

The Gospel of Luke

Zechariah's Prophecy -

From whom, how, and for what purpose, does God save us?

(Luke 1:67-80)

Introduction

In today's message we'll discover from whom, how, and for what purpose, does God save us. We'll also find out how John the Baptist was involved in God's saving plan. This answers the unanswered question from the previous verses: "What then will this child be".

Reading the previous verses, we see how God's prior promises to Zechariah and Elizabeth came to pass. A child was born to them, to everyone's great joy. But, even in the middle of this great joy, there was a test or trial for Elizabeth and Zechariah to remain obedient

The neighbors and relatives wanted to name the child according to the customs of that time. But both Zechariah and Elizabeth went against peer-pressure, remaining obedient to God. They named the child John, as per God's previous instructions. As a result, God's will was accomplished, and Zechariah's deaf-muteness, which was because of his past unbelief, was lifted. Immediately, he spoke praising God. The end result of all of this was the crowd marveling at God's awesomeness. That's what I call a win-win-win!

But going back to Zechariah's praise of God, which is briefly introduced in verse 64: *And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.* Today, we will see the details of how he blessed or praised God. Through these details, we will discover from whom, how, and for what purpose, does God save us. We will see all of this in verses 67 through 80, which contain Zechariah's prophetic song, also known as the 'Benedictus'. The first word of his song is "Blessed", which is "Benedictus" in Latin. Zechariah's praise is very similar to Mary's song of praise (46-56) in its general sentiments and Jewish character. It uses Jewish language based on the Old Testament, to express how God is worthy of praise, because he acted in accordance with his promises to bless his

people as per the Abrahamic covenant, and through the deliverance and salvation that comes through a descendant of David.¹

Let's read Luke 1:67 through 80:

Luke 1:67 *And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,*

Luke 1:68 *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people*

Luke 1:69 *and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,*

Luke 1:70 *as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

Luke 1:71 *that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;*

Luke 1:72 *to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,*

Luke 1:73 *the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us*

Luke 1:74 *that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,*

Luke 1:75 *in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

Luke 1:76 *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

Luke 1:77 *to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,*

Luke 1:78 *because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high*

Luke 1:79 *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Luke 1:80 *And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

Filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 67)

Luke 1:67 *And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying...*

In the very first verse we read that Zechariah "prophesied". What does that mean?

Many people misunderstand the biblical gift of prophesying to be the ability to predict the future. While knowing something about the future may sometimes have been an aspect of the gift of prophecy, it was primarily a gift of proclamation, bringing a message from God. The Greek word translated "prophesying" or "prophecy" means to "speak forth" or declare the divine will.²

As we read these verses, you may have been in awe as to their beauty and content. Do you think this was because Zechariah had some extraordinary talents? Or was there some other underlying source for the content of these verses?

Verse 67: "Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied". That's "Holy Spirit power" right there. He fills, reveals, speaks, and guides (Luke 1:67; 2:27; 4:1; 12:12; Act. 15:28). This in turn takes us to extraordinary insight and action. Holy Spirit -power is what's behind the praise of Zechariah. The same thing happened to Zechariah's wife Elizabeth earlier in verse 41, when she met Mary. Now Zechariah, under the direction of the Spirit, communicated the divine point of view about the

1 Green, J. B. (1997). The Gospel of Luke (p. 115). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2 To interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God which is designed to influence people. <https://www.gotquestions.org/gift-of-prophecy.html>

significance of the extraordinary events, which happened thus far in this first chapter of Luke³, and that now brings us to the main point of the whole entire first chapter.

From whom does God save us? (v. 71, 79, 77)

As we read verses 67 through 80, what struck you as the main theme in Zechariah's declaration? Is the joy of an old barren couple, who finally had a child? Is it about obedience? Let me highlight some words from today's verses:

Luke 1:68 *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and **redeemed** his people*
Luke 1:69 *and **has raised up a horn of salvation** for us in the house of his servant David,*
Luke 1:71 *that we **should be saved** from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;*
Luke 1:74 *that we, **being delivered** from the hand of our enemies,*
Luke 1:77 *to give **knowledge of salvation** to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,*
Luke 1:79 *to **give light to those who sit in darkness** and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

The main theme of Zechariah's praise, and of the whole entire first chapter of Luke, is salvation.⁴ Redemption, deliverance, and salvation is coming! God initiates a sequence of events that will bring his Abrahamic and Davidic covenants to pass in order to save his people. This is what Zechariah is blessing or praising God for. But, from whom does God save his people from? We find the answers in verses 71, 77, and 79.

He saves us from our enemies, and from the hand, or power, from all who hate us:

Luke 1:71 *that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;*
In the Old Testament, God constantly saved Israel from the hands of her stronger enemies, such as Egypt and Edom, and from those who hated them, such as Pharaoh and Haman. In the future, with Christ's second coming, God will once again deliver Israel and all his people from the hands of their enemies. Zechariah's prophecy has both a political and a spiritual element of salvation. But what Zechariah doesn't know, is that the political salvation, Israel being eternally saved from her political enemies, will be delayed. That's because after Jesus revealed who he really is, most of the Jews rejected him, and he was crucified (13:31–35; 19:44). The forerunner John the Baptist got beheaded and the Messiah got crucified.

3 Marshall, I. H. (1994). Luke. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 983–984). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

4 The term itself means deliverance or preservation, whether it be physical preservation of health, deliverance of a nation, or the spiritual deliverance of salvation before God (Exod. 14:13; Job 5:4; 2 Macc. 3:32; Ps. 106:10; Ps. Sol. 10:8; 12.6) Plummer 1896.

Praise God that wasn't the end of the story though. Jesus resurrected, was raised into heaven, and now in the meantime, while we wait for Christ's second coming,⁵ God does save us from our enemies and from those who hate us, even in this life, right now:

Matt. 10:28 *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matt. 10:29 *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*

Matt. 10:30 *But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.*

Matt. 10:31 *Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

The point is that we should not fear man. Why? Because even a cheap little bird, a sparrow, that was sold for penny, will not fall to the ground without God's authorization. How then, do you think God would let anything unwanted happen to you, to you who is of much greater value. God even has the number of hairs in your heads counted, not to mention the fact that Jesus died for us on the cross. If he gave his life for us, and suffered for us, and as a result received you as a love gift from God, do you think he's going to forget about you, or stop being concerned about your well-being, or allow anything happen to you that's not in your benefit? No, he won't (Rom. 8:28), he paid a great price to purchase you, with his own blood.

This of course doesn't mean difficult things won't happen to you, they will, but only for God's glory and your eternal benefit. Remember how young Joseph had to go through several tough years of slavery to refine his character. This prepared him for the duties of being the prime minister of Egypt. God will always deliver us from the hands of our enemies, either by preventing certain things from happening to us or like in the case of Joseph, turning seemingly bad and difficult things into our ultimate benefit and blessing. Basically, nobody can hurt us unless God has permitted it and the only way he would permit it is if it's for his glory and our benefit. The question is, are we living like it, for his glory? Or are we living in fear like little scary-cats who think God is a liar? That's something for each one of us to reflect on.

So, God saves us from our enemies here and now, until our lives have served their purposes. But he also saves us spiritually and eternally. He does this by saving us from ourselves. Do you find that surprising, that God saves you from yourself? What do I mean?

God saves us from ourselves:

Luke 1:79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death

The bible says that we as sinners, before we got saved, lived in willful ignorance of God due to our hard hearts. We were darkened in our minds and understanding, willfully giving ourselves to various sins (Eph. 4:17-19). In other words, we sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, and afterwards the

5 Of course, Zechariah has no such twofold conception here: he simply presents the total package. Only subsequent events explain how the plan has two parts. [Baker Expository Commentary on the New Testament]. It's clear, that he is praising God with an expectation of total deliverance, both worldly and spiritual, for his people. From our previous messages, we remember that at this time in history Israel was oppressed by the Roman Empire and the prophesized Messiah from the Old Testament was expected to overthrow Israel's political oppressors. But what Zechariah doesn't know, is that the political redemption will be delayed, because most of the Jews ended up rejecting Jesus (13:31-35; 19:44).

second death, eternal hell.⁶ In a certain way we were like certain drug addicts, who love their drugs so much that they are ignorant to the damage it's doing to them, even though it's clear to everyone else. But glory be to God, he saves us from ourselves, us who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, with our minds and understanding darkened.

In addition to saving us from our enemies and from ourselves, there is something even more important and dangerous that God saves us from. Do you know what that is?

God saves us from himself:

Luke 1:77 *to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,*

A just and righteous God must exact judgment on sin. If he were to let sinners, people who have committed crimes and iniquity against him, walk free, he would deny his very character of being righteous and just. Justice demands that all offenses get punished. Unfortunately for us, offenses against God, an infinite being, carry the punishment of eternity in hell. If that sounds drastic to you, it's because sin is drastic in God's eyes. We don't even understand the full evilness of sin, because we are so used to it. It's a bit similar to how someone who hasn't taken a shower for months will not realize how bad he himself or other dirty people around him smell. That's how we are with sin. We don't see the full horror of it like God, because we are so used to it.

As Zechariah described it, John prepared people for what God would accomplish through the Messiah. Through John's ministry, which declared the necessity of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). God gave knowledge of salvation from the punishment that awaits everyone of us.

But what makes it possible for God to forgive sins and remain a righteous judge? If a judge from our local court would let all the criminals go free by forgiving them, people would likely say, and correctly so, that this judge is not just, as he lets evil go unpunished. So how does God manage to forgive our sins and yet remain just?

How does God save us? (v. 68-70, 78-79)

Luke 1:68 *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people*

Luke 1:69 *and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,*

Luke 1:70 *as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

Here Zechariah is blessing God, in other words praising him, because he has remembered his people by raising up⁷ a horn of salvation for them through which they can be redeemed, just as he had promised through the Old Testament prophets. Zechariah was speaking of future events in a past tense, as if they

6 These OT images appear to refer to those who are oppressed spiritually and physically (Ps. 107:10; Isa. 9:2; 42:7; 49:9–10; 59:8–9; Mic. 7:8). They refer to people locked up in ignorance, on the edge of death. Threatened with rejection, they lack righteousness, do not demonstrate justice, and stand in need of release and forgiveness. [Baker Expository Commentary on the New Testament]; <https://www.gotquestions.org/second-death.html>

7 God raises up a horn of salvation. Raising up means God sending a significant figure to his people: a prophet (Deut. 18:15, 18), judge (Judg. 3:9, 15), priest (1 Sam. 2:35), or king (2 Sam. 23:1) [Baker Expository Commentary on the New Testament]. In Jesus, all these offices combine.

were already accomplished,⁸ because that's the level of certainty we can and should take God's promises with.

What is this "horn of salvation" and the "house of David" that is being referred to? The house of David refers to Israel as a nation (1:54, Acts 4:25), but also specifically to David's kingly lineage, to which Jesus belonged to by blood through his mother Mary, and legally through being the adopted son of his step-father Joseph, who was also of David's lineage.⁹ As for the "horn of salvation", horns are used in the Bible to refer to power. Horned animals use their horns to battle, to conquer their opponents. You may have seen ancient warriors use horns in their helmets, again as a symbol of power. That's how the Messiah is viewed. The salvation God offers is strong in conquering the enemy and triumphant in setting his people free.¹⁰

Verses 71-74 show the power and might of this "horn of salvation" in action:

Luke 1:71 *that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;*

Luke 1:72 *to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,*

Luke 1:73 *the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us*

Luke 1:74 *that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,*

So, this is how God is able to forgive our sins and yet remain just. He visited and redeemed his people by a horn of salvation. God visited us through the Messiah, Jesus:

Luke 1:78 *Whereby the sunrise¹¹ shall visit us from on high*

Luke 1:79 *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Upon growing up, John proclaimed salvation, pointing the way to Jesus, who delivered it by volunteering to take the punishment of our sins upon him. He paid the price on the cross. Justice was served, God was able to remain just, and we, who repent of our ways and accept Jesus as the lord of our lives, receive forgiveness and are saved. That's how God saves us. But now the question is why? Why and for what purpose does God save us? Is it so that we can enjoy heaven? Is it so we can enjoy material prosperity? Is it because we are so awesome and worthy of saving? That's what we often like to think, but that's not the reason the Bible gives us.

For what purpose does God save us? (v. 72, 74, 75, 78)

Luke 1:72 *to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,*

8 Bible scholars use the term "prophetic aorist" to describe this.

9 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-genealogy.html>; Even though Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, he non the less passed the "royal bloodline" to Jesus as his legally adopted son.

10 The figure is also used to describe God himself as the "horn of salvation" (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 18:2 [18:3 MT]). [Baker Expository Commentary on the New Testament]. See also Deut. 33:17.

11 The phrase rising sun has produced much discussion. It is significant that the previous mention of visitation in the hymn is associated with Messiah, the horn of David (1:68–69; R. Brown 1977: 373–74). This observation makes it likely that Messiah is intended by "rising sun," which is confirmed when one examines the messianic background of the term ἀνατολή (anatotē). [Baker Expository Commentary on the New Testament]

Luke 1:73 *the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us*

Luke 1:74 **that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,**

Luke 1:75 **in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**

Luke 1:78 **because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high**
(bolding mine)

Both the forerunner John and Messiah Jesus are expressions of God's mercy. In saving us, God displays his mercy¹² and his faithfulness in keeping his promises, while also granting us the privilege of enabling us to serve him.¹³ God of course doesn't need anyone to serve him, he is fully self-sufficient, but as we are about to see, he does this for his glory and our benefit.

First, let's remember that God doesn't have an obligation to save anyone. But he does, because he is merciful. More than a thousand years before Zechariah and John the Baptist, God in his mercy had given Abraham a promise of a great nation, and that all the families of the earth shall be blessed through him (Gen. 12:1-3).¹⁴ God also gave Abraham's descendant, king David, a promise of a future king that will come through David's line, and reign over an everlasting kingdom.¹⁵

Thus, by bringing his people salvation, God's keeping his promise of mercy that he made to the "fathers", the patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob). Why is God doing all of this? The obvious answer of course is "for his glory". The Bible says that everything God does is ultimately for his own glory. That may sound selfish, but if you think about it deeper, God would be downplaying his worth if he didn't operate that way, which would actually be a sin, to downplay God's worth.

If a friend of yours were to do everything he does, for an excellent cause, would you blame him? Of course you wouldn't! If he did everything for the most excellent cause in the world, would you blame him? Of course you wouldn't! What then, is the most excellent and perfect cause in the world? God himself.

Thus, God himself must also do everything ultimately for his own cause and glory. Moses knew this. When Moses was begging God to not kill all the Israelites in Numbers 14, what did Moses base his appeal on? Was Moses saying: "Come on God, don't kill them, they don't deserve it". No, Moses appealed for God not to kill them for God's own glory, so that Egypt and the other nations wouldn't think God brought Israel out of Egypt but didn't have the power to sustain in the desert. Ezekiel 20:9 summarizes this: *I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.* (see also Ps. 106:8).

12 Jesus will later identify mercy as the primary motivation behind God's activity and as the basis for ethical behavior for the community of disciples (6:36) Green, J. B. (1997). *The Gospel of Luke* (p. 117). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

13 In the book of Exodus the purpose for Pharaoh letting the Jews leave, was so they could worship God. "Let my people go, so that they may worship me ..." (Exodus 7:16; cf. Josh 24:14).

14 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Abrahamic-covenant.html>

15 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Davidic-covenant.html>; 2. Samuel 7 and later summarized in 1 Chronicles 17:11-14

God acted for his own name's sake, as he always should, or he would downplay his worth. In Isaiah 48:11 we see why God refines his people through affliction: *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.*

That's right, God does everything, even refining you through affliction, for his own sake. Why? "My glory I will not give to another". Luckily for us, his children, God is a loving and merciful God who aligns glorifying himself with our best interests and blessings (Rom. 8:28). Verses 74-75 give us some insight into this.

Luke 1:74 ***that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,***
Luke 1:75 ***in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.***

Salvation leads to the privilege of service. God saves his people from the hand of their enemies so that they might serve him all their days, without fear, in holiness and righteousness. This is nothing new. Do you remember what was the reason God demanded that Pharaoh let Israel go back in Exodus? "*Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness.*" (Ex. 7:16) That is the reason God delivered his people from Egypt, that is the reason God will deliver his people from all their enemies at Christ's second coming, and that is the reason God delivers us from sin and all its devastating effects; so that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. Righteousness means following his commandments and holiness means that we are set apart, set apart for God.

Just like God does everything for the most excellent and perfect cause in the world, himself, in his mercy he also delivers us and saves us, so we too can be 100% fulfilled in devoting ourselves fully to the most excellent and perfect cause in the world, God himself. In other words, God saves us from our enemies, from our ourselves, from himself, to himself.

How to serve (v. 80)

God saved you to serve him with 100% dedication, with your whole being. That's what submitting your LIFE under the lordship of Jesus means. John is a good example of this: Luke 1:80 *And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*¹⁶

As per verse 75, God is to be served in holiness and righteousness. As such, our service should also be more than being busybodies on God's behalf. Our service is to be a way of life, both personally and morally. It's a continuous worship that should characterize our life now and will certainly characterize our life in eternity in God's presence ("all our days" v. 75).

How is this going for you? Is your primary goal in life to serve God or do you have some other primary goals such as a bigger house or car, more vacation, career advancement, better health, etc.? There isn't necessarily anything wrong with some of these things, as long as they are done for the glory of God. Is that the underlying objective of everything you do? I can confess to you that it's not for me. But through God's grace, the Holy Spirit is at work to align our desires towards serving him. If you reflect on your life compared to a year or two ago, you will, or at least you should,¹⁷ see your life being more aligned with serving God in holiness and righteousness and that you even get greater joy from it.

¹⁶ Why was John in wilderness? I don't know, but that's often where prophets prepared. Moses, Elijah, John, and even Jesus for 40 days. Perhaps it was to keep them away of distractions. I don't know. This is how John prepared as well, he grew and became strong in spirit in the wilderness.

¹⁷ Heb. 5:12; 1. Cor. 3:1

Often however, our growth doesn't come in a straight line. So, don't despair if you feel your life isn't in total submission to God. It will never be, nor can it, on this side of heaven. That's what Jesus is for. That's why he lived a perfect life on your behalf, because you cannot! You just grab onto Jesus and his righteousness and hold on tight. In fact, he will even help you grab onto him and hold you in his hands. He will never let you go! (Heb. 13:5)

In the meanwhile, while we wait for that day in heaven, when we will finally be able to serve him perfectly, with no fear, with 100% holiness and righteousness, without worldly enemies and our sinful flesh obstructing us, I encourage you to use the "ordinary" means of grace, prayer and the Word, to help you advance in all godliness, and achieve little victories over sin one step at a time. Ask God to give you the desire and the doing to draw closer to him through prayer and his Word.

Remember, when you became saved, you ceased to be a slave of sin. You have a choice to battle it, and to be victorious. Being sinful, you will not achieve victory every time, but you can, and you WILL increase in godliness as the Holy Spirit works in you (from glory to glory). How fast and effective this process is, depends on how close you draw yourself to the power source of that process, to God. Pray for this.

Let's pray

Thank-you God for saving us through the sacrifice of Jesus, from our enemies, from ourselves, and from your righteous judgment. Thank-you for gifting us the most excellent and perfect thing in the universe, yourself, through Christ Jesus.

Let us be more like John from, verse 80, strong in spirit, so that we can serve you better for your glory and our joy. Help us see this reality of all of this more clearly, so that we would indeed value you as the most excellent and perfect thing that gives full satisfaction, as opposed to the many idols, such as material possessions, which ultimately never have and never will fully satisfy us. Help us stop running after them and let us instead run more consistently after you.

Let us stop idolizing and serving ourselves as gods, which is what we do every time we sin. Give us clarity and repentance to realize that every time we sin, we are setting ourselves up as the ultimate authority and god, as opposed to submitting to and serving you, the real God, the only one who can make our joy complete.

Thank-you for being merciful to us, and instead of tying your promises and our best interests to our own imperfect attempts at righteousness and holiness, you tie it all to the perfect life of Jesus. Thank-you for your overall awesomeness, we join Zechariah in praising you for it. Amen!

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