

December 29th, 2019 Zechariah's Song

Intro

"Holy there is no one like you, there is none beside you Open up my eyes in wonder Show me who you are and fill me with your heart." If we begin to understand and see the holiness of God, the beauty of God, and the love God has shown us in providing salvation for us, It will inspire us! It will change us! It will motivate us to do what we just sang! "And lead me in your love to those around me!" Today as we look at another ancient Christmas song, which is a song of salvation, I pray we will desire more than ever to help others find the salvation we've found! Let's pray and ask God to teach us and inspire us today! Pray.

I know I say this every week, but I am truly excited every time I have the privilege to share God's Word with you! Thanks for allowing me this privilege. Each one of our pastors who share this responsibility with me feel the same way! Okay, take your Bibles, physical copy or electronic copy, and turn with me to Luke's Gospel, chapter one, beginning with verse 5. We are going to read the story leading up to Zechariah's song and learn some very important lessons and then we'll read his song and learn some awesome lessons from it.

The Background

Luke 1:5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

Luke 1:6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.

Luke 1:7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Luke 1:8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,

Luke 1:9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

Luke 1:10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Luke 1:11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Luke 1:12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

Luke 1:13 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.

Luke 1:14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

Luke 1:15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.

Luke 1:16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

Luke 1:17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous —to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Luke 1:18 Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

Luke 1:19 The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

Luke 1:20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

Luke 1:21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

Luke 1:22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

Luke 1:23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

Luke 1:24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

Before we get to the rest of the story and the ancient Christmas Song, we must look at some of the very important lessons we can learn from the background leading up to Zechariah’s song of salvation. One of the first lessons we can learn from the background of our story is this...

Lesson: God has an amazing plan!

Luke 1:13 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.

God’s plan was amazing for many reasons! First of all, Elizabeth was well beyond child bearing years, and even though she and Zechariah had desired a child they had never been able to have a child. Some would have said they didn’t have enough faith. Others would have surmised they had done some evil thing and God couldn’t bless them. Neither was true! In fact Luke said this about them...

Luke 1:6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly.

Sometimes, when it seems things aren’t going so good, God may be doing something we can’t yet see or understand, but hold on, God has an amazing plan for your life no matter your circumstances!!

Lesson: God will go through amazing lengths to make His plan happen!

Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah, “*just happened*” to be on duty on this particular day, this particular year. Why do I mention this? Listen to these words from theologian Malcolm O. Tolbert:

“Priest in Palestine were divided into 24 divisions, Abijah’s being the eighth of these (1 Chron. 24:10). According to some estimates, there were approximately 20,000 priest in Palestine at this time. Each of the 24 divisions ministered in the Temple for one week twice during the year. Since there were hundreds of priests in a division, they were chosen by lot to officiate at certain rituals. Such a privilege as the burning of incense, which took place daily morning and evening, would fall to the lot of a given priest no more than once during his lifetime.”

God worked the details out so that Zechariah could be on duty at this pivotal and strategic time in his life and in the life of the Israelites! Amazing! The Angel of The Lord was going to appear inside of the temple with an extremely important announcement for Israel and Zechariah needed to be the one to receive it!

Lesson: God’s plan may not make any sense to us at first sight!

Luke 1:11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Luke 1:12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

Folks, I’ve never had an angel stand before me and bring me a message directly from God, but there have been numerous times when I’ve been praying about God’s will for my life and God speaks to me through His Word and there have been times when it was a bit scary. Like when He called me out of music ministry to pastor a church, or when He called me to leave a large church just outside of Birmingham, AL, to come plant a church from scratch in Slidell, LA. Do you know what I did in both situations? I cried out to God for leadership and discernment. I didn’t want to make the wrong decision. The Psalmist puts it this way...

Psa 119:169 May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.

Psa 119:170 May my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise.

Psa 119:171 May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees.

Psa 119:172 May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.

Psa 119:173 May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

Psa 119:174 I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight.

Psa 119:175 Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me.

Lesson: God’s plan needs to be trusted!

You might wonder the difference between Mary and Zechariah concerning their responses to the angel of the Lord. Zechariah loses his voice because of his response, but Mary did not. The difference may seem very small and minute, but it is important. Mary was told she was going to have a child and she asked this question:

“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

In other words, she didn't question whether or not it would happen, but how it would happen.

On the other hand, when Zechariah was told that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, Zechariah asked the angel...

"How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

Zechariah's question was different. He wanted proof the angel was telling him the truth!

When we are studying God's Word we must remember the advice of the writer of Proverbs...

Prov 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

Prov 3:6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Prov 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

Great wisdom when it comes to God's plans for our lives!

Now let's skip down to verse 57 in our text. We read the other verses last week with Mary's Song.

Luke 1:57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

Luke 1:58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

Luke 1:59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,

Luke 1:60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

Luke 1:61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Luke 1:62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

Luke 1:63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."

Luke 1:64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

Luke 1:65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

Luke 1:66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

Zechariah's Song

Luke 1:67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

Luke 1:68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

Luke 1:69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
Luke 1:70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
Luke 1:71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—
Luke 1:72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,
Luke 1:73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
Luke 1:74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him
without fear
Luke 1:75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
Luke 1:76 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,
Luke 1:77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
Luke 1:78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to
us from heaven
Luke 1:79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our
feet into the path of peace.”

Luke 1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness
until he appeared publicly to Israel.

I don't know the melody to Zechariah's ancient Christmas Song, but I can tell you this,
the lyrics are Amazing and Awesome and the reason why is obvious, Zechariah was
filled with the Holy Spirit! Zechariah had had 9 months to be silent and just listen to God!
I sometimes think, maybe if I did less talking and more listening! I believe Zechariah had
pondered, meditated and asked God to teach him everything he could learn about what
the angel of the Lord had prophesied to him, what it meant and its implications.
Obviously, God had answered his prayer and his lyrics have so much to teach us!

Lesson: Praise God for taking the initiative in our Salvation

Zechariah Sang...

Luke 1:68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come to his people
and redeemed them.

Did you know this is what Moses did after God saved his people from the hand of
Pharaoh? Listen...

Exo 15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the
LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.

Exo 15:2 The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is
my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Exo 15:3 The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.

And Paul puts it this way in Romans...

Rom 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Rom 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Rom 3:24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Rom 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

Rom 3:26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Rom 3:27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

Lesson: Jesus has become our Horn of Salvation to save us from our enemies

Zechariah Sang...

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

Luke 1:70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

Luke 1:71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

Satan is our enemy! Sin is Satan's tool to bind us, chain us, and keep us from living the righteous and meaningful life God has for us! The world many times hates us, because we are a light that exposes their wickedness and a voice that calls out the wickedness and injustice. They don't like that, so they may try to extinguish the light and silence the voices! But here's the beauty of Jesus being our horn of salvation. Because the horn of an animal was its weapon to defend against its enemies, it was used as a symbol of power and was used in the Old and New Testament as a symbol of God's power to save. Even the altar of burnt offerings in the Temple and Tabernacle had horn-like pieces built into its corners as a reminder of the Power of God to forgive and cleanse sin. People in fear of punishment could run to the tabernacle and hold on to the horns of the altar as a way to plead for forgiveness. We can run to Jesus for forgiveness, for protection from our enemies, and know that He is mighty to save! Listen to these words spoken in the Old Testament Book of Zephaniah...

Zep 3:15 The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.

Zep 3:16 On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.

Zep 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Lesson: Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of God to His people

Luke 1:72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,
Luke 1:73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

Next week we're going to begin our reading of the Bible together and our messages each week will be based on Scriptures you will be reading! For the first several weeks we will be looking at how God's promise prevails. Yes, I'll be talking about God's promise to provide salvation for His people, keeping His covenant with His people, and I believe you're going to be amazed at how the promise and prophecy of Jesus the Messiah is even found in the book of Genesis! You don't want to miss next week. But let me just give you a hint of Jesus being the fulfillment of the promises of God to His people, because Zechariah sang about it in his ancient Christmas song! When Peter and John were speaking to some of the very people responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus they mentioned the prophecies...

Acts 3:13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

Acts 3:14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

Acts 3:15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

And then in verse 17...

Acts 3:17 "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.

Acts 3:18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Acts 3:20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus.

And then down in verse 24...

Acts 3:24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.

Acts 3:25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'

Acts 3:26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Lesson: We are rescued from our enemies for a divine reason

Luke 1:74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear

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

“To enable us to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him!”
What a privilege and high honor! And I just can’t think of a better passage to express this divine reason for our rescue...

1 Pet 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Pet 1:14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

1 Pet 1:15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

1 Pet 1:16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Pet 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

1 Pet 1:18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,

1 Pet 1:19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Pet 1:20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

1 Pet 1:21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Lesson: Like John the Baptist, we are to prepare the way for The Lord to give salvation to people

Luke 1:76 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,

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

Luke 1:78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

Luke 1:79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Zechariah’s ancient Christmas song seems to touch on all three of our goals for revival: Investing in our relationship with God, Identifying one person to share the love of Jesus with, and finding the way we can impact our world by serving God! Let me end with this passage which I pray will inspire you to prepare the way for The Lord to give salvation to people in desperate need of God’s grace, mercy and love in 2020! Paul said...

Rom 1:14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

Rom 1:15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Rom 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Rom 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Let's pray!