

In Luke 1 we meet Zechariah. Who was he? A regular guy. A priest with daily tasks like the rest of us. Then one day, he's burning incense in the Temple, something miraculous happens. Imagine him walking into the Temple, sighing, going through the ritual like he had so many times? Where was God? He hadn't spoken directly in 400 years! Zechariah's old, his wife's barren, they've prayed for a child to no avail. Life was mundane; it hadn't given him all the blessings he'd hoped. Yet he follows God, although there may seem to be little reason to do so. You can almost hear the echoed noises of his activity in the empty Temple. People gather outside; he's alone in that room. But was he? An angel appears speaking words of hope. He's going to have a son, but no ordinary son, a son that would prepare the way of the Lord for the people of Israel. His son would be John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus.

We look at his reaction as a lack of faith when he says, "How can that be, we're old?" We look at the reaction from the Angel as punishment, Zechariah won't be able to hear or speak until the day the boy is born. Imagine, maybe it wasn't punishment? Maybe the angel did that as proof to Zechariah and others, as a sign that what he said was real? If it hadn't have happened this way, he could've left and thought, "Did that really happen? Maybe not, maybe I imagined it". Whatever the case, he's left silent unable to hear or speak until his son's birth; unable to voice the secrets told to him in the Temple; left with only his own thoughts for 9 months perhaps to flesh out what this means. Then his child is born, his tongue loosed, and he bursts forth in song! What does he sing? Does he thank God he has a son? Does he thank God he can speak? No, he praises God on promises fulfilled! Why is that?

Today is the second talk in a 4 week series called, 'Songs of Revolution.' Zechariah sings of redemption and the revolution it causes. What's he so joyous about?

Zechariah speaks in the past tense starting in Luke 1:67:

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

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

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn ^z of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

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

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us— ¹

Why does he sing about all this, not much has happened other than his child is born. Yet, Zechariah sees something more. He's privy to the Scriptures as priest; he knows the history of his people. In his silence, left only to his thoughts, he's had nine months to think about these angelic words. He knows what Israel is waiting for and this son will take part in ushering in something wonderful. He sees in all this the fulfillment of promise from God.

¹ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Lk 1:67–71). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

We have to remember a few things as I think he did, the first of which is this: It's always been about Grace. God has always pursued, provided for, and resided with his people. He pursues his people to buy them back: God continually does the impossible; we can take no credit. Abraham & Sarah in Genesis 12 couldn't have children and were very old, but a child was promised. The child came and then God asked Abraham to sacrifice this child of promise just as any pagan god would have at the time. However, God stopped him and provided a ram in the thicket. Many of us think this was his test of faith, but I would venture to suggest that it was more to *teach* Abraham about this new God of grace (explain history – Abraham leaves the pagan religions, child sacrifice). It was as if God was saying, "The gods of your forefathers demanded unending sacrifice, sacrifice of your most prized possession, your firstborn. You could never have assurance of being right with them. You provided the sacrifice, but I will provide for you. You don't have to give me anything. It's done for you. I make the ultimate final sacrifice. I am not like any God you have ever known; I am a God of grace." Unlike other gods, the God of Christianity pursues, resides with, and makes provision for his people.

All throughout the history of Israel other miracles happened! Hannah prayed to have her son Samuel when she had been barren and provoked for years. Gideon defeats an army of Midianites with only 300 men at the command of God. Joshua sees the walls of Jericho crumble with a trumpet call. Daniel is thrown into the lions den and isn't eaten. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are thrown into the furnace, but don't burn up. Joseph is sold into slavery and ends up being used by God to protect and save his own people. God brought 10 plagues on Egypt to redeem his people. God guards the Israelites with a pillar of fire and smoke and then uses Moses to part the Red Sea to provide freedom. Manna from heaven, another provision. Water from a stone. The list goes on! God pursues. God provides. God resides with his people.

Mary, a young virgin, is miraculously made pregnant. Elizabeth and Zechariah, old and barren, yet find themselves with a child. And who can get past the prophecies given more than 700 years earlier about the coming Messiah in Isaiah. God seems to be continually making it clear, He will provide. He will bring about his purposes, he will keep his promises, his plan and covenants will remain and be fulfilled by him. It all depends upon the Father. It all depends on his grace, which should make us sing with joy. God pursues you. God resides with you. God provides for you. That's why Zechariah bursts out in song.

He continues:

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear²

² *The New International Version*. 2011 (Lk 1:72–74). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Zechariah knows his history. He's thought in silence about this for the length of his wife's pregnancy. He's left with his own thoughts. He knows the prophecies and the promises; the holy covenant. He's studied the history. He's been waiting for God to speak; it's been 400 years; and all this gives him cause for joy. He bursts with coming expectation about the future, but interestingly, he speaks of this redemption and horn of salvation in the past tense. Since he's led by the Holy Spirit to prophecy that the Gospel has been around long before Jesus showed up in Bethlehem! Galatians 3:8 says this, ⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."³ That's the exact promise Zechariah refers to when he speaks of the oath God swore to Abraham found in Genesis 12. It says:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

²"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing. ¹

³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."⁴

And after this, God 'cuts' this covenant with Abraham to solidify this promise in Genesis 15. When two kings/parties cut a covenant of peace there was a ceremony involved. Whenever two kings were making a solemn pact of reconciliation, they would sacrifice a bunch of animals by cutting them in half and arranging the two halves opposite with an aisle down the middle. The kings would walk together down this aisle with burning incense saying to each other, if I should break this covenant, may I end up like these animals. The ceremony solidified responsibility on both sides. But the interesting thing in Genesis 15 is, God left Abraham out of the ceremony. He put Abraham into a deep sleep, God walked the aisle alone. God cut the covenant alone. Meaning, all responsibility of the promise/covenant depends fully on God to fulfill it; God will pursue. God will provide. God will reside.

Many of us view the OT as disconnected from the NT. We look at it and think, back then we had to do things to get right with God. Jews had to follow the Law and be circumcised to have relationship with God. That was never the case; God has always pursued his people by grace and provided for the promise. Zechariah brings up this ancient covenant to point out this out. Abraham was chosen by God not because of anything he did, but because God chose and provided for him; the Law was given 430 years after Abraham, he didn't even know about it, let alone follow it! God redeemed him from ancient pagan practices of bondage to horrible gods. Galatians also tells us

³ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ga 3:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ge 12:1–3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

clearly no one is justified by the law, only by faith. Abraham is said to be justified by faith, faith in the promises of God, not by anything he'd done.

Romans 4 says this:

³What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." ^{9b}...We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. ¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith... ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." ^o He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. ⁵

Redemption has always been God initiated by his sacrifice, not ours. Revelation 13:8 says that Christ was the lamb slain since the creation of the world – this idea of the Gospel was in God's mind all the way back to the beginning; as a matter of fact we can find reference to it in the garden of Eden when it was prophesied that the seed of Adam (namely Jesus) would crush the serpents head bringing an end to sin and death (Genesis 3:15). Do I understand all that? No. Do you understand all that? Probably not. Did Zechariah understand all this? Most definitely not. But it's clear, it's about God's grace, not me. God is pursuing his people, redeeming us, buying us back from sin and death strictly because he loves us; his promise; his provision! That's something to sing about. Zechariah thought so as he interpreted these events to mean that God was on the move bringing fulfillment to his promise; God was providing redemption.

Zechariah knows that something special is coming (1 Peter 1:20 'He (Jesus) was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake.'). He not only sees that God has been faithful to his promises and pursued his people by grace; he also knows Messiah is coming with healing in his wings, to redeem his people, and with a horn of salvation! That's why he speaks in the past tense about God's promises & provision. He may not understand it all, but the next chapter has started. There's something revealed about Zechariah here, he may be referring to very real enemies such as Rome, but he doesn't realize that his prophecy reaches down into his own heart; the enemies of sin and self will be dealt with! Zechariah knew that God would not leave his people to waste away. He's returning with a horn of salvation. The horn has always been not only the crowning glory of an animal, but a symbol of power and victory; Therefore, Jesus comes in victory over sin and death and in the final days over all enemies of his Kingdom.

⁵ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ro 4:3–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

In Luke 7:22 Jesus responds to John's question as to whether he is the Messiah and says, "22.... "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." A clear sign he was the Messiah; the Kingdom of God was at hand. So, wonderful things have happened! The Kingdom has come! Good news, right?

There's a problem, sometimes we don't live in that victory. We're not always singing like Zechariah, we're more like him in the Temple carrying out the mundane tasks of life. We'll get back in our cars, drive home to broken relationships, debt, addictions, bitterness, and a haunting past. This Good News seems a pipe dream; all my tears haven't been wiped away. Zechariah also went back to everyday life and watched his nephew grow, heard about his teaching, and may have thought; "When the heck are you gonna overthrow the government boy – when are you gonna rescue us from our enemies. When are you gonna establish the Kingdom?" History grinds on for 2000 years more, the Jews continually go through hardships, Hitler comes along slaughtering millions. So, was God untrue in his promises to Israel? Did he rescue them from the hands of their enemies? Is God untrue to his promises with us when we feel life is kicking us in the teeth? The answer is God has been, and is still being, faithful.

We need to remember a few things:

1. We know what we need to know. Just like Zechariah didn't know everything when he voiced this prophecy. Yet, God is working in history. Zechariah knew enough to know that God was doing something great through his son and the boy's cousin, Jesus. God was keeping his promise, providing for, and pursuing his people. If we take the time to understand his Word, history, his purposes, and our future hope, we wouldn't fear anything, even in the face of uncertainty.
2. The Kingdom has come, but not fully come; there'll come a day of culmination where God will establish his kingdom in its entirety. He'll bring absolute peace to his creation and his enemies will be put under his feet. We're part of this continuing story just like Zechariah was.

This second point brings us to the next major drive of the passage, which is our purpose; the revolution of grace. Zechariah, either knowingly, or unknowingly, lays out our purpose. He says we are enabled to serve without fear in holiness and righteousness before God all our days. In the knowledge of Grace and the ultimate plan of God in history, all fear is washed away. Gratitude and joy are born from Grace, and we are enabled by the His Spirit to serve Jesus all our days.

The issue is, the Kingdom has not fully come. In your present state you battle, in the power of the Spirit, your own fallen nature in a hostile world. But, that becomes easier and easier the closer you draw to your Savior in relationship and purpose. Listen to what he says about his son, John:

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,

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

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”⁶

When you see that your purpose is the same as John’s, to be a prophet of the Most High, calling people back into relationship with him through Christ, life takes on new flavor. When you realize you bring a message of hope to a hurting world, your outlook changes. When bitterness and insecurity no longer mark your inner struggles, realizing your purpose in Christ, you look outward to making disciples of others, loving them, caring for them in real and practical ways then life is absolute joy!

The problem with many sermons is, there’s a lot of information but no passion. Cognitive input, but no joy! It’s as if the pastor has no feeling left in their bones. The heart isn’t there, as if they don’t feel it him/herself. In the end it is a perfectly crafted heartless sermon. You feel it, the art is gone, the heart is gone. Zechariah wasn’t like that; this prophetic song was conjured up from deep down in the wells of knowledge, and an understanding of Grace, which produced the twin children of gratitude and joy eradicating fear and rejoicing in purpose.

So, what was Zechariah so joyous about? God pursues you. God resides with you. God provides for you. He hasn’t left us alone! Redemption is good news, Revolution is what it causes. The Good News, the Gospel, has been around longer than you think. God’s heart has always been to buy back his people by his own sacrifice.

I have the best job in the world. I get to proclaim this story of Jesus; to sit down with people and say God resides with you, pursues you, and provides for you; to adults and children alike. I get to hear adults say, “I can’t believe you would take the time to tell me that.” I get to hear parents say, “I can’t believe you would take the time to tell my child that”. Why wouldn’t I - I’m passionate about this story of redemption! How much hurt is in the world? How much pain? How much darkness? Where is the love, the grace? You and I hold the knowledge, joy, and understanding of grace, the key to peace!

When it comes to how much God loves you, it doesn’t matter what you do; you can’t make God love you anymore, or any less. Like Abraham we’re simply called into relationship with God. But when it comes to experiencing his love and understanding it for the world and yourself, it does matter what you do; it must be lived out in purpose. Your relationship with him is not established on your actions, good or bad. However, who wants to know God without living him out before others? Grace births the twin sisters, gratitude and joy, and just like Zechariah, when understood, it can’t be contained.

The final word of the Kingdom is peace. Shalom. In the knowledge of grace, let us approach life with gratitude and joy, full of hope, emptied of fear, and rejoicing in

⁶ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Lk 1:76–79). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

purpose. God pursues you. God resides with you. God provides redemption through his promise. You may feel he's been silent too long, but he speaks to you, and resides with you in the story of Jesus; he provides for you in his sacrifice. He pursues you in constant love. In the continual story of redemption, let's continue the revolution of grace!