

## The sermon

### Intro

What do you long to be rescued from? I know for some of you it's things like depression, intense physical pain, failing joints, memory loss, energy loss, cancer, separation from deceased, believing loved ones. Inability to do those things you used to do.

For me it might be costly equipment that breaks down, inflation, COVID protocols.

For Christians across the globe it might be government oversight/restrictions on the church, evangelism comes with the threat of imprisonment, the need for Visas to remain on the field, the meeting place being bombed.

Israel, in Mary and Elizabeth's day, longed to be rescued from Roman rule.

### READ PASSAGE

#### Body

#### Passage Focus

The birth of John the Baptist is the beginning of a sequence of events that will result in the eternal rescue of God's people.

#### Point 1: God rescues (1:56-73)

##### 1:56-64

Mary departs Elizabeth when John's birth is near (1:56).

Friends and family rejoiced over John's birth (1:57-58). Longing dashed became longing come true.

John's birth is an act of God's "**great mercy**." It's the word that describes the Good Samaritan's actions in Luke 10:37. God's mercy is kindness in action. The Greek equivalent for Hebrew word translated "steadfast love."

At John's circumcision the unidentified crowd (neighbors – 1:65?) objects to the name John: "*None of your relatives is called by this name*" (1:61). God has done this great thing for me and you're fighting me about the name? Kaitlin's not excited to share the name of children. It's not you. Negative comments in the past have made her a bit sheepish. Why are people so opinionated about baby names?

When questioned the mute Zechariah writes, "*His name is John*" (1:63). John means "**Yahweh has been gracious**." God has extended unmerited kindness to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age.

After nine months of inability to hear or speak, Zechariah's disciplinary sign is lifted, resulting in praise (1:64).

#### Impact (1:65-66)

God's power brought fear which spread "*through all the hill country of Judea*" (1:65). There was a stir about John from infancy (1:66). This helps explain John's massive following (Matt 3:5-7).

##### 1:67

Zechariah moves from silence to prophecy.

"**filled with the Holy Spirit**" – What exactly does it mean? Literal meaning of full. Wedding hall filled with guests (Matt 22:10), opponents of Jesus filled with wrath (Luke 4:28), a boat filled with fish (Luke 5:7), filled with awe (Luke 5:26), filled with jealousy (Acts 13:45). Results include prophecy (1:67), tongues (Acts 2:4), and speaking boldly during

persecution (Acts 4:8, 31). Elsewhere strongly influenced by the Holy Spirit resulting in lives conformed to God's will (see Eph 5:15-21). Here the Spirit moves Zechariah to speak true (without error) words that God wanted spoken.

### **Content**

1:68-75 speaks of God the Father

1:76-77 speaks of John the prophet

1:78-79 speaks of Jesus (God the Son)

***"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people***

Visited by raising up a prophet and the virgin birth of the Messiah (1:68). Redeemed is the term for freeing a slave = freeing Israel from Roman captivity (1:68).

***and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,***

The horn is Jesus. The prophets spoke of a Messiah who was a descendant of David. Salvation here speaks to rescue from foreign enemies and oppression, not forgiveness of sins.

***as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,***

The faithful expected this to happen. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and others spoke of a child who descended from David who would rescue Israel from her enemies, reign forever, and be served by Gentiles (Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 37:24-28; Dan 7:13-14).

**BIG IDEA:** Zechariah was speaking about Jesus so the Old Testament prophets were speaking about Jesus.

***that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;***

Again rescue from foreign enemies, not forgiveness of sins.

***to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,***

Mercy's the same word in 1:50, 58. Rescue from foreign oppression is "mercy, steadfast love" in action.

***the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us***

Mercy = rescue from enemies was promised in the Abrahamic covenant.

Where did God promise Abraham that his descendants would be rescued from their enemies?

*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* – **Genesis 12:3**

"*him who dishonors you I will curse*" = a promise that God will act in judgment on the enemies of Abraham's descendants.

*And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."* – **Genesis 17:8**

If the land was an "everlasting possession" of Abraham and his offspring, Israel's enemies couldn't occupy the land forever.

*I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,<sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” – Genesis 22:17-18*

If Abraham’s descendants would “possess the gate of his enemies,” God would have to rescue them from foreign invaders.

### **Your promises too!**

Did you notice how two of those passages spoke of all the nations being blessed through Abraham? Paul notes that those who believe in Jesus are Abraham’s offspring.

*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. – Galatians 3:29*

In other words, through faith in Jesus we become Abraham’s offspring and heirs of the promises given to Abraham. That’s how all the nations are blessed. You’re part of the story!

*For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. – Romans 4:13*

Abraham would be “heir of the world,” not just Canaan. Final fulfillment of these promises come in the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1-2). That’s the everlasting kingdom of **Daniel 7:13-14** where “all peoples, nations, and languages” will serve Jesus forever.

I’ve been giving you a lot on Old Testament covenants and promises. That’s the background. That’s what Mary and Zechariah keep talking about. The **BIG IDEA** is that the eternal reign of Jesus over his redeemed people, Jew and Gentile, is God keeping his promises to Abraham. It’s in Jesus that all God’s promises come true. It’s in Jesus that all our legitimate longings come true!

*that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

Why god rescues and the subject of our next point.

### **Rescue**

The **BIG IDEA** here is that God is a rescuing God. God rescues his people from evil oppressors. Being American Christians we might not identify. If you were a Christian in North Korea where those who are found to believers are at risk for immediate imprisonment, torture, and death, you might identify.

If you were a Christian who converted from Islam in Afghanistan, Somalia, or Libya where conversion results in things like family disowning you, family killing you, being forcibly sent to a psychiatric hospital, loss of employment, homelessness, you might identify.

My last pastor suggested that it’s the Christian professional (the teachers, the doctors) that are going to suffer in America because of modern gender ideologies, not the pastors. Teachers who won’t teach transgender ideology are being fired.

When God’s people are suffering evil oppression, they long for rescue. Mary and Zechariah did.

### **God with us**

Maybe you noted “*For the hand of the Lord was with him*” (1:66). God was with John the Baptist in a special way. How did things end up for John? Imprisoned by a wicked ruler and beheaded (Matt 14:1-12). With John ≠ exempt from beheading. God is with his suffering people. Horrific suffering ≠ God has abandoned me. God is with people who are beheaded.

**Point 2: God saves us for holy living (1:74-75)**

*that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

The common Jewish expectation was Messiah comes, Messiah overthrows Rome, and Israel's kingdom restored (Acts 1:6).

We can't be sure exactly what Zechariah anticipated, but it seems he wouldn't have envisioned an inter-advent (between comings) age where the gospel goes to the nations and local churches are formed throughout the globe. Given **Isaiah 9:6...**

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

it's likely he envisioned Messiah's birth followed by rule. Isaiah doesn't separate birth and reign. Having the New Testament, we know there's an indefinite period of time between Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings.

Regardless, the purpose of rescue is ability to live in holiness and righteousness without fear. Christians in North Korea can't live in holiness and righteousness without fear. Converts from Islam in the Middle East can't live in holiness and righteousness without fear. Some American professionals, small business owners, military chaplains can't live in holiness and righteousness without fear of lawsuits, termination of employment, public shaming.

**Holiness** = different than the common word for holiness. Here it means dedication, devotion.

**Righteousness** = conduct that conforms with God's revealed will.

**What holiness isn't**

I'm only allowed to pray, read my Bible, fast, evangelize, and go to church. Because anything else would be a waste of time. Holiness isn't hiding from the world to avoid contamination. Holiness isn't refraining from cribbage, only wearing dresses, never wearing make-up, etc. Holiness isn't just do's and don'ts.

**What holiness is**

Purity's involved. Grace-giving words rather than foul language. It's more than refraining from evil. It's developing character, new patterns like the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). In Colossians, it's holistic Christianity. It's completeness. No area of life untouched by God's word.

My point? God saves us to live differently (thoughts, feelings, actions). Antinomianism (anti-law) is anti-gospel. One aspect of gospel promise is newness of life (Rom 6:1-4).

My point? God enables us to live new. There's hope in Jesus to overcome destructive life patterns! God saves us to set us free from sin's control!

**Point 3: God forgives (1:76-77)**

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

Zechariah addresses his infant son. John goes before Jesus to get heart ready to receive Jesus (1:16-17).

*to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,*

John's message isn't rescue from Rome is coming. John's message is individual faith and repentance. Turning from rebellion to trust. Turning from rebellion to devotion and dedication (holiness). John's message is that God saves sinners by forgiving their sins.

### **Total forgiveness**

John called the people to a right response: faith and repentance. A right response to God would result in total forgiveness. God no longer holding our sins against us: past, present, and future. No more fear of hell. No more fear like "God's out to get me." A restored relationship with God. Total forgiveness.

John's evangelism gives way to "*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29). How does Jesus take away our sin? Jesus died on the cross such that whoever believes will be forgiven and an heir to Jesus' eternal kingdom.

No matter what you've done, Jesus death is worthy to cover your sin. Because Jesus is a worthy sacrifice to take the punishment in your place.

### **Point 4: God brings light to those in darkness (1:78-80)**

*because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

God hates sin. But God's merciful to sinners. We find mercy in Jesus. And only in Jesus.

The sunrise alludes to Jesus. Note Isaiah 9:1-7 that Darryl read for us. Jesus coming is God's mercy. In what way? By giving light to people in darkness, people with death hovering over them. That's everyone ever born by the way.

If we're to receive God's mercy, we need to recognize we're darkened. There's something wrong with us. We're broken. Darkness manifests itself in different ways. Selfishness. Greed. Lying lips. Theft. Harsh speech. Violence. Cruelty. Substance addiction. Foolish decision-making. Pride, thinking we're wiser than God. Autonomy, thinking we should be king instead of God. **The first step towards mercy is admitting there is something radically wrong in our hearts!**

Because we're in darkness, we sin against God making us guilty and worthy of hell's unending torment ("*shadow of death*"). Sin is a big deal because of who it's against!

But there's a way of escape. A "*way of peace.*" God saves us to relieve us of shame and guilt. And he saves us to alter how we do life. To move from darkness to "*holiness and righteousness.*" That's rescue from selfishness, deception, out of control anger, addictions, foolishness. Through Jesus. And only through Jesus.

Turn from darkness to Jesus. Trust him. Learn from him. Do life with his followers.

### **Conclusion**

The God who shaped John for his evangelistic preaching (1:80) shapes us for holiness and righteousness. That's why we exist.