



# GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

## THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Sermon Notes

### The Promise of John the Baptist, Part 2

#### JOHN THE GREAT

Luke 1:14-17

April 17, 2011

<sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

One of the most comforting statements in the Old Testament is found in Psalm 30:11a:

<sup>11</sup> "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;" [emphasis added]

- We later read, in the New Testament, in the Gospel of John, a similar statement, as the hope of God relates to the apostles just prior to Christ's crucifixion:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, **but your sorrow will turn into joy.**" John 16:20 [emphasis added]

- The passage in the Gospel of John (as well as the Psalm) are both profound, as the Lord Jesus Christ does not say that the disciples' grief will be *replaced* by joy; but, rather, *their grief will be turned into joy*.
- To put it another way, Christ **takes the very object of our pain and suffering and transforms it into something joyous!**
  - Consider, for example, that during the first century, a cross was viewed as an object of torture and death (similar, for instance, to a guillotine during eighteenth century France). Therefore, at the point from when Christ was

hung on the cross until His resurrection, the cross will be a source of great weeping and mourning. However, AFTER the resurrection, the cross will be a **source of rejoicing** – for it was there where Christ paid the full penalty of all the sins of everyone who will believe.

- Indeed, only Christ can do this – turn the object of our weeping and suffering into the object of our joy (consider again that to this day, a cross is made into jewelry, artwork, and decorations).
- The “world” says that “time heals all wounds”; yet, for those who have suffered greatly, you know that this is untrue. Only Christ can heal, and only He can **turn our weeping into joy...our mourning into dancing.**

- 
- Last week we read about Elizabeth’s barrenness along with her age, and the hopeless situation of not only Zechariah and Elizabeth, but all of Israel.
    - Yet, in God’s plan, as Elizabeth and Zechariah prayed for a child, God heard them and answered them.
    - Yet, just as Jesus would later promise, **God turned their weeping into joy.** Furthermore, the object of their weeping – their helpless situation (for Elizabeth was barren and advanced in years) – would now become the object of their joy. It was the object of their joy, because their hopeless estate magnified to the grace and glory of God who moved on their behalf.

- 
- This week, the angel continues in his announcement of the birth of John the Baptist.
  - In so doing makes several points:

- I. John the Baptist’s Birth Will Lead to Rejoicing**
- II. John the Baptist’s Birth Will Lead to a Remnant**
  - a. A Repentant Remnant**
  - b. A Reconciled Remnant**
  - c. An Obedient Remnant**
  - d. A Universal Remnant**

---

<b>I. John the Baptist’s Birth Will Lead to Rejoicing</b>
---

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The angel tells Zechariah, in <u>Verse 14</u>, “<b>And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,</b>...” (emphasis added)</li></ul> |
|---|

- The key theme here is the **joy** of the (a) couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth; and (b) the “many.”
  - **Joy** is a gift of God that transcends our circumstance, and it is the result of God acting on behalf of His people.

Darrell Bock writes, “Joy is a reaction to the acts of Jesus (13:17; 19:6), to the events associated with the ascension (24:52), and even to suffering for proclaiming and believing God’s message (Acts 5:41).”

Charles Spurgeon preached, “Joy is our portion and we are cheered and comforted in the Savior. “What?” you ask, “are we not depressed and sorrowful at times?” Yes...yet what Christian man or woman among us would make an exchange with the happiest of all worldlings? Your lot is somewhat hard, my Brother, and sometimes your spirit sinks within you. But do you not count yourself to be, even at your worst, happier than the worldling at his best? Come, would you not take your poverty, even with your mourning, rather than accept his wealth with all his hilarity and give up your hope in God?”

Ronald Fung, in his Commentary on Galatians 5:22 [the Fruit of the Spirit], writes, “Joy does not mean earthly, human happiness: Paul repeatedly exhorts Christians to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 3:1; 4:4; 2 Corinthians 13:11); this joy is ‘joy in the faith’ (Philippians 1:25) given by the God of hope along with peace in the continuous process of believing (Romans 15:13); its chief ground is the hope with derives from faith...”

John Gill writes, “The object of it [our joy] is God, not as an absolute God, but as a covenant God and Father in Christ; as the God of salvation, as clothing with the robe of his Son's righteousness, and as pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, full atonement being made by the sacrifice of Christ; who also is the object of this joy in his person, fullness, righteousness, offices, relations, and when beheld, embraced, and enjoyed in a way of communion. This joy, likewise, which is the produce of the Spirit, lies in spiritual things, and arises from an apprehension or good hope of interest in them, as justification, pardon, peace, adoption, and eternal glory; and is peculiar to such who have the Spirit, for a stranger intermeddles not with this joy, nor can he form any judgment of it, and is even unspeakable by the believer himself.”

“Joy means sweet thoughts of Christ, melodious hymns and psalms, praises and thanksgiving, with which Christians instruct, inspire, and refresh themselves...He did not send His Son to fill us with sadness, but to gladden our hearts. For this reason the prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself urge, yes, command us to rejoice and be glad. ‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, they king cometh unto thee.’ (Zechariah 9:9). In the Psalms we are repeatedly told to be ‘joyful in the Lord.’ Paul says: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always.’ Christ says: ‘Rejoice, for your names are written in heaven.’”        Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*

- Joy, like hope and biblical contentment, is something that doesn't change based on our circumstances, but it rooted in God's promises, His character, and His actions.
- Consequently, because God has acted and will give Elizabeth and John a child, they will rejoice. Yet, because of who John the Baptist will be – the herald and the forerunner of Christ, the Messiah – many others will rejoice as well.

- Luke writes, in Verses 14-15, “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, **for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.**”

- Here, Luke explains **why John's birth will lead to rejoicing for “the many”** [it is obvious why there will be rejoicing for Elizabeth and Zechariah – for they were barren and will now have a child].
- John provides three reasons for rejoicing: (1) John will be great before the Lord; (2) He must not drink wine or strong drink; (3) He will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Certainly, each of these is inter-related. In fact, the main point here is John's “greatness.”

- **John will be “great” before the Lord.**

- Here is the primary reason for the couple's and for the nation's rejoicing.
- The Greek word here, translated “great”, is *meGas*. But, the important point is not simply his “greatness”, but the fact that John will be great **before the Lord** – this is the reason and basis of the nation's joy.
- It is somewhat ironic that Luke has already mentioned King Herod, who called himself “Great” – Herod the Great – yet, here Luke states that John the Baptist will be great **before the Lord**. God's assessment of us is, indeed, the only thing that matters.
- We know that John will be great because he will **herald the coming of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah**. Yet, John will also teach the people – and us today – the very nature of “greatness” in God's kingdom.
- John the Baptist will declare:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:30

- Christ Himself will describe “greatness” as well in Luke’s Gospel:

“<sup>26</sup> But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”  
 Luke 22:26-27

○ **He must not drink wine or strong drink**

- Some see this as an indication that John was a Nazirite, in accordance with the Old Testament description found in Numbers 6:1-21 (see also Judges 13:4-5). The reason for this is that a Nazirite could not drink wine. However, a Nazirite could not cut his hair, either, and there is no mention of this restriction in Luke’s Gospel, or anywhere in the New Testament.
- Furthermore, priests were not restricted in drinking wine, except when they were performing their duties as priests (Leviticus 10:9).
- Therefore, rather than this restriction implying that John was a Nazirite, it likely emphasizes his **special and unique place in God’s plan of Redemption. John is unique...set aside for a particular purpose.**
- Furthermore, the verbiage here is similar to 1 Samuel 1:11. Samuel was Israel’s first prophet, and here John the Baptist will be its last (before Christ – the TRUE prophet).

○ **He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.**

- This is the first time Luke will mention the person of the Holy Spirit in his Gospel narrative.
- The Holy Spirit will be a central person in the Luke-Acts narrative (consider Pentecost).
  - The Holy Spirit will be the One who will apply the benefits of Christ’s life-work to all who believe in Jesus as the Christ.
  - Therefore, John’s filling by the Holy Spirit foreshadows this coming eschatological reality.

Darrell Bock writes, “In his intimate relationship with the Spirit, John the Baptist is a precursor of God’s coming ministry of the Spirit in the church when the Spirit will be given not just to a few but to all who believe.”

- Furthermore, his filling with the Holy Spirit emphasizes his role as a prophet – indeed, the final prophet – in Israel prior to the coming of the Messiah. Prophets in the Old Testament were “anointed” with the Holy Spirit (Samson in Judges 13:5, 7; 16:17; the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 49:1 – which points to Christ – and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5).
- God’s filling of John the Baptist by the person of the Holy Spirit *even from his mother’s womb* is perhaps one of the greatest evidences of God’s sovereign choice and role in the salvation of His people. It would be nearly impossible to argue that John could have “resisted” or “rejected” the Holy Spirit.

Commenting on verse 15, Howard Marshall states, “The language expresses divine choice and care of a person from his very birth, but here in connection with 1:41-44 a pre-natal sanctification of John is implied; even before he was born, the hand of God was on him to prepare him for his work. Thus in the strongest possible way the divine choice of John for his crucial task is stressed”

- **Once again, the purpose of the reference to the Holy Spirit here is to indicate that a prophet will now be born in Israel. The 400 years of silence is over, and something incredible is about to happen! God is moving!**

John will serve as the transition figure from the Old Testament to the New – from the shadows to the substance.

- Just as the Old Testament prophets were empowered by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1; Ezekiel 11:5; Joel 2:28), John will be as well (although John was filled, and it appears that the Holy Spirit “came upon” the O.T. prophets. Furthermore, John’s ministry will involve proclaiming that Israel “repent” and turn back to God and His commandments. This was, indeed, the function of the prophet in Israel.

## **II. John the Baptist’s Birth Will Lead to a Remnant**

<sup>16</sup>And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup>and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

### **a. A Repentant Remnant**

<sup>16</sup>And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup>and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

- John the Baptist will call God’s covenant people, Israel, to repent.
- The idea is that John the Baptist will call the people of Israel to turn from the world to God. The Apostle Paul echoes this “turning” in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10:

“<sup>9</sup>For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

- Luke indicates that in his role as **prophet** and one who will call Israel to **repentance** that John will go before the Lord Jesus Christ “in the spirit and power of Elijah.”
  - Certainly, Elijah was empowered by the Holy Spirit to do his work as a prophet.
  - Furthermore, these words echo Malachi:

“<sup>6</sup> True instruction was in his [Levi’s] mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity.”

Malachi 2:6

“<sup>5</sup> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”

Malachi 4:5

- The “spirit and power” of Elijah could be seen as the Holy Spirit, but also the “spirit” or “essence” of his message – **repent and turn back to the LORD.**

- By calling all of Israel to repentance, John the Baptist will lead out a “**repentant remnant**” from Israel.
  - This idea of “repentance” and “turning” will culminate in our **conversion** (Acts 9:35; 2 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:25), for conversion involves:
    - 1. Repentance and turning from sin;
    - 2. Embracing Jesus Christ through faith.

Darrell Bock writes, “Whereas in the church’s language turning indicates reorientation of one’s life to God’s way, here John’s call is for the covenant nation to return to the way of living that God expects of His people.”

## **b. A Reconciled Remnant**

- In calling the nation to repent in the spirit and power of Elijah, John will:

### **Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children...**

- The underlying message here is that through their repentance and turning to God's provision in His Messiah, God's people will be not only reconciled to God, but **to one another**.
  - In the context here ("Fathers and children"), Luke is likely referring to the reconciliation within covenant families that will occur through ministry of John the Baptist.
  - If one considers that one of the effects of the Fall was the turning of brother against brother, than one can understand that the coming Messiah will reconcile and restore these relationships.
  - One should notice, too, that it is the **hearts of the fathers** that will be turned to the children.

Joel Green comments: "God himself is presented as the Father who cares for his children and acts redemptively on their behalf, and human fathers can be characterized along similar lines."

- Some have also suggested that "Fathers" here is used in the context of "forefathers" or "ancestors." Furthermore, this view sees "Father" in Verse 17 as corresponding to "the disobedient" and "children" corresponding to "the wisdom of **the just**."
  - Therefore, the idea is that the "Fathers" or the "disobedient" will be turned back to God.

**The idea seems to be, though, that the work of John the Baptist will lead to repentance and repentance will lead to: (1) reconciliation between God and man; and (2) reconciliation between man and man.**

- This also represents the fulfillment of the two greatest commandments: (1) Love God; and (2) Love people.

## **c. An Obedient Remnant**

**... and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just**



- Next, not only will the “remnant” repentant and be reconciled, but they will lead obedient lives.
- Next, the call to repentance by John the Baptist will lead to **obedience**.
- This history of the nation of Israel is a history of disobedience.
- However, with the coming of Messiah, John the Baptist will call out an **obedient remnant who loves the Lord and each other**.
- In fact, Christ Himself will say “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”
- **Simple obedience is the mark of true repentance and faith.**

#### d. A Universal Remnant

- Finally, Luke describes John’s work to:

#### **Make ready for the Lord a people prepared.**

- Christ came to save all the Father gave Him – a people of Jews and Gentiles.
- Here, we see that it is John’s role to *prepare a people*.
- This not only emphasizes John’s role as the forerunner and herald of Christ, but also the essence of his ministry.
- John’s ministry is also one of **preparation**. Yet, this begs the question, “How?”
  - And the answer is clear: through the preaching of the Word.

John Gill agrees, “**Now, the work of John the Baptist, was ‘to make ready’ this people, by pointing out to them, in a ministerial way, wherein their readiness lay, to meet the Lord, and be for ever with him in heaven...and so any other Gospel minister, may be said to make ready a people, in this sense; when they are the instruments of the regeneration and conversion of sinners, and of leading them to the righteousness of Christ, for their justification before God, and acceptance with him.**”

- One can also see in the flow of redemption history how John called the people to repent and turn from sin to God’s provision the Messiah so that when Christ came, the true remnant would personally know the object of their faith.

John Calvin states, “What immediately follows about *making ready a people prepared for the Lord*, agrees with that clause, that John, as the herald of Christ, would *go before* his face, (Malachi 3:1) for **the design of his preaching was to make the people attentive to hear the instruction of Christ**. The Greek participle used by Luke [κατεσκευασμένον], it is true, does not so properly mean perfection as the form and adaptation by which things are fitted for their use. This meaning will not agree ill with the present passage. **John was commissioned to fit or mold to Christ a people which, formerly ignorant and uneducated, had never shown a desire to learn.**

**Matthew Henry writes, “We must be prepared by grace in this world for the glory in the other, by the terrors of the law for the comforts of the gospel, by the spirit of bondage for the Spirit of adoption...Nothing has a more direct tendency to prepare people for Christ than the doctrine of repentance received and submitted to. When sin is thereby made grievous, Christ will become very precious.”**

- 
- This goes back to why Luke refers to John as “great.”
    - John is not great because he is wealthy, popular, or prosperous. In fact, he is none of these things the world today identifies as “great.”
    - Rather, he is humble, obedient, and committed to proclaiming the truth of God’s requirement of repentance to a lost and dying world.

May we, therefore, embrace this understanding of “great” that we may seek to do as John did – caring more about the opinion of God rather than that of men, and knowing that we are to decrease, that our Lord and Savior will increase.

These are the two great commandments, to love God and to love others, beginning in the home. In times of spiritual declension, people invariably forsake these two great commandments. They turn away from God in self-willed disobedience, and they selfishly disregard love for others. Therefore, in times of revival, the process must be reversed: People must turn in repentance toward God, seeking to obey His holy commandments; and, they must turn in repentance toward those they have wronged, beginning in family relationships and begin to practice biblical love.