

Pastor Matthew Ude
December 22nd 2019
Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Lord has Visited His People

Luke 1:67-80 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." ⁸⁰ So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Luke 1:67-80 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,

There is the true story of a missionary to China who when he first arrived over there was given a gift by a certain individual. Unfortunately he not knowing the Chinese customs accepted this gift. Only later he found out that in China he either was supposed to not accept the gift or he was supposed to give a gift of equal value back to the man. So he had to write to the mission board asking for extra money in order to return to the man an equal gift.

It is always a little awkward if someone thinks to get you a gift and you didn't think to get one for them.

Here God has given an unbelievable gift to Zacharias. What can he give in return? Nothing except praise. And so he opens his mouth to bless the Lord.

It is interesting that the term bless means different things depending on the direction of the blessing. If it is from God coming to us it means that He is filling us with His gifts. If it is from us to God it means nothing more than that we are praising and thanking Him. Because that is all we can do in return there is no other gift which we can give to God.

So having received the blessing of God, Zacharias responds in praise.

"Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me praise his glorious name."

We certainly ought to bless the Lord with all that is within us, especially this time of year when we remember all His gifts with which He blesses us.

Zacharias has a specific reason for blessing God, notice he mentions three things which God has done:

1. He has visited His people

He came down from heaven to be with us.

There was one particular village in Africa which I visited. The reek and the stench of the place made my skin crawl. I could see blood and feces on the walls. I was standing in filth. But I had gone there to bring them God's word and wasn't going to leave until I had done what I came for. I didn't sit down but I stayed and taught them.

How much more repellent must it have been for Christ who lived in eternity in heaven to come down among us and live and walk and yes even sit in the stench and reek of our sin.

The word visited implies someone coming to help those in a desperate situation.

James reminds us that just as Jesus visited us in our need we ought to imitate him by visiting other who need our help.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

And Psalm 8 verse 4 reminds us of God's grace in descending to visit us

Psalm 8:4 What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?

God visited his people that is He descended from heaven to earth in order to give aid to us in our desperate need.

2. He has redeemed His people

What did he do while he was here? He made atonement that is he redeemed us.

Later Zacharias says, "to save us from the hands of our enemies and those who hate us."

Liberal scholars might point to those words and say, "Zacharias is speaking of national liberation. He is expecting Jesus to lead his people in glorious battle against the Romans." But Zacharias makes it clear that this is not what he is talking about, that is not what He is expecting from Jesus.

Rather He will make atonement, reconciliation that is He will pay the price for our sins.

Again many people will say of Jesus he is a good example of how we should live. And it is true that He is. But this is not why He came. He did not come to be an example. He came to pay the price for our sins.

This is why I am not a huge fan of those WWJD bracelets. They aren't wrong. But they do focus more on Jesus as an example rather than Jesus as a Savior. Better would be WDJJ, what did Jesus do? He paid the price for my sins so that I can go to heaven.

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

This is a reason to sing blessing to the Lord

3. He has raised up His people

A horn is a symbol of strength and of pride.

Anyone wants to try and head but a rhino, or a full grown mountain ram? Anything with horns? You are going to lose.

When you go out hunting do you look for the deer with the smallest nubs of antlers? Or do you look for the one with the largest antlers? And then you bring the antlers home and hang them on your wall and tell everyone look at what a great big deer I shot.

This redemption that Christ won for us is not a timid or weak thing. It is the horn of a rhino or the tusk of an elephant. It is strong and sure and certain. It is a salvation that will not disappoint but will accomplish what God has promised. It is a salvation strong enough to defeat even our own sin.

Whatever sins we struggle with in our life, whatever doubts plague us when we lie down at night, whatever guilt, whatever past event loop through our

head again and again like a really bad record player, this salvation is strong enough to take care of all of those problems. You are forgiven because Christ came down from heaven and paid the debt you own. You are clean because although you live in the filth of your own sin Christ came down and the cleaning the agent He used is strong enough to get any spot or filth out.

Psalm 18:2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

This is what Jesus does, now Zacharias continues with *why* He has done it:

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:

Notice that Zacharias gives two reasons why God did this for us and neither has anything to do with us. We are completely superfluous to the transaction. We simply receive the gifts which He gives to us.

1. Because of His promise
2. Because of His Mercy

That is what makes the salvation so strong. This is what makes it a horn of salvation, the fact that it is based completely on His promise and His mercy.

For this reason we can be very bold before the Lord and one another, because we have this horn of God's salvation in our hands.

Someday we are all going to die and on that day we are going to stand before the throne of God, and there will be Satan, the great accuser. Satan is going to say, "You can't go into heaven and here is the list of why." It will probably take twenty years to read the whole list. To which we will respond, "Yup I did all those things. But God you promised." And God will say, "Yes I did, go in."

You know when you watch cop shows they are always trying to trick the criminals. The FBI will say, "oh yeah we'll give you immunity if . . ." But then there is always a trick, there is always some fine print, which they use to catch you.

God doesn't do fine print. He doesn't do tricks. He says this is the promise I made and spoke through my prophets since the beginning of time and it is yours.

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.

What is the result? We are able to serve him without fear.

We don't have to wonder about every bad thing that happens to us, did this happen because God is angry at me?

God is not angry with us; we know He is not because Christ paid the price for our sins.

What happens when you owe someone money, or if you did something to that made someone else mad or they did something that made you mad? You try to avoid them whenever you see them.

There is no need to try to avoid God or try to hide from his coming, like Adam and Eve did in the garden.

We can stand boldly before Him. We can come into his presence. We can go in and out and serve him in righteousness all the days of our life. Knowing that if we mess up, He isn't going to strike us down with fire from heaven. No, He is going to forgive us for Jesus sake.

Amen