

## Songs for the Savior: Mercy — Luke 1:57-80<sup>1</sup>

Five Points Community Church (12/4/16)

Brett Toney

- Sometimes things are too good to be true. We've been hearing about fake news stories that were (are?) being circulated on social media during the presidential election. People click through and share them often because they confirm perfectly what they want to be true. The problem is that people are not rightly suspicious.
- An old priest named Zechariah had that kind of experience. An angel delivered him with really great news, yet he was wrongly suspicious, and was left mute so he wouldn't say foolish things anymore.
- He was going to have a son who would be the forerunner to God's Messiah, the Savior. Yet he and his wife were beyond child-bearing years. We pick up the story now at the birth of this son.

### Magnified Mercy (v.57-66)

- “The Lord had shown great mercy”—he had *magnified* his mercy toward Elizabeth
  - Just as Mary had “magnified the Lord” in her song
    - Piper: not magnified like a microscope but a telescope—God is wonderfully massive yet often appears small and insignificant in our faithlessness
  - God demonstrated his bottomless mercy toward Elizabeth in removing the shame & sorrow of her barrenness
    - Even prior to his birth, the Lord uses Elizabeth's son to bring glory to himself in pointing his people to regard him rightly
- They insist on naming her son Zechariah yet she refuses; they turn to the father for the final word and in his muteness, insists that his name *is* John. Note the definitiveness.
  - Worship is the response: “they wondered” (v.63) and Zechariah blessed (v.64)
  - It took Zechariah, the old priest, 9 months to learn faith-filled obedience whereas the teenage Mary responded faithfully immediately
- The events surrounding John's birth and naming go viral, thus magnifying God's mercy even further

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<sup>1</sup> Commentaries consulted: Darrell Bock, *Luke: 1:1-9:50* ECNT (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1994); Walter Liefeld, *Luke* EBC (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1984).

- How has the Lord magnified his mercy in your life? How do you respond?
  - Even though Zechariah was a priest, he did not believe God though an angel stood before him telling him these things. Perhaps his familiarity with divine things had lulled him into complacency.
  - May years of walking faithfully with the Lord or regular engagement in church activities not so lull us. May the mercy of God be increasingly magnified in our lives that we would worship him gladly.

### **Steadfast Mercy (v.67-75)**

- Zechariah blessed God upon having his speech returned to him (v.64) and this song could be that blessing.
  - Last Sunday's song for the savior is called the "Magnificat" and this song for the savior is called the "Benedictus," from the Latin word that begins the song, "Blessed."
- V.68-69 – Does it strike you as odd where he begins his praise song? It doesn't start with John. It doesn't start with the great mercy God has shown in giving him a son.
  - It begins with his God who sends a savior. Zechariah knows that his son is not the Messiah. He is the preparer. That's what the angel told him (1:17).
  - And he describes the Lord's work as though it is completed: *visited*, *redeemed*, *raised*
  - Because Zechariah has now seen firsthand the word of God come to fruition in the birth of John, he rejoices at what is still yet to come in the foretold birth of Jesus (1:26-56).
    - Mary lived in his house for 3 months—he knew what she had been told
    - He now exudes faith-filled confidence in God to accomplish his word
- V.70-75 – So he begins to recount the redemption and salvation God would accomplish *politically*. This indeed is what God had promised his people "by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old"
  - After all, a *king* would be given—2 Samuel 7:13 spoken by the prophet Nathan
  - Deliverance from enemies would be guaranteed—Genesis 22:17, the Lord spoke directly to Abraham, reiterating what had already been promised in Genesis 12

- It is not wrong or misguided by Zechariah to anticipate or hope in a political, national redemption—that’s what was promised to Abraham, anticipated in the Exodus, foretold to David, and promised by the prophets.
  - Such a salvation is described by Zechariah as *mercy* (v.72)—it is God’s steadfast mercy to be true to his Word and self-revelation to his people over the prior millennia
  - The Triune God had promised to deliver his people though they were hard-hearted and rebellious. He promised to not pour out judgment on his people forever. Instead, he would relent and be merciful. He would *not* give them what they deserve.
  - And in the birth of his very own son and the prophetic word spoken about the pre-born son of Mary, Zechariah is seeing the fullness of God’s word inaugurated. He stands on the very precipice of all redemptive history. “*Finally*, all of God’s good purposes and promises are coming to fruition!”
  - I think that is why one of the most special things about Advent each year is getting a taste of that anticipation, waiting, and excitement.
    - Don’t be blinded by the busy-ness and consumerism of these weeks. Reflect on the tension of anticipation of Christmas morning, of evenings spent with good friends and family around rich fare. Reflect on the waiting and embrace it. Let it swell up in your soul that when the party and the presents come, your joy readily moves from what’s before you to dwell on the mercy of God displayed the fulfillment of his Word.
    - It had been about 2,000 years since God promised deliverance from enemies to Abraham. About 1,000 years since he promised an everlasting king on David’s throne. That’s how long Zechariah and his people had been waiting. We’ve got three more weeks.
- What Zechariah and faithful Israel wanted was this rest from their enemies and oppressors *in order that* they could serve the LORD in holiness and righteousness without fear. They wanted unhindered religious liberty.
  - His political motivations were pure. He wasn’t after worldly power and influence. He wanted to be able to worship the LORD in the way God had called him.

### **Tender Mercy (v.76-80)**

- But it was a temptation in Zechariah’s day, just like it is in ours, to seek political redemption as the end itself. To have *our* king on *our* worldly throne.
- But that is not Zechariah. He shifts in v.76, speaking prophetically to his son John, about what else the Lord will do.
  - John is *not* the Messiah. But he will go ahead of the one God will send to prepare the way.
  - This preparatory ministry will be marked by a knowledge of another kind of salvation, one of the forgiveness of sins.
  - John is Isaiah’s voice crying “Prepare the way of the LORD” (Isa. 40:3, Luke 3:4-6).
- In Zechariah’s view—in the Bible’s view—salvation is not *merely* political or national. It is *also* spiritual. Yet we can’t spiritualize the political. We hold on to both of them. Peace from enemies will be granted. King Jesus will reign on earth.
  - Darrell Bock: “Salvation unites the real world with the world of the heart and the world of heaven”<sup>2</sup> — to characterize salvation as only political/earthly *or* only spiritual is to miss the fullness of God’s redemptive work.
- But why does God work this multi-faceted salvation?
  - “Because of the *tender* mercy of *our* God.”
  - Again, it is God’s mercy that is on display here, this time characterized as *tender*. It is a word that can also be translated as “compassionate.” It refers to this deep-seated empathy. *Our* God looked upon his people and was moved with compassion to show mercy.
  - I was convicted by this phrase this week. I felt slighted by my wife, and I was selfishly brooding over it while washing dishes. She didn’t even sin against me. Yet I was plotting how I was going to let her know I was not happy with what happened.
    - And then this phrase came to mind. “the tender mercy of our God”—the Sovereign Creator, our Father in Heaven, has shown me tender mercy. I *have* sinned against him, and he could justly make me pay. Yet *he* has shown *me* mercy.
    - How hypocritical of me to not show my wife mercy over something that was not even sin!

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<sup>2</sup> Bock, 176

- “What a wretched man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).
- This mercy of God, his steadfast and tender mercy are magnified by the rising sun.
  - No one likes Monday mornings, but tomorrow may you see it with new eyes.
  - We know Zechariah’s sunrise is a reference to the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Savior, because he alludes again to Isaiah, this time 9:2—the sunrise, the great light, *is* the child who will reign on David’s throne (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7).
  - Friends, we are doomed to the darkness of death apart from Christ. The candles, the lit trees, the lighted homes—they pierce the darkness to remind us of this great truth.
  - God has given light in the person and work of Jesus to lead us into peace. That’s not just peace from our enemies. That’s peace with God himself, who apart from demonstrating his tender mercy would never be at peace with rebels like me.
- “A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench” because of his magnified, steadfast, tender mercy. Because Jesus himself is our peace.

### **Lord’s Table**

- This Table unites God’s many people into one. Because God has displayed his great mercy to us, making peace by the blood of his Incarnate Son, we who are united together by faith in Christ come.
- If you are a baptized believer, we welcome you to join us at this table.
- The Sundays of Advent when we enjoy the Lord’s Table are among my favorite of the year. Here this morning we have the full display of Christ’s work: we rejoice that he took on flesh in order that his body and blood might be shed for all who hope in him.
- So it was on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, “This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
- In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”
- For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

**Benediction:** May the LORD bless you and keep you. May the LORD make his face shine upon you in the light of the Incarnate Son and be gracious to you. May the LORD lift up the *light* of his countenance upon you and grant you his *peace*. Amen.