

"A Song of Victory"—Luke 1:67-79

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "A Song of Victory", is Luke 1:67-79 → John's *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."* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

One familiar song which is closely associated with our Christmas celebrations is hymn # 357—“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” If you look at the first line of each verse you will notice that each one expresses the desire for someone to come and visit us to act on our behalf in some fashion. This person is referred to as “Emmanuel. . . Wisdom from on high . . . Lord of might . . . Branch of Jesse’s tree . . . Key of David . . . Dayspring from on high” and “Desire of nations.” Of Whom is the hymn speaking?

In our worship context we immediately recognize these references as various Scriptural descriptions of Jesus. How would a person come to such a conclusion? The name “Jesus” is not specifically mentioned in the hymn. In fact, if you look at the words closely you could get the impression that this is a hymn which could be sung in a Jewish synagogue as a prayer for the Messiah to still come and “ransom captive Israel!” Where did we get the idea that such a hymn desiring freedom and victory refers to Jesus?

We are people who have experienced the fulfillment of God’s plans for us by the deliverance and victory which He accomplished in the Person & Work of Jesus, the Messiah. In this faith we recognize these descriptions of Jesus from the Old Testament promises which God gave—promises which caused Zechariah in our text to burst into a song of victory.

After the birth of his son, Zechariah *prophesied* under the guidance of *the Holy Spirit* concerning God's fulfilling of His promises recorded in the Old Testament. It has been titled by the Church the "Benedictus," based upon the first word of his song in Latin meaning "blessed."

Zechariah certainly had much to be joyful about when he spoke these words. Aside from the joy of his "miracle" baby's birth, it is possible that these were the first words he spoke in nine months. We recall his lack of faith and the consequences he incurred when the angel announced John's birth nine months prior as recorded in Luke 1:20. The angel told him: *You will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.* Nine months mute is a long time to learn the lessons of faith, that when God says He will do something, **He will do it!**

Using many Old Testament pictures Zechariah described what God has done for His people. Verses 68-69 of our text describes this work of God: *He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David.* To *redeem* means "to buy back" from slavery and oppression. The phrase *raised up a horn of salvation* describes strength, power and victory over all enemies that would separate God's people from Him. This idea is also expressed in verse 77 where it says: *that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* It is a song of victory in the midst of

God's deliverance!

No doubt, Zechariah may have thought of this deliverance in a political way. Many of the Jews during His day were looking for the Messiah Deliverer-Redeemer to come in power, overtake the Roman government whom they felt were oppressing them, give back the Promised Land and establish an earthly kingdom with all the glory of "the good ol' days" under King Solomon. It is even possible that Zechariah's son, John the Baptizer, wondered about Jesus' ministry later in his life because Jesus didn't really fit this concept of the Messiah. It is recorded in Matthew 11:2-3 that *when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the One Who is to come, or shall we look for another?"*

I wonder how many times our perspective of Jesus as our Deliverer-Redeemer is only earthly focused? It is easy to simply view Jesus as *the One Who is to come* and rescue us from the struggles of life; to relieve our discomfort and pain; to make us feel better; to rescue us when we get in trouble and make our lives better; to make sure we are "blessed" by making things go good for us and provide abundantly for us. **This is actually a self-centered perspective of Jesus, motivated by "I"-dolatry, not faith.**

The meaning of this deliverance and redemption goes much deeper than a political deliverance with earthly blessings. It is a deliverance from

the **power** of sin, death and the devil over our lives. This song is given by the Holy Spirit, expressing the **spiritual victory** in our lives through the Person & Work of Jesus, the Christ. Galatians 3:13-14 puts it this way: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . . so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that **we might receive the promised Spirit through faith***. The faith which Zechariah expressed in his song of victory is the same faith Abraham and all believers in the Christ expressed throughout the ages.

Thus, believers in Jesus, the Christ, are the new Israel now who have experienced His redeeming work and continue to experience it daily through repentance *in the forgiveness of our sins*. Experiencing victory over the power of sin instead of slavery to the power of sin in our lives happens only through repentance and faith in Jesus, Who has done everything to assure our total and complete forgiveness before God. It is the atoning work of Jesus through which the Holy Spirit desires to work changes of obedience to God's commands in the daily vocations of our lives.

The second part of Zechariah's song reflects his son's part in this plan of salvation. Verses 76-77 describes John's prophetic ministry as going *before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins*. Notice Zechariah

prophesied about John the Baptizer in connection to the **spiritual** deliverance which **everyone** needs and can only experience in Jesus. It's a deliverance which is literally "out of this world." It's an eternal victory which will be realized in all its completeness when we go to heaven at the bodily resurrection and restoration of all things on the Last Day.

But what about our struggles with the presence of sin and the devil now, this side of the realization of that victory in its completeness? What happens when our day is filled with such spiritual battle that we feel like those described in verse 79 of our text: *those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death?* Will we not be relieved of suffering, trials, struggles and uncomfortable circumstances now? Maybe . . . maybe not.

Living in the victory of Jesus is not living a comfortable, convenient, pain free life. While describing the bodily resurrection which believers in Jesus will experience on the Last Day, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:19 → ***If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*** Zechariah's song of victory calls us to see beyond *this life only* to see our victory in Christ even in the midst of the presence of sin, death and the devil.

Actually, his song states the purpose for such victory in verses 74-75 of our text: *that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, **might serve Him** without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our*

days. We are redeemed and delivered **for service**?

This goes against the world's way of thinking which asserts that we are freed from oppression so we can do what we want. The Christian is freed from slavery in sin (which leads to eternal damnation in hell) and is given a new desire to serve the Lord Jesus because of having experienced God's grace, forgiveness and eternal life. In other words, we live a victorious life through faith in Jesus even as we live in the midst and mess of the presence of sin daily.

The Benedictus is our song of victory because it is based on faith in God's fulfilling His promises for us in Jesus, both those past and the ones yet to come. Many of our Christmas carols confess our joy and victory because of God's future promises to us in Jesus as well. Our singing is based on God's ageless faithfulness as expressed in verses 72-73 of our text: *to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham.*

Because God has visited us who sit in the darkness of sin with His mercy and forgiveness in Jesus we have cause to celebrate, looking to God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises and we serve Him. Like Zechariah, we are not just celebrating a birthday—we are celebrating the victory we have in all that Jesus has accomplished for us and what He still wants to accomplish for us as we live daily by faith in Him. Amen.

Let us pray:

Blessed are You, O Lord, the God of Israel, for You have visited and redeemed Your people and raised up a horn of salvation for us. You have assured us that our final day of salvation will someday be completed, when Christ returns. Therefore, come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Amen

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