

Zechariah's Song

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[0 : 00] Well, we're in the birth narratives, the birth stories. It continues. We started with Luke, well, we're still in Luke chapter 1, but it's a very long chapter.

And we looked last week at the song of Mary, the Magnificat, you'll remember that, and how God is changing the world. Today's song explains how he does that.

Now, before we get to the song itself, you'll notice that everyone was excited about this birth that was going to happen. But interestingly, it's not Jesus' birth that they're getting excited about. It's John the Baptist's birth.

You'll notice, I think from verse 37, when it was time for Elizabeth to have a baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

And the child gets born, we're going to call him John. John, the name John is Yahweh brings favor, or Yahweh brings grace. Remember that Jesus, Yeshua, is Yahweh saves.

[1 : 05] So the two names kind of mean the same thing. He said, no, no, no. We're not going to call him a name of our family. We're going to give him a new name. We're going to call him John. And as Zacharias says, no, bring me a tablet.

Let me tell you what it's going to be called. His mouth is opened, and people are absolutely astonished. You know, it's not often that a dad or someone who's going to be a dad is quiet for nine months.

And so it's an amazing event, and everyone is speaking about it. They're not quite sure what's going to happen, but they know that something is going to happen. Have a look at verse 65.

The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea, people were talking about all these things. Okay, now that's a whole big area. The hill country of Judea is sort of south, a bit of north of Jerusalem.

It's the whole area around Jerusalem. Everyone who heard these wonders, everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, what then is this child going to be?

[2 : 10] For the Lord's hand is with him. Well, let's look at the song to see what God is going to do through this person, through Zacharias' son. And it's interesting, when we look at the song, the first part of it doesn't have to do anything with John or with Zacharias' son, but it has everything to do with what God is going to do for his people.

So, it starts off, praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. This explains why Zacharias and everyone else were so excited.

They know that God is doing something amazing. And it goes beyond just their own private, personal happiness. Zacharias knows that God is moving again in the world to bring about his great redemptive purposes for creation.

He's bringing everything to a final conclusion. And the thing that God is going to do is redeem his people. In fact, it's almost, you know, in the song already, in the song, God hasn't actually done anything yet.

His baby has just been born. But it's so certain to happen that he says God has already, praise be to the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed. That past perfect tense.

[3 : 24] It's so certain that what God is going to do, it's going to happen. You'll remember in the earlier part of Luke chapter 1, when the angel Gabriel visited Zachariah, he told him that he's fulfilling a prophecy from Malachi.

Do you remember that? We need to look at those words again. So just turn back to verse 14 of the same chapter. You might have to turn the page. I do. This is what Gabriel is telling Zachariah, verse 14.

He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth. 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 from birth.

Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of their fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Now, Zachariah would have known that that prophecy comes straight out of the book of Malachi, which closes the Old Testament period. That's about 400 years before Zachariah is born, before Zachariah's life.

[4 : 36] So the Jews, at the time of Zachariah, had been waiting for 400 years for God to do something. And when Gabriel says this, Zachariah knows exactly what's going to happen.

God has come to restore his kingdom and to start this thing of redemption again. Not that he hasn't been doing it, but he's promised in the Old Testament that it still has to come a time for his people when their sins are decisively dealt with.

Now, to be redeemed is to be set free from a hostile power. The word redemption is used in the slave markets. A slave would have been redeemed.

It means his freedom price would have been paid. So God is making a significant statement to his people. They still need to be redeemed. They're still in slavery.

There's still a problem that needs to be solved in God's people by the time Jesus and John the Baptist arrives. How is God going to redeem his people? What is he going to do?

[5 : 36] We'll have a look at verse 69. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. As he said through his holy prophets of long ago, Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

And then to show mercy to our fathers, etc. So, what is he going to do? Well, he's going to send a king who's going to save his people and destroy their enemies.

Isn't that interesting? Now, this language is straight out of the Old Testament again. When you read the Psalms, this language comes through in the Psalms all the time. Horn of salvation.

The way that God is going to redeem his people is by sending a king. That's what he's sending. A horn of salvation in the house of his servant David.

You mustn't miss that. That's not just any person. That's the king of the Jews. And so, the person that's going to arrive, that's going to work God's redemption for him, is going to be a king.

[6 : 41] At this point, Zechariah might be thinking it's Jesus, but I think he already knows from Mary's song that it's not going to be his son. He knows that there's a different thing that his son is going to do.

It's very important for us to understand at Christmastime that when Jesus was sent into the world, he was sent as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. That gives us shape and understanding of who Jesus is.

We have to understand that he's a king. Specifically, that he's the king of the Jews, but that that's not just any ordinary king, because the king of the Jews had very specific promises made to him that meant he wasn't just the king of the Jews, he's the king of the whole world.

It just happens that God is using the king of the Jews to bring about his purposes to change the world. Are you with me on that? Now, what do horns do? He's raised up a horn of salvation.

In some translations, he's raised up a mighty savior. Now, I don't know if you've ever been bored with an animal with horns. I happen to have. In my earlier life, we went cattle ranching in Namibia where they did the gelding of the cows.

[7 : 52] And they're just one year old. They're about this big, but they've already got horns. And they're ready to use them because they don't want to be gelded. And when those horns, when that animal comes at you with those horns, you run for it.

It is this big. That's not a full-grown bull. That's just a little calf. No. Horns can do serious damage. You don't want to mess with an animal with horns.

They will go through just about anything. What it means is that this king that God is going to send is going to be big and strong and powerful, which is good news if you're his friend, but really bad news if you're his enemy because you can't stop an animal with horns charging at you.

So what is God going to do? What is this king going to do? Verse 71. He's going to give us salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

He's going to deliver his people from their enemies. Now, you remember that we've done all this work in the Old Testament. Remember the promises that God made to Abraham for blessing? [9 : 00] And remember that he also said, whoever blesses you, I will bless, but whoever curses you, I will curse. So when God moves to save his people, he's got to deal with their enemies.

He can't just save them from nothing. You've got to be saved from something. Now, this message would have gone down really well with the New Testament Jews. They were under the rule of the Roman Empire at that time, and it's a horrible thing to be under the rule of Rome. They're very oppressive. They just march in with their armies, kill everyone they see, and then impose heavy taxes to pay for their armies. It's basically just a, it's nothing more than thuggery. And then you've got to pay for their upkeep while you're under their oppression, and you can't do the things that you normally do. They take away all of your rights. So they would have said, yes, God is sending us a savior like David.

And we all know what David did in the Old Testament. David went around killing his enemies just like that. Yes, we want that kind of a savior. But they'd forgotten something. The reason, there's a reason they have external enemies.

[10 : 08] God doesn't just send enemies to his people somewhere, anytime, just because he feels like it. He does it for a reason. And the reason is, they had been powerless to fight against their own internal enemy.

You'll remember from the Old Testament that the reason God sends enemies to rule over his people is that their sin, his own people's sin, continually get out of hand. So they have external enemies because of their internal enemy sin.

Are you with me on that? You know the stories. You know how it goes in the Old Testament. The sin of not worshiping God properly and of not treating others properly. That's throughout the whole Old Testament.

Every time you hear God explaining why he sends people to judge his own people, why he sends them their enemies, it's because of their sin. Now, not only have they got an internal enemy, sin that they're not looking at or not really aware of, I don't really want to change that.

They'd rather have our external enemies, their external enemies defeated. But there's another enemy that eggs the internal enemy of sin on, and that's Satan. And both of those enemies give rise to another enemy, death and the fear of death.

[11 : 21] So then, if this coming king is going to be the one who deals once and for all with all the enemies of God's people, he has to deal with all of them. He's got to deal with our inside enemies and our outside enemies, both foreign and domestic.

And the only king, the only person in the whole world who has ever been able to do any of that is Jesus. There's only one person who said no to Satan.

There's only one person who said no to sin and temptation. There's only one person who's defeated death. And there's only one person who's been sinless, and that's Jesus. You just have to continue reading the story of Luke to find out that that's the case with Jesus.

In Luke chapter 4, he meets Satan, and after three questions, he sends him packing. He's gone. I'm done with you. Okay, that's a reminder, or that kind of undoes what happened in the Garden of Eden.

I can't remember how many questions Satan gave Eve. Was it like one or two? Maybe it was three. I can't. But she gave in, and Adam gave in, and Jesus is there to make a stop to that. Then you'll see him going around forgiving people's sins, healing them, having power over the forces of darkness.

[12 : 37] And then he himself goes to the cross, and he himself explains that I'm doing this to pay for these sins so that you can be redeemed. And he comes back to life again because death can't have a hold on him because he's the king of God's kingdom.

And this is exactly what he's come to do, to change these things for us. Maybe just turn with me to Luke chapter 24. That's right at the end of the chapter of Luke.

Keep your hands in Luke 1. I just want to show you from Jesus' own words that that's how he understands his ministry, that he's come to do all of these things. Luke 24, that's the last chapter in Luke.

It's after the resurrection. Turn with me to verse, I think, 45. Verse 45. Jesus has appeared to his disciples. He's appeared to the people on the road to Emmaus.

He's explained. He's begun to explain to them who he is. They got the fright of their life when he came back from the dead. They didn't know what was going on. And he had to explain to them again and again, no, this is the reason I came.

[13:43] Here in this chapter, his disciples, he had to put his hands on them and say, no, feel my, feel. It's me. I'm not a ghost. From verse 45.

Then he opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures. He told them, this is what is written. The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

Beginning at Jerusalem, you are witnesses of these things. I'm going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. And then he gets taken up into heaven, an ascension of heaven, into heaven.

You can see from Jesus' own words that his understanding of who he is and what he's come to do is to be this mighty king, to defeat all the enemies of God, not just the outside enemies, but the inside enemies, if you want to put it like that as well.

Are you with me? Okay, let's turn back to Luke chapter 1 and continue looking through the son of the Benedictus. Okay, so he's going to save us from our enemies, from the hand of all who hate us.

[14:56] And why is he doing this? What's going to be the result? Verse 72 and 73, 74, 75. To show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he saw to our father Abraham, to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Now, isn't that amazing? The very things that we've been looking at in our sermon series up to now are the very things that the New Testament says are coming true. So you see that there's a strong connection between the Old and the New Testament.

In fact, if you read this passage and you didn't know it was in Luke, you would have thought you're still in the Old Testament. You would have thought maybe in the Psalms or somewhere like that. In fact, if you want to compare it with the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel, you can do that on your own time.

Just go read it. And it's very similar language. What God is doing in the New Testament time, plus minus zero BC, is based on the promises that he made to Abraham 2,000 years before that.

And the reason God makes a promise to Abraham 2,000 years before Jesus arrived is he's trying to undo the problem of sin that Adam and Eve started 2,000 years before Abraham.

[16:09] What this means for Jesus, or this coming king, is that he is the fulcrum, the turning point, the hinge point of history.

He starts the revolution, as we saw last week, that turns people away from their sin and back to God. There's simply never been a king like him, and there will never be a greater one.

The word to serve is the same as the word for worship. You'll see that the goal of this is so that we can serve him. Verse 74, to enable us to serve him without fear.

He does this by destroying our enemies, not just rescuing us and then leaving our enemies alive and kicking. He actually destroys the enemies. And he makes it possible for us to turn to God and to be acceptable to him.

That service is to give acceptable service so that God accepts the work that we do. So then, these are all the wonderful things that God is going to do in the person of Jesus.

[17:12] Now they don't know that it's Jesus yet. We do. That's why we celebrate Christmas time. God promises to redeem. God promises to save. God promises to rescue us from our enemies, enemies that are too powerful for us.

And he does this by destroying them. Now wouldn't you want to serve this king? Wouldn't you want to have him as your king? Well, if you do, you've got to prepare properly for him. You can't just come to him as you would like.

You've got to come to him as he says you must come to him. You know, we don't have kings in our culture, but when they do arrive, there's a huge amount of protocols that you've got to go through. You can't just walk up to them and say, Hi, hello.

You know, think of Queen Elizabeth, I spoke about how we met her once. Hi, Elizabeth. Hi, Lysus. Dylan, you're right there. How's it? How's it? You can't just go up to them.

You stopped long ago before you can reach them. They allow you to approach them and you've got to follow all these protocols. Now, thankfully with Jesus, there are protocols, but not the silly ones

that we have in our world.

[18 : 15] But there are some things we must do to prepare to receive this king properly. Are you with me? So let's have a look at the second half and that explains how we are to meet this king. Zechariah continues, and now he's talking about his own son, John.

And you, my child, from verse 76, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him and to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

Now, every king needs a prophet. In the Old Testament, you didn't get a king making himself a king. You remember when David and, or Saul and David were made kings, they didn't make themselves king. Do you remember who made them a king?

Samuel the prophet. Not just any prophet. One of the great prophets of the Old Testament. And so when we come to the New Testament, you've got another prophet. And so, by the way, it's not just any prophet.

Jesus himself says, this is the greatest prophet that has ever lived. Do you remember that comment that he makes also in the book of Luke? I'll just reference it. You don't have to go there. It's in Luke chapter 7.

[19 : 19] Don't turn there. I'm just going to give it to you. Or at this point in the story, I think John is in jail and he sent his disciples to Jesus and asked him, are you the Messiah?

Are you the one that we're waiting for? He really wants to make sure. I think he knows, but he's in jail and he's wondering what's happening. And Jesus says, what did you come out to?

This is in Luke 7. Don't look it up. You can do it another time. What did you go out to see? A prophet. Yes, I tell you more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you.

After John's messages left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John. I tell you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John. And the whole of that area knew that John was the greatest prophet.

In fact, he's referenced in external sources outside the Bible as being a great prophet. And then Jesus ends up saying, yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John.

[20 : 22] Isn't that amazing? That means us. Jesus thinks that we are greater than the greatest prophet that has ever lived in the history of his people. So John is very important in the story of Jesus because he's a big prophet that tells people how to meet him.

And how do they meet him? How do they prepare? Verse 27, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. John prepares the way for the king by telling his people their need of getting rid of their inside enemy sin.

They need to have their sins forgiven. In order to meet the king and to have him not kill you, because that's what kings do to their enemies, you need to be his friend. We need to deal, you need to have dealt with your sin.

You'll notice, you'll know in John's ministry that's exactly what he did. Remember when he started his, John started his public ministry? He quotes that Isaiah passage. Maybe you want to turn there this time, just turn the page, it might be a page or two, to Luke chapter 3.

I'm sure you know it, but these promises made when John was just born, John himself takes on. Luke chapter 3 from verse 3. He, John, went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[21 : 44] And then he goes on to call the people to repentance. And he quotes that passage from Isaiah. The voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight the path for him.

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. His crooked roads shall become straight, the rough way smooth, and all mankind will see God's salvation. And there's an urgency to God's, to John's message.

The people of Israel had to turn and have their inside cleaned in order to meet their king. Now I mentioned last time I met the queen, and we get all prepared on the outside.

You've got to look nice and shiny and new. Well, Jesus wants the same thing from us, except it's got to happen on the inside. And we can't do that cleaning ourself. Jesus has to do it. But the way to prepare that is to acknowledge that we've got that, we need that cleaning on the inside.

We need to become holy and righteous and good. In order to get access to this king, you need to be properly prepared. And the repentance of, repenting from our sins and being baptized.

[22 : 46] So you'll notice that John's, not in Zechariah in chapter 1, but in chapter 3, John calls on his people to repent and be baptized. And we've seen this in our study in Genesis about how God's covenant works.

You come to him, he makes a covenant promise to you, and then he gives you a sign that you've got to go through to ensure that you know that you're in that covenant and that he's in covenant with you. Now the New Testament is no different.

Baptism is that sign. We've had some good teaching on what baptism means and what it does for us. But just notice that that covenant language continues here in the New Testament. Repentance and baptism are the means by which our king washes away the barrier that separates us from him. Well then, as we close, have you prepared to meet King Jesus? He is a mighty warrior king who's going to do to his enemies just what the kings of the Old Testament did.

Destroyed all of them when God was with them. Especially guys like David and Solomon. The good kings. Not the bad kings. But Jesus is the ultimate good king. So he's got ultimate power over his enemies.

[23 : 53] Are you prepared? Now this whole Advent season is a time for preparation. So what do we do when we prepare for something? Well, we go, we change our daily routine.

You've all begun to prepare for Christmas lunch. I don't know if you've begun to prepare for Christmas lunch. That's quite far away. But ladies, am I right? You've begun. Guys, probably not so much.

Not so much? Okay, that's all right. But when you do start making your preparations, you change the way that you do your normally daily business. You've got to make plans.

You take different steps to achieve a different result. You change your daily routine. You do things differently. So maybe there's some prep work that we can do to prepare, not for Christmas, but as such, but to prepare to meet Jesus.

Are there things in our daily life that need changing? Am I getting too angry too quickly? Am I still using bad words that I shouldn't be using, even if it's under my breath, especially at this Christmas time when everything gets crazy?

[24 : 58] Am I making enough time for my family? Am I making enough time for God? Am I dealing with my sins properly? Now, one of the best ways to do prep work is to check with your partner and your kids.

You can ask them straight up, listen, is there stuff in my life that needs to be changed? And they'll give you a long list. Right? Well, just choose one or two.

In fact, don't choose two. Just choose one because it's so difficult to change our sin, even with God's help. Choose one and change your daily routine to make sure that that thing that's in your life begins to get dealt with.

Make a commitment to praying about it. Bringing it to Jesus and asking Him to help you change. Ask Him to defeat this sin in your life. He's promised to do so. He's a mighty warrior that has defeated our enemies.

But we still need His daily help to do that in our lives. If you need bigger help with sin in your life, you go and speak not just to your partner but speak to a Christian brother or sister that you respect who's been in the Christian walk a long time.

[26 : 08] You can come and speak to Nick or myself. Don't let sin stop you from celebrating Christmas as a Christian. So maybe you need to take that first step. You haven't made it yet.

Maybe you need to come to Jesus and repent of your past life and be baptized. Then do that. And you receive all these blessings that the song of Zechariah gives us in Jesus.

But maybe you have done that and you're living a Christian life but we know what sin is like. You know, it's like walking through a... As you walk through life, you always... Dirt just kind of comes back and sticks on you.

Like the cleaning that we've done. I don't know if you've noticed. That first weekend it was so nice. It looked like Plum said it was nice and shiny and new. And then a few weeks later the paper...

In fact, I've seen that they've graffitied our wall that we cleaned. Oh man! That's okay. It's not a big job but it's a small job. But you've got to clean it. You don't want to leave it. Now for the Christian that's what sin...

[27 : 03] Remaining sin in our life is like. We've got to do that constant work inside ourselves to make sure that we clean. We constantly go to Jesus and make sure that our sin is being dealt with.

Don't let sin stop you from celebrating Christmas as a Christian. Rather prepare yourself so that you can enjoy all the benefits that King Jesus has to offer his people. And if you do, have a look at the end of the song to see the things that God does for us.

From verse 78. God is going to give his... Well, from verse 77. God is going to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. And he's going to do this because of the tender mercy of our God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace.

If you do these things, you can look forward to receiving tender mercy from God. You can look forward to receiving the sunlight of Jesus himself. That's the rising...

The tender mercy of God which the rising sun will come. It's called the... Some translations have the day spring. And that's Jesus himself shining his knowledge and his spirit and his love into our lives.

[28 : 21] You can have Jesus chasing away your gloom and your darkness, letting you see properly how to live and enjoy peace. It wouldn't be a lovely thing to have the peace of God into our hearts and lives at Christmas time but of course throughout all our lives.

Now isn't that worth spending time preparing for? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for this lovely song of Zachariah the Benedictus. Of how it reminds us that you have sent Jesus as our king and that he's our savior and rescuer and that there's not a single enemy in our lives that can withstand him.

Lord, some of our biggest enemies is our own sin and our fear of death and we hear from John, Lord, that we've got to prepare to meet our king by taking care of our sin and all we have to do is bring it to you and ask for forgiveness and that you will indeed forgive us.

Help us, Lord, to remember these things and to hold on to them at this Christmas time. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.