniting his heart.

Worship never takes place in a mindless vacuum inside the heart. And it's certainly not increased by style of music or mood music. That only enhances the theology and the doctrine that we know to be true in our minds, and it is high theology that produces high doxology. It is a high view of God that produces high worship of God. And as I see Zacharias here, he has a mind that is saturated with biblical truth. And that tells me that you and I need to have a continual learning process of the great truths of the Scripture. None of us have arrived here today. I mean, we've only barely put a little toe into the ocean of truth that God has for us. So, this is where this begins.

And I guess one more observation I must make before I go on. Do you see again verse 68 to verse 75, do you see how top-heavy this prayer is in praise for God? I think sometimes our prayers tend to be top-heavy in petitions. This is top-heavy in praise for God, and I also want you to notice the order of this. Verses 68 to 75 doesn't come at the end of this prayer, it comes at the beginning of this prayer. And this is how Jesus taught us to

pray: "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That's what we see being modeled here. So this would be a great example for you to know how to pray and how to praise God by the example that is set by Zacharias.

Well, we need to proceed now to verse 76, and I want you to note, second, not only the praise for God, but "the prophecy about John, the prophecy about John." And what Zacharias will now tell us, it's a threefold prophecy. He will say to God and lay out for God the three avenues of John the Baptist's ministry. This is really good, I want you to see this.

He begins by making a prophecy that John will be a prophet in verse 76. You can see that. He begins, "And you, child," stop right there. Obviously, Zacharias has been looking upward into the heavens and praising God; and now at this moment, having looked vertically, he now looks horizontally, and he now looks to his son. This is the eighth day in which John is being circumcised. And so having looked up to God, he now looks to his son, and he says, "And you, child."

Now, the child's only eight days old, and the child cannot understand what his father is saying obviously. But what this is is, really, a recognition of what God is going to do in the life of his son, and he is prophesying over his son.

And so, in verse 76, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High." I don't think there could be a higher calling for anyone than to be a prophet, the prophet of the Most High. A prophet is someone who is a chosen messenger sent by God to bring God's message to God's people, and even to the world. A prophet is a divine spokesman. His message is, "Thus says the Lord."

And there are two kinds of prophecies that a prophet makes. There is what we call forth-telling, F-O-R-T-H, forth-telling, where you speak forth what God has already said. You remind and you reiterate and reaffirm the divine

revelation that God has already given. And so you are one who reinforces what has already been made known. And that's a powerful ministry that the prophets had.

The second aspect of being a prophet is what we call foretelling, F-O-R-E, foretelling, where you are revealing what will take place in the future, and you are given by God insight into the future of Israel, into the first coming of Christ, into the second coming of Christ, into the end of the age, into the new heavens and the new earth. And that is what we normally think of with the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel all the way down to Malachi. There was so much foretelling of the future.

But John's ministry will be that of forth-telling. He will be reinforcing the message that has been given for centuries. It will be the message of repentance: "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand," that you must repent of your sins in order to enter into the kingdom of God. You must come under the deep conviction of your sin and confess your sin to God, and turn away from the pursuit of sin and turn 180 and turn to God, and by faith believe in God and in God's Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And it would be this kind of a prophetic ministry that John the Baptist would have. His message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

And what makes this so important is there has not been a prophet in four hundred years. There has not been a prophet in Israel for four centuries, and the reason is because God has sent prophet after prophet after prophet, and Israel put their fingers in their ears and they hardened their heart, and they were uncircumcised of heart and stiff-necked and they would not receive their prophets. In fact, they were killing their prophets. And God says, "That's it," and God became silent and He has nothing else to say, "until you act upon what I've already told you." But now after four centuries, God remembers His covenant, and the tender mercy of God comes bubbling up, and so God sends John the Baptist to be a prophet to reestablish the message of salvation.

Now, second, not only does Zachariah say John will be a prophet - and this is very exciting that John will be a forerunner. And we read in verse 76, the second half, "for you will go on before the Lord" - there's the forerunner, "before the Lord" - "to prepare His ways." Now in ancient times, a forerunner would go ahead of the king. And if the king was traveling in a royal entourage - and he would travel from point A to point B so that the people would know that the king is coming, that they need to clean up their houses, they need to clean up the streets, they need to be ready for the king when he arrives - the forerunner would go out ahead of the king and announce, "The king is coming! The king is coming! Prepare the way for the king!"

And his message was one of repentance, and he would say that you must lower the high places and raise up the low places. In other words, as he would travel through the wilderness, high places of elevation must be lowered so that the king can easily travel, and it represents those who are high-minded and prideful and haughty need to lower themselves so that the king can travel into their life. And low places of depression must be raised up so that the king can travel with ease. And those in low-living and gutter living must repent and be raised up. And the crooked ways and crooked living must be made straight if the king is to come into your life. And so the fact that God would send a forerunner to prepare the way for the coming of Christ is an indication of just how apostate the nation was, that Jesus couldn't just come, someone had to come and wake up the people. Someone had to come first, as it were, with a trumpet and sound the alarm to wake up, "The king is coming!"

And so what a necessary ministry John the Baptist had, because the nation was in unbelief. The nation had all of the external trappings of religion, but they had no internal reality within their hearts. They were just going through the empty motions of coming to the temple in sacrifices, and they were caught up in the external facade of the Pharisees and the legalism, but they had no heart for God. In fact, Jesus said, "You people honor Me with your lips, but your heart is far from Me." He came to establish a religion of the heart. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who are meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. Blessed are the pure in heart."

He came to establish a religion of the heart, but Israel was so hardened that God had to send a forerunner to break up almost like the frozen Tundra of the North Pole so that ships could pass through there. It's the ministry of John the Baptist, that he would be this forerunner. And this was all prophesied. I mean, look at verse 76 again: "For you will go on before the Lord" - that's quoting Malachi 3:1 - "to prepare His ways," - that's quoting Isaiah 40:3. This was all laid out in God's plan that there would be this forerunner who would break up the hardened hearts in order to receive their King.

But there's a third and final prophecy. Not only will John be a prophet, and not only will John be a forerunner, but, third, John will be an evangelist. This is really good. And so an evangelist is one who preaches the way of salvation and calls sinners to come to Christ. And so in verse 77, what a ministry God gave to John, to give to His people the knowledge of salvation. Wow.

No one can have salvation until you first have the knowledge of salvation. Evangelism never occurs in an intellectual vacuum. There has to be the truth. There has to be the knowledge of the way of salvation. And specifically what this means is, you must know what God has done for you in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, and you must know the need that you have for this salvation, and you must know what is required of you to receive this salvation, and you must know what are all of the aspects of this salvation that God has for you. And so this ministry that God gave to John to give His people the knowledge of salvation, that there could not be a more glorious ministry entrusted to anyone.

Listen, the greatest joy in all the world is to know Jesus Christ. The second greatest joy is to tell others about how they can know Jesus Christ. And this is the ministry given to John in a preeminent way. And then in verse 77, here is one of the important aspects of salvation. He says, "by the forgiveness of their sins." This is what salvation brings, it's the forgiveness of sin.

The word "forgiveness" means to send something away. It means a dismissal of something so that it goes away. It's a release of something. And in this case, it's very obvious what that something is. It is our sin and the penalty of God upon our sin, "The wages of sin is death," that the forgiveness of our sins means that the condemnation and the guilt have been laid upon someone else, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He has taken it far away. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That's what forgiveness is.

And please note, "sins" is in the plural, which would indicate all of our sins who would ever believe in Christ – all of my past sins, which are many; all of my present sins still abound; and all the sins I would ever commit for the rest of my life. When Jesus died at the cross, He paid for all of my sins. And if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, I say the same to you. All of your sins have been canceled out. Romans 8:1, "There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This is the greatest need that you have, this is the greatest need that I have, is for our sins to be forgiven.

So I just have to ask you this question before I proceed: "Are your sins forgiven? Will you die in your sins, or has someone else died for your sins?" Your sins are the issue. You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I have sinned. And there's only one way to have sins forgiven. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

And why has He done this? Well certainly, for His glory. But verse 78 talks about, really, the driving force: because of the tender mercy of our God. He is so tender toward His people, toward you and me. The word "tender" here literally means the inward parts deep within a person. It really speaks to your intestines, your kidney, your liver. In our culture we say, "I love you with all my heart." And, physiologically, my heart is up here, my intestines are even deeper. And this is an expression of the deep, deep, deep internal mercy of God that wells up from His innermost being, the compassion and pity that He has for those who are devastated in their sins.

He says, "with which Sunrise from on high." Excuse me, "with which the Son from on high will visit us." "Sunrise" here is a figure of speech. It's a metaphorical expression for the Messiah who had come into a dark world, a world darkened by ignorance of God and much sin. And the coming of Christ is like the early morning sunrise as the sun first begins to peek over the horizon, and it just continues to rise and becomes brighter and brighter, and it pictures the coming of Christ in His virgin birth as the sunrise. And then when He goes to the cross, it'll be high noon. And the fullness of God's grace and mercy on display, it speaks to how dark this world was and is, and how much we need the light of Christ.

What's interesting here, too, is that this says, "with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us." The sunrise doesn't come from on high, it comes from the east. It doesn't come from the south. The sunrise doesn't come from the west. But here, the Sunrise for us comes from the east. But here, the Sun is coming, really, from the north, or straight up from on high, and it is the descent of Christ as the Light of the world coming down to us, not over the horizon from the east like our physical sun appears; but He will be coming down from on high from the Most High God, from the celestial palaces of glory, and "He will visit us." This word "visit" in verse 78 means to visit the sick.

Many times I've gone to the hospital and called on someone who is dying; gone to their home, and they're sick. This week I called on someone who is dying to pray with them and for – they couldn't even speak – to pray for them and to read some Psalms to them. This is the picture here of Jesus. "He will visit us," – at the end of verse 78, as visiting the sick, visiting the dying, and visiting the afflicted, as He comes into this world. In verse 79, He just continues this image – "to shine upon those who sit in darkness."

"Darkness" has an intellectual aspect and a moral aspect. Intellectually, to be in darkness means to be ignorant of God and to be ignorant of the way of salvation. And when you're ignorant, you just cannot be saved. And then the moral darkness obviously speaks of living in sin and debauchery. And so

Christ has come into a world of intellectual and moral darkness to shine the light of truth and grace into our lives. And he says, "in the shadow of death," - which is another allusion to darkness - "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

We live in such a dark world, that except the light shine we do not know how to live, and the way to take, and the way to go. What fools people are to try to make their way in this world without the light of truth, to try to raise their children without the light of truth, to try to make decisions who to marry and where to live without the light of truth, how to conduct themselves when they go to work and how to live without the light of truth. What we see here is Christ is the whole package. His light is for salvation. His light is for sanctification. His light is for guidance. His light is for grace. He is everything that we need. And so this is the prophecy that he has made concerning John. It's quite a prophecy, is it not?

I need to say one last thing, so please just give me a couple minutes. Verse 80, it's just hanging there. And I want next week for the Sunday before Christmas to be in Luke 2, so I just have to give you verse 80. And so it's the third main heading, "The progress of John." So, Luke now hits the fast-forward button and he now accelerates the spectrum of John's life in one verse from right here when he's eight days old until he starts his public ministry, okay, in one verse.

Look at it, verse 80, "And the child (referring to John; meaning a young child, a little one) continued to grow." Over the years he continued to grow physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. He continued to develop like anyone else would develop, yet the hand of God was uniquely upon him; and to become strong in spirit. He was not just any person, he was strong in spirit, meaning he had an inner vitality and a fortitude that made him strong in the Lord, and he was resolved to live his life with intentionality and purpose.

And then we read this odd statement, "and he lived in the deserts." The word "deserts" here means lonely, desolate places. He lived east of

Jerusalem out in the barren wilderness where nothing grows. It's just brown. It's just shades of brown. I've been there. You would think that you just landed in a spaceship on the moon and you just stepped out. And it's bleak, it's barren. And that's where John lived, away from Jerusalem, away from the crowds, away from the temple, away from the religious establishment, away from the Pharisees, in isolation, alone with God, absorbed with God, in the shadows of obscurity, until the day. It says right here, "until the day of his public appearance to Israel." Until that day, when he had grown up to be a man, and on that day, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," there's never been a greater sermon preached other than by the Lord Jesus Christ than that little sermon pointing people to Christ, preaching Christ and Him crucified as the only substitute for sins and the only expiation for our sins to take our sins far away.

So, let me conclude by making a statement and then raising a question. The statement is this: you, and I'll say I, you and I, have a massive sin problem. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's the statement, and the entire Bible backs that up. None of us is without sin. You must have the forgiveness of your sins. And there's only one way for you to have the forgiveness of your sins and that is for them to be washed away by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.

So, here's my question. Have your sins been forgiven? Have your sins been pardoned? God is keeping impeccable books - every thought, every motive, every deed, every word, every action, every reaction. He knows you inside out and He knows you better than you know yourself, and He has remembered all your sins. Have your sins ever been forgiven? There's only one way for your sins to be forgiven and that is for you to repent of your sin, for you to come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit about your sin and to be brokenhearted about your sin, and to turn away from your sin to God through His Son Jesus Christ. If you would repent of your sin, God would just wipe the slate clean, perhaps for some of you, today for the very first time.

You will meet God one day and you will stand before God, and when you stand there, you want all of your sins to have already been forgiven; and that is more than possible through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ, who died bearing our sins; and He has carried them far, far away. The good news of the gospel is that all your sins may be forgiven. I don't know where you are with the Lord, but if you've never committed your life to Christ, if you've never believed in Christ, if you've never repented of your sins, I urge you: don't leave here today with your sins, leave them at the cross. Leave them with the Lord under a flood tide of His blood.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for this prayer and this prophecy that has been offered by Zacharias. Lord, help us to receive the truth that You have for us, in Christ's name. Amen.