

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, and has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. (Hebrews 1:1-2)
Amen.

Songs of Salvation

2. A Song that Prepares the Way

Luke 1:67-79 (NKJV) — 67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 68 “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. 76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

This is the inspired Word of the Spirit.

We pray, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice.” (Psalm 51:7,8). Amen.

In and through the only Name under heaven, by which we must be saved, dear fellow redeemed,

He just didn’t think it could be so. In their old age, how could he and his wife have a son. Elizabeth had been barren as long as they have been married. Upon hearing the word of Gabriel, Zacharias responds, “How will I know this for myself? For I am old and my wife is old.” At these words, Zacharias’ mouth was shut.

Of course, as promised, Elizabeth did conceive and did bring forth a son. When the fulfillment of this promise comes to pass, Zacharias shows forth his faith by naming the child John. His mouth is again opened. Nine months he had been mute. All that time, he was unable to speak a word. Now that his tongue has finally been loosed, what will he say?

We call this song of Zacharias “the Benedictus,” meaning “the Blessing.” Full of the Holy Spirit, he opens his mouth, saying literally... “Blessed the LORD God of Israel!” As we considered last week in Mary’s song, Zacharias says nothing of who he is and what he has done. All of it is focused on who the LORD is and what the LORD has done. We hear a song that prepares the way for another birth soon take place. We hear a song that prepares for the coming of Christ the LORD.

The theme of this song of Zacharias is liberation. v.70 – He has **redeemed** His people. That word redemption means liberation. To be redeemed is to be have the price of slavery paid, to be set free. v.69 – He has **raised up salvation**. That is, out of the depths of our misery, He has lifted up deliverance. v.71 – this is liberation **from enemies**, from those who hate us. v.74 – this is liberation **from fear** ... Indeed the way of the LORD brings liberation.

Zacharias’ son will be the forerunner for One who will liberate us. John the Baptist will prepare the way of the LORD.

76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins.

As we see here in v.77 Zacharias does not speak of liberation from government or through government. He does not speak of merely coping with guilt or personal struggles. He speaks of absolute freedom. And he speaks in terms of sin.

Any preparation for the LORD’s coming that is not in terms of our sins and our true spiritual enemies, will not make a ready path for the His arrival. For that which is the root of all we suffer and all that binds us is spiritual in nature. It is sin. The way is prepared by knowing that deliverance comes by means of the forgiveness of sins.

The work of John the Baptist was to clear the way. It is to get me out of the way. When the LORD comes into flesh in Bethlehem it is not to ask us for help or to encourage us to do better. *68 “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people.* God becoming flesh was to do what you and I, in our bondage to sin, could never.

When the angel appeared to Zacharias telling him that he would have a child, his flesh began getting in the way. He seemed to think that the birth of a son would somehow depend on him and his capabilities. The angel later tells Mary, “Indeed Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age ... for with God nothing will be impossible.”

How often do we get into the way of the way of the LORD. We think God’s good purpose somehow depends on me and my capabilities. Perhaps we think financial security depends on us working extra hours. Perhaps we think that our goals for retirement will be reached by our wisdom with money and investments. Perhaps we think our future church growth and survival depends on our careful budgeting and creative outreach ideas.

Perhaps we think it is up to us alone to solve the problem of a family member or friend. Or perhaps we think that person is beyond help. In all these things we really prepare only for my own way.

These are our Zacharias moments. These are the times when we think our liberty depends on what I do or don't do. As always, the largest obstacle to our LORD's coming is plainly me. God is here to shut our mouths.

Notice the work of preparing the way is, v.77, by giving knowledge. The way of the LORD is learned. Luke records in chapter 3 how John came *preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, (Luke 3:3)*. The work of John the Baptist was to prepare the way of the LORD by teaching and preaching way of salvation. The work of the Spirit is to get us out of the way so the way of the LORD can be seen. *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted. (2 Corinthians 7:10)*

This is why our songs of salvation center not in me. They sing of God's liberation. Freedom from sin is not something done by us, it is something declared by God. This is the knowledge that prepares the way. It is the knowledge that even a child possesses.

71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us.

Learn to know your sins. Know your weaknesses. Come to an understanding of who your real enemies are. The way of the LORD is "cross"-ward. His way was to battle the real enemies – the devil, the world, and your own flesh. His way was to defeat these the cross and buried your sins in the grave. He alone has risen victorious.

74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

We considered on Sunday how the LORD would come suddenly to His temple to purify the sons of Levi. He came as a refiner to rid you of the impure works of your flesh and to present you in pure holiness before God. The knowledge of salvation is the forgiveness of sins.

This is what enables us to serve God without fear. We are not coerced, nor are we guilt ridden into trying to serve God. We serve Him in freedom from the Law.

As Malacahi wrote, "He has purified the sons of Levi, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness." Purified by that faith that relies on Christ alone, we serve Him in holiness. We stand before God as righteous as God Himself.

You are freed from all those who oppress you – from those who treat you poorly at work even though you have been doing a faithful job ... from those who tease you at school just

for trying to do the right thing ... from those who criticize you for not joining them in something sinful.

79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Christmas is a time that people speak more and more of peace. TV specials, soldiers returning home – there is an increased focus of peace on earth. That was the song of the angels to the shepherds after all. Yet how emphatically Zacharias sings of the way of the LORD in terms of hell and heaven, sins and salvation. He sings of a heavenly peace that has come to earth in Jesus Christ.

To preach of peace on earth apart from the knowledge of our sins, empties the manger. To think of peace in terms of something I do for others or things I change in my life makes the coming of Christ meaningless.

This peace is not an end to all struggle in this world. Finances, things falling apart in your life, people letting you down, letting yourself down, letting God down are things that will be with you to the day you die. Yes, you will struggle. The peace is knowing how temporary and powerless these things are. This is the peace of knowing the days of your flesh, the devil, the world are all numbered, but the days of peace are not.

The way of the LORD is the way of Jesus Christ – barns and feed troughs. The way of the LORD was through lowliness, suffering, and death. Jesus never looked to rewards in this world. He cast off this world, condemned it, and looked for the eternal peace that would follow.

Be a wise man. Trusting in what God had promised, those wisemen looked to the star in the east. No matter how far off that Savior seemed, it remained their guide. It illumined the way. Jesus is the Dayspring (v.78), the Morning Star which has come from on high. Look beyond to the star that guides you into the way of peace. Look to God's words of promise. For you know that as Jesus has gone before, so you follow. As He has risen, so you too rise. As He stands enthroned in glory, so you also. Our Lord comes and He comes to you in peace.

See how these OT songs come into our NT lives? Christ has come out of the OT, out of the promises, to be your fulfillment. We, like Zacharias, are in a time preparation. We are the NT believers who are waiting for the LORD's coming, His final coming. Our mouths have been opened to sing a song that prepares the way. Our songs of salvation sing "the Benedictus" – "Blessed is the LORD God of Israel." Let us prepare for our Lord's return.

... [you] are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more

precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:5–9)

Amen.