



2. The Redeeming God (Luke 1:59-80)

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." 61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." 62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him. 67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. 69 He has raised up a horn ^{[69] Horn here symbolizes strength.} of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us-- 72 to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Miraculous births - births to women beyond child-bearing age - Sarah, Elizabeth

Luke - why so much about John the Baptist?

Acts 18:24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor ^{[25] Or with fervor in the Spirit} and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

John the Baptist had an enormous effect upon Jews in this period and the Jews of the Diaspora spread it all over the Empire. It was less conspicuous than Christianity as it was Jews-only thing and appealed to the many Jews who were expecting the Messiah. We know Apollos was a Greek speaking Jew of the Diaspora because he had a Greek name - which was not uncommon.

Luke knew that the preaching of John was an issue because most likely, he knew Apollos and here in Luke, we have most importantly a record of what the relationship of Jesus to John was and it was important for those who were ministering to Jews at this time to be able to relate this story, to demonstrate that quite correctly they identified John as the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah and that the Messiah was actually second cousin in relationship to John. What's more, Luke also tells

us the remarkable circumstances in which John was born. Why, so that anyone who still followed John and not Jesus would do so as Jesus was the fulfillment of what John was prophesying.

He doesn't diminish John, but shows him to be part of an extended family through whom God, in His sovereign grace had decided to use. I say that because neither Zechariah or Elizabeth or Mary and Joseph for that matter, were particularly outstanding or special. That what comes across. In fact, in all instances, they were really rather surprised that God was using them.

In this we get a unique insight into this remarkable family and as I said last time, the uniqueness of this account indicates that Luke got it from the horses' mouth - it came to him through someone in the family - perhaps Mary herself.

In some ways it's an expected story and in other ways it's strange. One might expect that the forerunner of the Messiah might be identified by a miracle or commissioned through one. That happened with many of the greats of the OT as God marked them out for service - Isaac, Moses, Aaron, Elijah, Gideon, Samson. And here we have John, born of a woman beyond child-bearing age then the father is struck dumb and then miraculously has his voice restored to give a prophecy.

Jesus describes him in this way: *Matt 11: 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 He who has ears, let him hear.* (actually, this is also in Luke 7).

In many ways we can see John as the last of the "OT prophets" because in the OT prophecy points to the coming Messiah and he was the last before the Messiah, Jesus was revealed.

But John was also remarkable. Jesus is the Elijah - the great prophet. Jewish tradition at that time said Elijah had to come before the Messiah (Mark 9:11) because Elijah was regarded as the greatest of the prophets because of the miracles he did. He had the distinction of being filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15).

But why tell us all this - it takes up most of the first chapter! We're told this because of the prophecy that Zechariah gives. Let's have a look. What is it about. It sets the scene for the whole gospel as in John we get the key to how God works and is going to work in the lives of His people. What I'm saying is that this piece of prophecy is important in helping us understand the nature of the gospel.

1. Redemption is the prerogative of God

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us-- 72 to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

He has come to redeem His people... The people haven't found a way of getting close to God through their upright lives and their religion. God is doing all the doing. He's come, He's redeemed, He's saved, He's shown mercy, He's kept His promises (even though we haven't). We've come to celebrate the fact this morning that we are a redeemed people. What do you do when you redeem something. You get it back - usually by buying something back.

How did we need buying back. The word redemption could be used with slavery. If someone had got captured into slavery, or more usually were sold into slavery to pay debts, somebody could buy them out. When we were without Christ, we were sold into slavery to sin and satan - and Jesus has come to buy us out. And how did He do that? By having His body broken and His blood shed for us.

But there is another picture in that prophecy that we could also say about someone bought from slavery as well as somebody rescued from oppression by an enemy. We have an enemy - satan. Zechariah said He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. Raising up a horn say some commentators means strength. But it's more than that. What is a horn used for? For battle. Look at an old cowboy film and the horn indicates that the cavalry has arrived! When we were powerless, God sent in the cavalry. Here is Zechariah saying. God is sending the cavalry - we are going to be rescued! That's the message of this table. The cavalry came and won the battle. And we accepted the rescue that God provided and promised. As we come around this

table this morning, we accept that rescue.

2. Redemption has service at its end

74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

The second thing that comes out of Zechariah's prophecy is that God redeemed us for a purpose. We are called to serve Him in holiness and righteousness. We are called to serve in a way that's set apart for Him. We like the idea of the cavalry rescuing us don't we? But what about service, obedience, holiness? In this day and age that's the problem isn't it. That was to be the message of John. God is sending the cavalry, but we need to be prepared to serve and obey Him. And the church in this age is marked by lack of commitment, lack of service, lack of holiness. Obedience is doing things in God's terms and not ours. As we come before this table this morning and meet a risen Saviour, we thank Him for the redemption, but we need to come in repentance for being less than the people we have been but recommitting ourselves to be the people we should be. But repentance means that. Not just saying sorry - but changing.

The trouble is that we so often are challenged aren't we? But are we changed? What's the product of being challenged by God's word? It's change. How are we going to move on as believers and as a church - by not just being challenged, but by being changed. Until then we stat as we are and the cavalry will just sit there and the enemy won't be pushed back.

3. Redemption is only achieved when sin is dealt with

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

The final point is the shortest. Redemption came because the Messiah John announced dealt with the whole issue of sin - which kept and keeps people apart form God. Look at the words that are used: 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." Sin brings darkness and the shadow of death. In Christ we have been rescued from it. The blood of Christ has dealt with all our sin - and as we come around the table this morning, let's celebrate that, but let's come in penitence for our sins, or failure to obey, our failure to live in holiness, our failure to be people of integrity - and to come to Him in repentance - and accept the God wants to bring change into our lives, into our attitudes and into our church. The table is that place where we meed, there we experience his presence, where we find forgiveness, where we say "the cavalry has come!!!" But as we have come into the presence of the risen Christ, are we going to come out changed this morning? That's between you and God. Changed. Do you want change? In your life? In the church? Then here's the place. It's here this week. It will be here next week. It's here twice a month. Are we going to take advantage of being in the presence of God. Or is it going to be another service where we do what we're familiar with and the cavalry remains camped, and the enemy still presses in?

Let's pray that God's Spirit will speak into our lives today.