

Luke 1:57-80

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Date: 12 December 2019

Preacher: Lourens du Plessis

[0 : 00] So yeah, so we're at the end of Luke 1, from verse 57 to 80, and that will conclude our series in Luke.

And then next week, we're in here again, so not next door, in the hall, we're in here for the carol service. So that is something to look forward to, and if you have friends and colleagues and neighbours and people you know who might be interested in coming, please do invite them. Chris has some flyers that you can take with you and hand out, and please do bring people along. Yeah, back to Luke 1. The birth of John the Baptist, verse 57. Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.

And her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child.

And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, No, he shall be called John. And they said to her, None of your relatives is called by this name.

[1 : 15] And they made signs to the father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, His name is John. And they all wondered.

And immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, Blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea.

And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What then will this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people, in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

[3 : 22] And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. It is the loving and active word of God.

What is the point of Christmas? It's a fair question to ask at this time of the year, isn't it? If you ask around, you'll probably hear something like family, thankfulness, togetherness, happiness, presence, especially if you ask children.

Food, maybe? A couple of nice carols, and mulled wine to make us feel warm inside, in the cold, dark winter months. Some vague mention of peace on earth, and how nice that would be, maybe.

But I suspect if someone does mention that, peace on earth, it won't happen other than people mumbling through a carol, they probably don't know that well anyway.

Or it'll be a throwaway line, and no one will really want to dwell on that, because it doesn't really look like a very peaceful place in the world right now, does it?

[4 : 36] Because who wants to spoil Christmas with talk about enemies, and rescues from enemies? Who has those anymore?

We don't go about talking about our enemies like in the medieval times. And that's not what those cute nativity scenes are about, are they? Who wants to talk about enemies when you've got a cute

little baby Jesus, away in a manger, no crib for a bed?

Why on a bleak midwinter would you talk about those things? Can't he wait? Well, Zechariah doesn't think so, it seems.

His promised son, John, is born, finally, and that's where he goes. He talks about enemies, and rescues from enemies, and people who hate us.

This special child has now finally come. This child, he couldn't believe would be born, when the angel Gabriel told him, and prophesied to him about who this child would be, and what he would do.

[5 : 44] This child that seemed impossible, humanly speaking, to us, to be born in their old age, for Zechariah and Elizabeth. But, before we get to why he talks about enemies, and rescues, we need to understand what's happening, in the first part of this scene, don't we?

Now, cast your minds back five or six weeks or so, it's incredible, it's been that long, isn't it? And you remember that when the angel Gabriel, spoke to Zechariah, the priest, at the beginning of this chapter of Luke's gospel, Luke couldn't believe this promise, of the messenger of God.

And he was struck temporarily, with muteness, wasn't he? Well, the baby's now been born. God's promise has come true, as they always do.

And Zechariah has now realized, the error of his way, so to speak. And he realizes who the son is, and what he must do. But more than that, he realizes, who the God is, who sent the son.

And when they come to naming the son, the people here expect a family name, they automatically assume it's going to be Zechariah. Anyone who's got a strong tradition of family names, in their families, knows the pressure and difficulties, this can cause, when it comes to naming children, grandchildren especially.

[7 : 10] The story of how I came to be called, by my second name, Lawrence, and not my first name, is too long to bore you with today. But there was a whole lot of family drama, involved in there, I can tell you.

And even more so in those times, names had a meaning. They told you something, about the person being named. And God had already, by means of Gabriel, given the son a name, hadn't he? John. He told Zechariah, this child should be named. And John means, God is gracious. It's another sign, that probably doesn't immediately, lead us to think of enemies.

And Zechariah's song, and the content of that, God is just, or something like that, might trigger us to think about enemies, and those who need God's mighty justice, and punishment, for how they've wronged us, don't they?

And then when Elizabeth tells them, in verse 60, that he'll be called John, they don't believe her. There's no one in your family, by that name. They don't realize, who this child is yet, do they?

[8 : 27] When I try to go around her, to Zechariah, maybe the father of this child, has a different opinion. It's almost like, children, playing off parents, against each other, and going to the other one, when the first one, has already said no, to staying up later, hoping they'd get a different answer.

And he tells them, on this writing tablet, that no, he won't be called John, his name is John. Isn't that incredible?

From a doubter, who didn't believe this promise, to effectively, someone who says, this child already has a name, because he's from God, for God, to do God's work, like Gabriel had promised. He's a special child, with a special name, from God, because he'll go before, the promised Lord, the Messiah, to prepare his way.

He's saying more, than just saying a name, isn't he? What's in a name? Pretty much, at least in this case. God's, and immediately, we read, which in Luke's gospel, is usually, a signal for us, that the miracle has happened, he can speak again.

[9 : 47] He's confessing, the gospel is a miracle. Despite all the evidence, of God's kindness, and his existence, even, the Bible tells us, the heavens declare his glory, despite God speaking to us, through all the prophets, in the Old Testament, and now through his word, despite Jesus, his son being born, as he was promised by God, it's still a miracle, every single time, someone, confesses the truth, of the gospel.

You, me, anyone, who calls himself a Christian, Romans 5, 10 tells us, we were enemies of God. And none of us, would have been able, to believe God's promises to us.

None of us, wanted to believe, God's promises to us. And not even mentioning, calling upon God, for forgiveness, or returning to God, ourselves. You see, it wasn't, when this miracle happened, it wasn't just, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who realized, something was going on.

We know that, because the people, talked about it. The people realized, the hand of God, was on this child. Because what had happened, was unusual, wasn't it? They realized, this is a child from God, here to do God's work.

And the hand of God, was upon him. Now, we must realize, obviously, Israel was, under Roman occupation, and they'd lost, their own state really, and, you know, since they came back, from exile, things just never really, were the way, they were before.

[11 : 28] They never really, were the same again. And so, they've been waiting, for a political savior. They have. They had real enemies, oppressing them. But, Zechariah, is inspired here, by the Holy Spirit, isn't he?

He was filled, with the Holy Spirit, and he prophesied. You get, it's interesting, the one who didn't believe, the prophecy, of the angel Gabriel, is now the one, who prophesies, by the power of God. And he prophesies, about more than, than, than political saviors. Doesn't he? You see, this promise, that was made to him, has now been fulfilled.

And he sees, that in that promise, lies a deeper promise. A new, an old promise, made anew, of the savior to come.

The savior, that his son, would prepare the way for. And that's why, we have to think about enemies, and opposition, at Christmas.

[12 : 33] Because if we don't, we miss the point. And we miss the miracle, of Christmas. You see, if John the Baptist, didn't come to be, the last prophet, the one who prepared, the way for Jesus, then his birth, would have been, nothing more than, a private miracle, for Zechariah, and Elizabeth.

An old couple, from an unknown town, in the hill country, of Judea, circa, 0 AD. But even more so, his preparing, the way for Jesus, only means something.

Because if Jesus, didn't come to rescue us, the birth of, the son of God, as a man, 2000 years ago, which we spend, billions of pounds, celebrating every year, is nothing more, than a private miracle, for a virgin girl, from Galilee.

And it doesn't really, mean much for us. The reason Christmas, is so important, is this thing, that Zechariah, puts his finger on.

That we're in desperate, need of salvation. Our biggest problem, if we're honest, is not external enemies, even though some Christians, around the world, will tell you, absolutely incredible, horror stories.

[13 : 54] Christians in North Korea, literally risk their lives, when they tell, their children the gospel, but they do, because they know, what the gospel means, and how important it was, that Jesus came, to be born as a man.

The government, in countries like North Korea, is an enemy, of God's people. And Christians, they know, what it means, to put their trust, in a saviour, who is more powerful, than any oppressive regime.

Even more powerful, than the Roman Empire, that oppressed, the Jews, and the early Christians. It's an incredible miracle, that a man, the God man, but a man nonetheless, will be the one, to finally overthrow, all tyrannical regimes, and bring peace forever.

A man, who is God's eternal king, will defeat God's enemies, and those who hate his people, will reign justly, for all time. But it isn't even, it isn't even Satan, and his demonic forces, who are our biggest enemies, in some ways.

Powerful as they are, God made clear, right at the beginning, of our problems, at the fall, in the garden of Eden. Didn't he? That Satan, would be crushed, by this promised Messiah, the promised saviour, and that he is ultimately, just another created being, under God's authority.

[15 : 21] And, although he will be, overthrown to, overthrown to, by this conquering, Son of God, God become man, will demolish, the one who tried, to deceive man.

No, I think if we are honest, we are our own, worst enemies, aren't we? It is our own sin, that is our undoing. It is our own, hatred of God, that makes us, enemies of God.

And so, the miracle of Christmas, and the reason, why we desperately, need to realize, that deliverance, from enemies, is crucial, to properly, understanding Christmas, more than family dinners, and presents, and Christmas specials, on the telly, is that we need, deliverance, from ourselves, by a God, whom we fought, and hated.

It isn't something, we could do. A wise man, once told me, there are two kinds, of problems, in this world, your problems, and my problems.

There was a deeper, point to that, that because if you, have a problem, I can help you, with your problem. If I have a problem, you can help me, with mine. But by definition, if we have a problem, we are in trouble.

[16 : 43] We needed someone, to save us, from our worst enemies, ourselves. And in Jesus, God has provided, the Savior. Not because of anything, we have done, but because of the kind, of God that he is.

That is what Zechariah, is singing about here, and prophesying. He is a God, who can make promises, come true, across time. verse 69, verse 70, as he spoke, by the mouth, of his holy prophets, from of old.

And he has made, one, coherent promise, across human history, through all the prophets, who spoke on his behalf, over thousands of years. And he has kept, that promise. He is the kind of God, who makes promises, who enters into, a covenant, with people, despite, what they have done, to him.

To people, who are his enemies. And he is faithful, to those promises, even when, we are not. He is a God, who desires, a people, who will know, and love him, and live rightly, before him.

Verse 75, that we might serve him, without fear, in holiness, and righteousness, before him, all our days. And he does, what is necessary, to make that possible.

[18 : 02] Raising up a saviour, who is able, to redeem us, from our sins. He is a God, who acts, not because, we force him to, but because, of his tender mercy.

Verse 78. And you know, it is only when we realize, we more than anything, need salvation, from ourselves, and from our own sin, and that it is not, enemies out there, that we have to worry, about firstly, but the fact, that we have made, an enemy of God, that we can really, fully appreciate, what Christmas means.

They say, it is only when you, put a diamond, on a black cloth, that you appreciate, its beauty. It is always, darkest, before the dawn, and it is only, when you see, the darkness first, that you appreciate, the brilliance, of the sunrise.

It is only when we, when we realize, the darkness, in our own hearts, when we realize, the dark truth, of death, hanging over us, because of our sin, the punishment, we deserve, for making, an enemy of God, that we, appreciate, the in-breaking, of light, that Zechariah, sings about there, isn't it?

Verse 78. That we appreciate, the in-breaking light, the sun rising again, that Christmas, represents. Perhaps, that's something, you need to, maybe that's something, you want to do, for the first time, this Christmas.

[19 : 40] Don't let the shimmer, of tinsel, and fairy lights, blind you, to the reality, that you need, salvation by God. You see, the point of Christmas, is that we were, enemies of God, but we are, no longer, because, of God.

We are those, Zechariah talks about, in verse 79. Those who are sitting, in the darkness, and shadow of death, unless, because of the birth, of Jesus, a new light, guides our feet, unto the way of peace.

Zechariah's, song of, praise, and prophecy, is, usually known, as the Benedictus, the Latin word, that is the first word, of the song, in Latin.

Blessed be, the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited, and redeemed his people. Blessed is he indeed. Blessed is the God, who rescued his enemies, from themselves, and raised up the one, who would save us.

blessed is the God, who became one of us, two thousand years ago, because he, had mercy, on us. Amen.

[21 : 01] Let me pray.