

**Luke 1: 67-75; “The Work of Promised Mercy”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on December 27th, 2020,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, is the one who uttered these very profound words after his ability to be able to speak was given back to him. He had lost his ability to speak because he had not believed the words of the angel Gabriel, that he would have a son in his old age. He was given the ability to speak again when the promise was fulfilled; when his son John the Baptist was born. So these verses are the words of a prophecy which God enabled him to utter, which would tell us what God would do in His showing mercy to His ancient people Israel. But they are also words which apply to the mercy which God shows to all people who will believe in the promises of God concerning Christ.

So, in these glorious words of this prophecy, we learn the truth that Christ was raised up to be a horn of salvation; to be that Great One, to be that Holy One, who would defeat all of our spiritual enemies. Because Christ would do this great work, God could show saving mercy; first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Well, specifically then, what kind of a work was it, that God did, when He sent Christ into the world? I want to show you that it was a 3-fold work of Promised Mercy. 1st – It was a work of God’s visiting mercy. (verse 68) 2nd – It was a work of God’s redeeming mercy. (verses 69-73) And 3rd – It was a work of God’s delivering mercy. (verses 74 and 75) All of this work was promised to those who would believe in Christ.

1st of all – This work, promised and performed by God, was a work of visiting mercy. (verse 68)

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited His people.” To visit means to come to the place where someone else lives; to spend some time with them, and then to leave again. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ did in His Incarnation. He who had existed from all eternity came down to visit men in the Person of His Son. First of all He came to His own. “In sending the Messiah, God made a gracious visit to His people, whom, for many ages, He had seemed to neglect, and be estranged from.”(Joseph Benson) If you will recall, it had been 400 years since the Old Testament prophets had been heard from, and so word from the Lord was rare, and thorns and thistles had grown up in God’s garden of Israel. There were many things from the Old Testament Scriptures which Israel had forgotten, or twisted to suit their fancies.

But the Light of the World was about to appear. He was about to pay a visit to mankind. He would be “the Daystar”, or “the Dayspring from on high”; the Son of the only true and living God would visit us, and with His holy, pure, and perfect light, He would begin to shine in the spiritual darkness. He who had existed from all eternity was now to be born in a stable in Bethlehem. Joseph Caryl, the puritan says, “To visit signifies to show mercy, and to refresh, to deliver, and to bless.” “That greatest mercy and deliverance that ever the children of men had, is thus expressed in Luke 1: 68, “The Lord has visited and redeemed His people.” He goes on to say: “Mercies are visitations, when God comes in kindness and love; to do us good, He visits us.”

“And these mercies are called visitations in two respects: 1st, Because God comes near to us when He intends to do us good, His mercy is a drawing near to a soul. “It is a drawing near to a place.” “As when God sends a judgment, or afflicts, He is said to depart and go away from that place; so when He does us good, He comes near, and as it were He applies Himself in favor to our persons and our habitations.” “And 2nd – His mercies are called a visitation because of the freeness of them.” “A visit is one of the freest things in the world.” “There is no obligation, but that of love, to make a visit: because, such a man is my friend, and I love him, therefore I visit him.” “Hence, I say, that greatest act of free-grace in redeeming the world, is called a visitation, because it was as freely done, as ever any friend made a visit to see his friend, and with infinitely

more freedom; there was no obligation on man's side at all, many unkindnesses and neglects there were, but God in love came to redeem man." (Practical Observations on Job, Vol. 2, P. 665 and 666)

Turn over to John 1: 14 with me, and you will see how our Lord Jesus came into the world. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." There it is; the Logos the Word, was begotten of the Father in eternity past as the One who, being of His own substance and essence as God, would become flesh. And He, being God, would become something that He had not been, from all eternity. He would become a man; He would take upon Himself human nature. He would be one person with two natures; the divine and the human. God in His essential Being is unchangeable, but He could add to Himself. And He did. Christ in His human nature, would be created and formed by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. In this way, He would come down to visit us, and He would live among us, as a man among men.

As the God-Man He would come into this world as a little baby, as a little child. He would live in a way that would show us the way of truth and righteousness. He would visit us in mercy because He saw our plight in sin; that we would perish forever if He did not come. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who has visited His people." He visited His people then, coming in flesh and blood. And because He came in flesh and blood, and lived His life unto God, as fully and as righteously for God as could possibly be; He now visits each and every believer with the gift of the Holy Spirit. And when He comes to you, He comes not simply to visit, but to dwell in you forever. He comes to form Himself in you. But I want you now to see, that this visit of Christ's, and this gift to you, dear believer, which would save your soul, could only be bought with a price. And so,

2nd – This work promised and performed was a work of God's redeeming mercy.
(verses 69-73)

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us..." Verse 70 – "As God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us." "To perform the mercy promised to our father and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham...." The purpose of the Lord's visit is here revealed. It was not just to come down and look and see if the report is bad concerning us. He knew that the report of the angels concerning the nation of Israel was bad. He knew what their sins deserved. So, too, He knows what our sins today, deserve. This is why the prophets had to prophesy "since the world began"; that we should be saved from our enemies. It is because we cannot be saved, by our own efforts, from our spiritual enemies, that we need a Redeemer.

God's promises have been since the world began. For our enemies have been since the world began. It was Satan, that great spiritual enemy of God and man who came into the garden of Eden in the Beginning of the world and deceived Eve. And it was through Eve's being deceived by the Devil, that she then convinced Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And so, the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, fell from their original righteousness. And all persons descended from them fell in them. What a desperate condition all men have been in since the Fall. But God, in His great love for Mankind, saw that we could not save ourselves. And so, He purposed, from the Beginning of the world to give great and magnificent promises; promises that those who believed them, would be delivered from their enemies. Our greatest enemies are Satan and ourselves.

Many people are deceived in their clinging to a hope that they will be able to hold on to their sins, and not be punished for them. No, only Christ can break sin's stranglehold over you. Only He can redeem you and purchase for you, by His suffering on your behalf, the gift of eternal life.

But thanks be to God, it says here in verse 69, that God has raised up a horn of salvation for us. He has raised up Jesus Christ our Lord to be that horn. The horn of salvation is a powerful word picture, here given to us, of Christ's charging at our spiritual enemies to gore them, spiritually speaking. He would to push them back, to scatter them, and to defeat them. There is a wonderful word picture given to us of Christ in the prophetic blessing of Moses upon the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 33: 13-17 which ties in with this, if you would turn over there with me.

“And of Joseph he said: ‘Blessed of the Lord is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and the deep lying beneath, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, with the best things of the ancient mountains,, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.’ “Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.” “His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox; together with them He shall push the people to the ends of the earth; they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.”

These verses speak of the literal Joseph who was faithful to God in his generation. But these verses also speak to us of the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, these blessings should most certainly be applied to Joseph and to his believing descendants in Israel, but they also may be applied to Christ, who by His being born into the world and his faithfulness in life and death, purchased these precious things of heaven. It was Christ who purchased the dew of grace, the precious fruits of righteousness, the best things; His coming and fulfilling the ancient mountains of God's decrees, and His purposes, and fulfilling His promises.

The land which Christ purchased there at the cross, was the eternal inheritance for His people. We who believe in Jesus Christ dwell in Immanuel's land. These blessings of salvation have most certainly come upon the head of the Lord Jesus, on the crown of the head of Him who was separate from his brethren. He was holy, harmless and undefiled, and separate from sinners. But having not only come to visit, but also having purposing to become our Redeemer, His way of conquering was to allow Himself be “gored” by His enemies at the cross. I hope that you will see that it was actually some of the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh who pushed Him to the cross, but He went there willingly. He went there willingly so that many of them would be saved. He pushed back at them with the horns of His righteous words and deeds, and His willingness to suffer for their sins. And He prevailed over their unrighteousness, in the sight of the holy God.

He fulfilled the law. He suffered the great agonies of the cross, for their sakes, and ours. Sinful men everywhere who will now repent, will together with Christ, who is the greater Joseph, push the gospel to the peoples who live at the ends of the earth. That is; through the preaching and sharing of the truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the truth of what He came to do, and what He came to bring, to sinners everywhere, His cause and kingdom shall push forward, to bring salvation, to the ends of the earth. It is always through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, that Christ's people, by the power of the Holy Spirit, pushes forward the truth, into the hearts of sinners everywhere. And according to God's good purpose, many will be saved, many will be conquered by the truth of God's word, because of God's mercy in sending Him.

Jesus Christ is the greater Joseph of this prophecy. And so we should believe that sometimes even some of the greatest enemies of Christ and the gospel will be saved. This is how it was with the apostle Paul. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Concerning the law, he was a Pharisee. He was so zealous that he persecuted Christ's Church before he was saved. But because of the greatness of the power of Christ's working, shining great light upon him, speaking to him directly on the road to Damascus, even as he was on the way to persecute Christians, Paul found out that he was wrong. Christ showed him how very wrong he was, and his great

opposition was overcome. And he who had been one of the greatest persecutors of Christ's Church, because one of the greatest promoters of the truth of what Christ came to bring to men. He knew that Christ had come into the world to redeem him.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was born into this fallen and sinful world, His arch-enemy Satan tried to destroy Him at Bethlehem through King Herod. Herod thought that the Lord Jesus was a rival king, and since he craved to have all the power to himself, he would put to death any rival to his kingdom. When he heard the words of the Magi, who had come from afar to worship Jesus; asking where the prophecies of God's word had said He would be born; the leaders of the Jews told him that it was in Bethlehem. And so Herod had all the male children from the age of two years old and under put to death. "This is awful," you say. Yes, it most certainly was; but it is a good picture of fallen human nature.

We, by nature, do not want anyone to rule over our heart but ourselves. Our sinful heart will tell us that Christ's being born there will be a threat to our ruling ourselves. When we hear that Christ is the not only the King of the Jews but the King of the Nations and Lord over all men, including us, we take it as a threat to our personal freedom and the control which we think that we have over our lives. But it is a strong lie and a deception which resides in our own bosom. The truth is, that unless Christ had been born in Bethlehem, and had grown up to become the horn of our salvation; there would be no hope. There would be no eternal salvation for any person at all. The truth is; that unless Christ is born in your heart, that you will perish forever in the lake of eternal fire! Christ came into this world to die for all of God's enemies and yours; to destroy Satan's power, and overcome the world and the opposition of your sinful heart to His righteous rule. When you believe you praise God for this!

Listen to Psalm 92, verses 5 and following. "O Lord, how great are Your works!" "Your thoughts are very deep." "A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this." "When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever." "But You, Lord, are on high forevermore, for behold Your enemies, O Lord, for behold Your enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered." "But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil." All this destruction of God's enemies was accomplished by Christ's coming into this world to be the Righteous One, the One who would fulfill God's holy law and suffer as a sacrifice for our sins at the cross.

Listen to Psalm 89, verse 19 and following. "Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, and said; 'I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from among the people, I have found My servant David (the prophecy applies to David but also to Christ who was descended from David), I have anointed him, with whom My hand shall be established; also My arm shall strengthen him, the enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him.'" "I will beat down his foes before his face and plague those who hate him." "But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted." That is; not only David's power and kingdom would be exalted in an earthly sense, but that the greater David's eternal kingdom and power and glory would be established forever, and all of God's enemies defeated forever.

David himself confesses in 2nd Samuel 22, verse 2, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, You save me from violence, I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies." Let me ask you if this is the way that you view the Lord Jesus Christ this morning? Is He your strength and your Redeemer? Has He visited your heart with salvation? Then you can serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all your days for you will be saved from all of your enemies. Let us bless the Lord, with Zacharias this morning, that because God has sent Christ, we shall be saved

from all of our enemies. He has performed the mercy that He has promised, to everyone who will believe.

3rd – This work, promised and performed, was a work of God’s delivering mercy.

(verses 74 and 75)

“To grant that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.” Sometimes you and I need delivering mercy. In order to tie all these truths today, we need to go back to Luke chapter 1. Here in verse 6, it says that, “Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” They were both people of faith in God’s word. They kept all of his commandments and did so in a blameless way. God was going to reward their faith. They were old and advanced in years, but they had had no child because Elizabeth was barren. And so, it says in verse 8, that it was while Zacharias was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, that his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

In verse 11 it says that, “an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense,” and when he saw him “he was troubled and fear fell upon him.” But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.” And then he gave Zacharias this great prophecy of what John would be like (verse 15): “For He will be great in the sight of the Lord, and be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and even turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; and he would make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (verses 16 and 17).

Now, you would have thought that with this amazing revelation, which he really had no reason to doubt, that Zacharias would have been jumping up and down and shouting Hallelujah! What a privileged position had been granted to him, to be the father of the forerunner of the Messiah. Could anyone ask for more? And yet we find a very curious unbelief reigning in the heart of this dear man. He has an angel standing in front of him, declaring these things to him; and yet he has the audacity to say in verse 18, “How shall I know this?” “For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.” “And the angel had to say to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.’”

I need to ask you now, whether you are trusting in the glad tidings of salvation; this wonderful message of joy which God gives to you in the gospel? I want you to understand the awfulness of the sin of unbelief; how much it dishonors God. If you fall into unbelief, you will question the very messenger of God Himself, and you will think themselves justified. Let me ask you now – Are you a Christian who has become skeptical of the plan, the purpose, and work of Almighty God in your life? You can’t figure out how God can bring about great and good changes in your life, or in this nation, or change things in and among the nations of the world. And so for various personal reasons you will not believe that the great things that He has promised can take place in your heart and life.

I would have you remember, this was not an unbeliever who said these words to the angel. It was a man who was commended very highly; as a person who was “walking in all the commandments and the ordinances of the Lord blameless.” So you see, unbelief can gain quite a foothold in the heart and mind of one who is godly; even so. Well, there was a consequence to this unbelief of Zacharias. There was a disciplinary action which was brought against him by God for his unbelief. And we read about it in verses 19 and 20. “And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.’” “But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day

these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”

Now, I hope that you will understand, that it was because God loved Zacharias that He did this. And so, it came to pass for a time in Zacharias’ life. I do not want to frighten you when I say this, but there will also be consequences which will come to you as a believer in Jesus Christ, if you fall into a skeptical unbelief of this same kind that Zacharias had. It will probably not be that you will be struck dumb, but God will know what to do, and how to bring you to exercise faith in Him again. The real lesson here, is not that you should fear and stand in dread of God. Rather, it is to learn that it is not for you to question the words of revelation which are given to you in the Bible. Yours is to believe. Yours is to marvel at God’s goodness and mercy to you.

You should believe and be looking forward to the promised mighty works which He can and will bring about in your life. If you do not; how will you ever be able to praise Him for the good things that He does for you day by day, by His grace, if you have that kind of attitude? How can you even begin to speak to others about Him, and about the power of the gospel, if you yourself have a skeptical unbelieving attitude towards His purpose and His work toward you? I am hopeful that every believer here does not want to be found guilty of dishonoring the One whom they profess to love and serve. Each of us should know from this text, that God will certainly be able to find ways to wake us up, and turn us away, from this kind of sin. Yes, the Bible even plainly says, that “whatever is not of faith is sin”. (Romans 14: 23)

So, you see; it is very important for you who do want to glorify God in the way that you live, that you begin to think and to live your life in this holy way; that whatever mercy God promises you through Jesus Christ your Lord, He also will perform it. Will you do that? It says in Romans 4, verse 20, that “Abraham did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but he was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” In both Abraham’s case, and in Zacharias’ case, it was God’s sheer mercy which gave them children; children who were directly related to God’s fulfillment of all of His promises in Christ. Jesus Christ is God’s mercy, promised and performed, not only to Abraham and the fathers, but also to us who will believe in Him now as well. Is it not a great thing that God did, in mercifully delivering Zacharias from this unbelief that he fell into? If you have placed your faith in Christ, He will mercifully do it for you as well. But let us be a believing people when comes to God’s promises and what He is able to perform.