

12.15.24

Luke

Chapter 1 - An Inconceivable Announcement

Good Happens for Good Reason (vs. 67-80)

Luke 1:67-80: And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us

In the house of David His servant—

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—

Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES,

And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;

To show mercy toward our fathers,

And to remember His holy covenant,

The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
To grant us that we, being rescued 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 on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS
WAYS;

To give to His people the knowledge of salvation
By the forgiveness of their sins,

Because of the tender mercy of our God,

With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE
SHADOW OF DEATH,

To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child continued to grow and to become strong in
spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his
public appearance to Israel.

The Gospel of Luke; “gospel,” meaning “good news.” We could use a little good news. We could use a lot of good news. What is the good news? The good news is that God loves you. That God has come. It’s an answer to our prayers. The mayhem, the confusion, trials and the tribulation of this world can easily begin to cause the light of hope to flicker. We need some good news.

In the setting in which Luke was written, the people needed good news. They were not feeling the good news at that particular time as Luke begins the text, and what's interesting is that the couple of Zacharias and Elizabeth had been living good lives. So, the perception is, “If I'm doing all the right things, all the good things, that good should naturally come to me.” Of course, unfortunately, we, I think, overestimate our goodness and clearly underestimate God's. Nevertheless, here they are waiting. As Zechariah gives this wonderful declaration, and it’s after his mouth was finally open and he's able to speak, he begins to proclaim how wonderful it is that God has

sent His salvation, His redemption to His people. It's been a long time, if you consider at this particular juncture, how long the world had been waiting. We figure, according to the Jewish calendar and if you were to tie into in some ways the Sumerian calendar, it was probably in the neighborhood of 3800 to 4000 years from the time of creation. So, from the time of creation now to this particular time in the Gospel of Luke, they've now been waiting about 4000 years for that Messiah to come that was promised to Eve. Throughout the process, there have been other things that have taken place. Of course, man has gone his own way, and yet God has called out and rescued a people for Himself. People often times don't think of the timeline of, say, Abraham in comparison to creation as well as Abraham in comparison to the time of Christ. There's kind of a simple way to remember; basically, from the time of creation to Abraham is about 2000 years, and from Abraham to Jesus is about 2000 years. You don't really think of it being within that particular span, but in this time all we're waiting, and God was giving a promise to Abraham, and He said it's going to happen; of course, now, 2000 years later. It was at the

time in which the nation of Israel, though they were called out of and rescued from Egypt, that as they go into the promised land; I guess their perception is everything's going to be good, but unfortunately oftentimes as we were talking about this morning, when good is given to us, we receive it in a way in which is basically a license to do wrong. So, the children of Israel went clearly off base and within a few short years, I say in comparison, the whole nation had become corrupt. Because of that, God put them into captivity. At about 586 years before the time of Christ they were taken into captivity by the nation of Babylon. At that juncture, I don't think they were feeling like the Messiah is going to come anytime soon. Of course, one nation, then it gets changed from another nation. So, the Medes and the Persians come in. They take them in. They allow them to go back home to rebuild some of their walls, but the temple doesn't look anything like the temple of Solomon was and things are still disappointing. Within short order, another nation comes, the great nation of Greece, and Alexander the Great begins to come in and wipe out nations and take into captivity others and the Greek nation takes control of

Israel, ultimately. An interesting king that is set as king over Israel by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes comes in and sets himself up in the temple as god. The great abomination of desolation takes place under him. Within a few short years from that, the nation of the Romans come in and they take captive as well, Jerusalem. All these years, Israel's been in captivity basically under another nation. All those years probably feeling, "Where's the Messiah? Who's going to rescue us?"

When Zacharias begins to proclaim this wonderful message, he mentions the fact that this promise was promised to "our fathers of old." It was promised to Abraham. It was a promise through all the difficult years, and I suppose that a lot had tenaciously held on to the promise, but the question had to be resounding in all of their minds, "When is good going to come?" And now the stirrings begin to happen. People began to hear that an angel had visited Zacharias while he was in the temple. The angel had given a message. They're not real sure what's going on, but they know something miraculous is beginning to happen. According to the Gospel of Luke, it's

at a time in which anticipation was at a peak because they were beginning to see things move, and you can imagine, I mean, all these years that have passed by, and now we're starting to see movement. What's happening?

An old couple by the name of Zacharias and Elizabeth had been living righteously. When the angel comes to them, he says, "You're going to have a child." Of course, at 70s, 80s, it's not going to happen. Unfortunately, though, Zacharias was a righteous man and doing all that he did because he believed it was right, and he wanted to serve the Lord. He still wasn't a man of great faith, and I think one of the things it shows is that you can do all the right things, but still not really believe in God; perhaps in some ways, you could do it for good reasons, but God's going to humble him. One of the ways that He does, of course, Gabriel, the angel comes before him, and he goes, "This is what's going to happen. You're going to have a child. His name is going to be John and he's going to be great and he's going to be bringing in this kingdom, as he will announce the Messiah coming, and Zacharias goes, "Ok, but I don't think that's going to happen." In so many

words. And Gabriel goes, “Ok, you're not going to talk.” So of course, as we have been reading, he doesn't talk for the whole time in which his wife is expecting. That's 9 months of him not talking and he's one of the great priests. What's interesting about the time in which he's the priest is this is a couple that's living righteous, and we know this according to Luke 1:6,

“They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.”

So, they had been doing the right thing, but that's an anomaly at this particular juncture because though Jerusalem is a sanctimonious city at this time, it's just basically a facade because on the whole, most of Israel had basically given up on God. We know according to the time that Jesus is walking the earth and talking with the different religious leaders that the Sadducees and the Pharisees that are so very religious are not very godly. So, we have this interesting facade that's happening at this particular point in time and the whole nation itself is under the rule of the Roman Empire. But they've placed a

king over them who's really not a Jewish king, but really from the Edomites. He knows about the Jewish religion but really is not a righteous man at all. In fact, he's a very hateful man. His name is Herod the Great. Herod begins to take control of not only Jerusalem but also the temple. So, what he does is he puts in the high priest. So, the people who are high priest are not people that are righteous. Actually, one of the first high priests that he puts in around 37 BC is his brother-in-law, and the reason why he doesn't stay in very long is because Herod kills his wife. So, it didn't seem to work out with his brother-in-law being in that particular office as a favor. So, then he puts in his second wife's father, who was his father-in-law. So, all the way through the people that are priests are not godly individuals. The fact that Zacharias was godly, and his wife was doing the right thing once again was a strange thing. Do you ever get the feeling sometimes, I mean, you run into somebody every so often that really loves the Lord; how strange that is? Because you read in Matthew 7 that the gate is wide for destruction, but the gate is small, and the road is small

that leads to eternal life. Actually, Scripture says, “few there are.”

An interesting question that kind of was posed to me is, why would there be so few? I mean, it's good news. Why wouldn't everybody want good news, and why wouldn't everybody be recipients of good news? And who are the recipients of the good news? And as Luke will show us, it's probably the most unlikely people that you would ever perceive to be the recipients of good news. Because you would think that the dignitaries, the ones that are the privileged would be the ones that are the recipients, and yet what we're going to see in the Gospel of Luke, it's all these in obscure places and people that seem to be insignificant and seem to be really out of the norm, and clearly Zacharias and Elizabeth were out of the norm, but God says, “But I see you.” And there are times that those of us who seem like outsiders, Hebrews 13 says we are outsiders; so, we feel like outsiders, and we feel like we're the ones that are never going to see anything great. The very the ones that we see in the Gospel of Luke are the ones that God sees. As he introduces the book, he talks

about this letter being to Theophilus which means a friend of God, and you begin to realize who are the friends of God.

I just want to interject this, since I'm giving you a little bit of history, it is to be noted that during the time of around 5 BC, right about the time that Zacharias is here in this announcement that they have a child and it's going to be John the Baptist, a new high priest came in and he was the first high priest that had come in that was actually from Jerusalem and actually cared for the Jewish people. He'll only be in there for a few years and then be taken out because he'll actually be accused of being an instigator of taking down the Roman eagle from the temple. So, God has given this interesting reprieve for this particular time, and this good news is beginning to stir. Elizabeth hears this and she goes, "How is this going to happen?" And it does. Five months later, she begins to reveal, and then Mary has the same angel, Gabriel come to her, and he goes, "And you're going to have a Christ child." Of course, in the same way, Mary goes, "How can this be? I'm a virgin." So, God begins to work in people's

lives, and just think about Mary; here she is, a young girl, who has kept herself pure, but she's living in Nazareth, which according to what we understand, though it's in Israel, it's largely a gentile city, which means that the influx of this particular town is basically known not for their righteousness, even beyond the fact that the Jews were not living righteously, but even more so; to be a virgin in that particular setting would be an amazing feat. Nevertheless, God sees her and the angel appears to her, and he says, "And you're chosen for this." Now, a half year later, John will be born, and then in 3 months, Christ. You begin to realize the great movement that's happening within the passage.

As you look in Luke 1, if you drop on down with me, it says,

(Luke 1:34) "Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be...'"

Then you almost feel the same energy in Luke 1:43, as Elizabeth hears this wonderful message, and as her relative comes to her, that is Mary, and says, "This is what's going to happen." And she goes, "Wow, you mean,

I'm actually meeting the mother of the Savior?" And she states,

(Luke 1:43) "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?"

I mean, everybody's in wonderment at this juncture.

"How could it happen to me?" And what you realize is that nobody's expecting good to happen to them in the passage.

There is something I want you to note in verse 39,

"Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah,

(Luke 1:40) and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

(Luke 1:41) When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

"How wonderful this is. I mean, you're blessed of all women."

There's an interesting note here that I want you to look at in verse 39, and that is where Elizabeth and Zacharias are living. You might want to note it.

(Luke 1:39) “Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah.”

It's actually called by the Jews *“Har Judah”* which means literally the “hills of Judah.” Now, why is that significant? Well, it's significant for a number of reasons, but if you just continue to go with me in Luke 1, you'll also see it coming out within the passage in which John was born, and people are coming. Mary has gone at basically Elizabeth's 6 month; she will stay with her for three months until the child is born.

(Luke 1:56) “And Mary stayed with her about three months...”

If you back up into verse 24,

“After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying,

(Luke 1:25) “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.”

(Luke 1:26) Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth.”

And he gave the announcement to Mary at that time. Then Mary is in Nazareth. So, basically, 65 miles as the crow flies. She heads down south, and she heads to the region in which Elizabeth and Zacharias live. It is in the hill country of Judah. Once again, just hang on to that thought.

So, if you pick up with me in verse 56,

“And Mary stayed with her about three months...”

Which is telling us that she stayed the full term, and the child was born, and now it's a great time of celebration.

The passage reads,

(Luke 1:57) “Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.”

Of course, the son is John the Baptist.

(Luke 1:58) “Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.”

One of the great things about being an underdog, if I can put it that way, suffering loss in your life is that when good things do happen, everybody just begins to rejoice with you. I mean, even when you're watching a particular program on TV, you know somebody, you see bad, bad, bad, bad, bad happen, but then when something good happens, everybody's just cheering for them. Strangely enough, it's one of the ways that God unites the body together. We begin to rejoice. So, there was a lot of rejoicing going on. Her relatives had heard and let me just emphasize this, her relatives are really around that particular region, i.e. the hills of Judah.

So, it goes on, it reads,

(Luke 1:59) “And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child...”

Which was actually a setting which there was a clear declaration, and relatives would come in for this

particular event and they would actually give the child his name at this particular juncture.

The circumcision, once again, especially when you consider Deuteronomy 10:16 refers to a circumcision of the heart, and it's an interesting picture of getting rid of flesh so that now a life can be productive. And I think one of the things that Scripture tells us continually is if you just get rid of your flesh then you can live a productive life and you can actually do good, but you're going to have to walk by the Spirit in order for that to happen. So, it's an interesting picture. And there's a reason why it's on the 8th day, because the 8th day is a picture of resurrection. So, all these things, of course, seven days, the sabbath and then the first day of the week would be Resurrection Day. So, the 8th would convey that wonderful truth.

So, it came about that at the same day that they were coming together, and the relatives are all there and they're going to name the kid. Of course, dad can't talk right now because the angel had shut his mouth. So, everybody's kind of rooting for him and they say, "Let's just name the kid," which would probably be an

encouragement to the dad, “Zacharias,” which would be a good name because it actually means “to be remembered by God,” and that's a good thing. So, it seems to be a good name, but that's not what Gabriel said. He said, “You're going to have a son. His name is going to be John” if you remember at the very beginning. So, when Gabriel had established this, of course, Elizabeth realized, “Ok. This is the way it's going to be.” Zacharias realized this is the way it's going to be, but the people are still kind of working the angle of, “We're going to make the dad happy.”

So, the passage reads,

(Luke 1:59) “And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.”

(Luke 1:60) But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.””

Now, John, the particular name that is used, “*iōannēs*,” from the Old Testament, is a wonderful picture of the grace of God. So, it literally means “God graciously gives,” and that's probably a better picture than even “God

remembers,” isn't it? Because what he's going to begin to announce is, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” He's going to be proclaiming that wonderful message. So, more appropriate, clearly, and God is really defining what's about to happen. Now once again, I just want to emphasize that most of these people, I mean, they've been living in a realm in a world that good has not been happening. So, how do you take this? I mean, something's happening here, they can identify, but what exactly is going on? Then, when the mother comes back and says, “Nope, it's going to be John.” They said to her, “Wait a minute. There's no one among your relatives that has that name.” That's true family, isn't it? So, they thought, “Well, let's check with the dad just to make sure.”

(Luke 1:62) “And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.”

(Luke 1:63) And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished.”

Probably one of the reasons why they're astonished is not only the fact that he emphasizes this as well, but it seems as if the text is referring to the fact that he had not been around and just came in and that he was in agreement with what had been said. It was like, to them, this is like an omen; this is like something, something's happening, and they're going to continue to feel this way.

(Luke 1:64) “And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed...”

Of course, he hasn't been talking for nine months. He starts talking because he wrote that and now, they go, “Ok. God is involved in this.” You just see all the relatives going, “God's involved in this.” Now, I want you to realize that it's this same region or where they live that all this is taking place.

(Luke 1:64) “And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.

(Luke 1:65) Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.”

“Har Judah” - hill of Judah. All the hill country of Judah.

What is the hill country of Judah? What is the city that's in the hill country of Judah, always defined as the town in the hill country of Judah?

Well, according to Matthew 2:1-2 it is the town of Bethlehem. There's a very interesting point because what you have is Mary coming down from Nazareth. Of course, she'll be coming down after she leaves in these first three months that she's with Elizabeth and the child is born; she'll go back to Nazareth. Within about six months, she'll head back another 65 miles to come back to Bethlehem. What's always been very interesting to me is, why could she not find a place to stay? We know that the time that she comes down is probably extremely crowded, which means there's some kind of feast or something going on around this particular time. If in fact it is winter, it would be the feast of lights. It could possibly be that there was no room, but what relative and as close as she is to Elizabeth in the sense that she was there when the proclamation was made and both Elizabeth shared, “The angel came and visited me, and I'm going to have a baby

whose name is John.” And she goes, “I'm going to have the Savior that he's going to announce for.” You can tell everybody's excited about this and the fact that she would be there not only at the birth, but she would be there clearly at the time of the circumcision of the celebration and all the relatives are there and they're all celebrating, which means that most of the relatives are in the hill country, which is in the region of Bethlehem. So, strangely enough, six months later, she comes down and there's no room for her. Now, I can tell you this that if you have a relative and one's coming down, they're nine months pregnant, and they go, “I don't have a place to stay,” I think almost any relative would open up their house. So, what Scripture is conveying to us in some way is that something happened. Now, I'm not going to go into all the details of that, but I'm just going to throw that out because as we go on, we're going to see that all this is about anticipation and God is working in the lives of people that you would never think that He would work in. As it goes on within the passage,

(Luke 1:67) “... Zacharias is filled with the Holy Spirit...”

If you look in verse 66, it reads this way,

“All who heard” about these miraculous things; once again, who are we talking about? Well, if you back up, (Luke 1:58) “Her neighbors and her relatives...”

All these people that are here together.

As it goes on, the word is spreading. Her relatives are talking about all these things that are going on and the neighbors are talking about these things. I mean, somebody is unable to speak. Somebody is saying that angels are visiting. I mean, this word is getting out.

So, it goes on and says,

(Luke 1:66) “All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be?” ...”

“Who is this John the Baptist? What's he going to do?”

Once again, if you look in Luke 3:15,

“Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ.”

So, there was no doubt there was a stirring, and in the stirrings, everybody's going, "In Bethlehem? How could that happen?" Now, obviously we know that there are probably some scholars around there going, "Well, it says Bethlehem in Micah 5, but Bethlehem is so small and seemingly insignificant, and the hill countries are just full of shepherds. They're not really full of great dignitaries." Nevertheless, the people were wondering,

(Luke 1:66) "... "What then will this child turn out to be?"
For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him."

Zacharias just starts bursting out, and goes, "I can tell you this salvation has come. Something miraculous has happened."

(Luke 1:68) "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for
His people,

(Luke 1:69) And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of David His servant—"

"All the things that were promised, whether it was the promise to David or was the promise of His holy prophets

of old, even all the way back to Eve, our salvation from our enemies, the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans. Now, it looks like we're going to be saved.” Could you just imagine the energy that's going on?

(Luke 1:72) “To show mercy toward our fathers,
And to remember His holy covenant.”

What’s interesting is that the term “mercy” is used so much within the text. If you back up, why is it that this old woman, Elizabeth, is able to have a child? God showed His mercy upon her.

(Luke 1:58) “Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her...”

Now, she even states it when she hears this wonderful announcement, and as Zacharias begins to realize God has been merciful. Now, why would Zacharias begin to understand that? Because Zacharias had to suffer loss of his vocal cords and a rebuke by Gabriel in order to come to a humbling; though he were, I would say a good man, he was not a humble man. I've known a lot of those too, and a little bit condescending and critical. So, here you

have this individual, but God humbles him. He knows how to humble us, and after He finally loses his tongue, what does he come up with? God's merciful, and it's exactly the message that God wanted him to proclaim. You're going to see as well that emphasis just weaves through almost every text in the Book of Luke to remind us that it's those that have humbled themselves. I mean, David realizes that God does not despise the contrite in heart, but you have to be humble and in order to be saved, you have to come to a humbling. God is opposed to the proud, He gives grace and His favor to the humble.

So, "How do you get the good?" I guess, is really what it's about. How do you get the good? Because really, as you go through the Gospel of Luke, the people that get the good as we've been talking about are really the most unlikely individuals in our minds that we would perceive to get it. I mean, really, this young girl that lives in Nazareth, in this area of the Gentiles, she's going to be called to have the Savior? These old people are going to have a child and he's going to be the announcer? Simeon, this old man is going to be able to see the Christ child.

Hannah, who has lived a life that seemed to be of disappointment, though faithful, is going to see this wonderful thing. In the Gospel of Luke, we're going to run into people like Zacchaeus, who is this tax collector. He's the greatest of tax collectors and most unlikely that you would think Jesus would want to come to his house. Nevertheless, because of his desire for forgiveness and because he humbles himself, Christ comes to his house with good news. He says, "Salvation has come to your house today."

A woman will come in Luke 7 that has been a woman of the streets. She will come in and she will begin to with her tears, anoint the feet of Jesus in a Pharisee's house. A Pharisee will, with disdain, perceive that Christ doesn't even understand. He's supposed to be a prophet, and He doesn't understand where this woman came from, and Christ goes, "I know where she came from, and that's why I'm favorable upon her, because this woman has humbled herself. It's her affliction in her life that has caused Me to be merciful to her." You see, one of the things that you're going to see throughout this particular gospel is that it's

the difficulties that humbles us, and it's the humbling that brings God's good. Those things that we oftentimes try to dodge and hope that it doesn't happen to us are the very things that really are the doors to God's goodness. Great things begin to happen in the realm of our afflictions, not in the realm of our successes.

So, he begins to proclaim:

(Luke 1:71) “Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES,
And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;

(Luke 1:72) To show mercy toward our fathers,
And to remember His holy covenant,

(Luke 1:73) The oath which He swore to Abraham our
father,

(Luke 1:74) To grant us that we, being rescued from the
hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,

(Luke 1:75) In holiness...”

By the way, why is good coming to us? Why does God give us good? Why does God give good to the ones that He gives good to?

Well, the way it reads here is,

(Luke 1:74) “To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,

Might serve Him without fear.”

You actually have good given to you for a good reason.

(Luke 1:75) “In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.”

The way it reads, if you look with me in Titus is, “Yeah, you've been called.”

1 Corinthians 1 would say the people that are called have oftentimes seemed to be the foolish and the ignorant and the people that aren't grand and glorious.

But Titus Chapter 2 says you've actually been called for reason.

(Titus 2:11) “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

(Titus 2:12) instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

(Titus 2:13) looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

(Titus 2:14) who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”

Peter will say almost the same thing in 1 Peter 2.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”

Why is God showing good to certain people? Because they're going to be agents of good. They're going to be followers of good. They're going to do that which is good, and you realize that the only way that that can happen is where there's a humbling. What's interesting to me is not everyone humbled in the same way. I mean, you would think that in some cases, maybe you could just go across the board and have everybody have leprosy or something like that, and if everybody has leprosy, then everybody's humbled. Not necessarily, and you realize that different

things in different people's lives humbles that person because of the different personalities that there are. In some cases, I've seen just the kindness of God.

The miraculous thing in Luke 5, and when I'm giving you these examples, only the Gospel Luke records these, but in Luke 5, when Christ finally tells Peter as it's at the end of the day, they're mending their nets, He goes, "Put it back out there again" and Peter goes, "I know you're not an expert of fishermen. I mean, your dad may be a carpenter, but I'm the fisherman." And yet he goes, "But I'm going to go out." So, he goes out, and when he does, there's an abundance of fish. Well, that's a miracle, but let me tell you what the miracle did in Peter's life. It put him on his face. Now, if you were to ask me what would put Peter on his face and say, "I'm undone, I'm not worthy of you." I wouldn't necessarily have pictured it, but in his life, that's what it takes.

What's going to humble Zacchaeus? Christ saying, "I'm going to come to your house." You're going, "Why would that humble him?" Because here's a Rabbi who's supposed to hate tax collectors working for the Roman

government, and He's wanting to stay with him.

Zacchaeus goes, "This has got to be a love that I've been looking for. I've been ostracized by my own people so many years and now I have it." And it literally humbles him to the point where he wants to give; only recorded in the Gospel of Luke. But God is demonstrating that good is coming, and I know a lot of times we're sitting around going, "Yeah, where is it?" And God goes, "It's coming to the humble."

The way it goes on and reads in this particular passage,
(Luke 1:76) "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;

(Luke 1:77) To give to His people the knowledge of salvation

By the forgiveness of their sins,

(Luke 1:78) Because of the tender mercy of our God..."

which is actually a quote from the Book of Malachi.

"...With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

(Luke 1:79) TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

How can that be? Well, it seemed like in order for God to show mercy to you, you would have to be in a state of affliction in some way. It's not always dealing with money. I mean, sometimes it's the physical right. God is, in many ways, speaking to us through these difficulties. Once again, man has a tendency to resist as we were talking about this morning, but there's a great passage in the Book of Proverbs.

If you look with me in Proverbs 3. In this particular Proverbs, it basically says that it would be unlawful to withhold good. It's kind of one of those verses you would like to quote to God, “It's not right to withhold good.”

And the way it reads here, if you look within the passage,

(Proverbs 3:27) “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.”

And certainly, obviously with God, it's always in His power to do good. What the passage is telling us is that God will not, because He's righteous, withhold good to those who it is due.

Now, the way that Psalm 84:11 reads is,

“... No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

Another passage reads this way,

(Psalm 73:1) “Surely God is good...To those who are pure in heart!”

But in some respects, the answer is actually in this particular passage. Because the fact of the matter is I know I can't be perfect. I've discovered this in the last few years. I know I can't be perfect but the wonderful hope in this text is this,

(Proverbs 3:34) “Though He scoffs at the scoffers...”

So, it's not going to do you any good to be braggadocious and condescending towards other people. Yeah, it's not going to get the grace of God; it's not going to get the goodness of God but watch what the phrase reads,

“... Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.”

You know it's going to pan out all through the Gospel of Luke, and at the most unlikely times and the most unlikely places, those that are going through an affliction are going to have a bright light shine on them. I think one of the great advantages of affliction is, it's when things are darkest that you see an unmistakable light. It's like going to the city lights and looking for the stars, but when you're in that pitch darkness and you're all alone and a bright light comes, it's unmistakable. It's Him. These are the ones that God gives grace to.

In this passage that we're reading, John was called to be a gift, and if you've ever read there in Ephesians 4, we know according to 1 Corinthians 12, that God gives spiritual gifts to people, but in Ephesians 4 it refers to that God gives gifts. More specifically, the way it directly reads is that God gives men as gifts to the church and he talks about pastors, teachers, evangelists. prophets. Well, what is he saying? He's saying that He literally raises up specific men to gift people around them; so that those that are searching, God will raise up men for you if you're

genuinely searching and you're going through affliction, to tell you exactly what you need to do. It's an interesting picture that you realize that John is a gift that is to proclaim this wonderful message, and God is raising him up for that very purpose, and it will be the humble that will be gathered together around this one. You look at these people that are gathered together, and I've often thought (we're going to get into Chapter 2 next week), "But why are the angels proclaiming on those hills with those shepherds at night?" And I would have to say, those are probably relatives and neighbors of Zacharias and Elizabeth, and as they're keeping watch over the flock by night. The hills, pardon me for quoting this, are alive with "the sound of music." It literally is the angels that are that are singing. Where are they singing? On "*har Judah*," the hills of Judah.

This particular chapter ends in a very strange way. It ends in a way in which it still refers to John as "child." See that last verse in the chapter? It refers to him as "child" and it says he lived in the wilderness. Do you see that? I don't know exactly what happened, but something happened in

six month's time. John was born. Well, within six months, their influence in that area was gone. They were gone, and John was in the wilderness. Many perceive that he was raised by the Essenes as they would be a part of a priestly lineage of sorts, far stricter than any of those. In fact, they were so strict that they felt like Esther had done wrong by marrying a Gentile king. So, they were hesitant about even retaining that book in their literature. Let me just say this, as Scripture says that John goes into the wilderness, the Qumran area is just 25 miles from Bethlehem. It's mountainous and to get there it'd be hard, but we believe that he probably grew up in that particular region and the wonderful thing is in just recent years, we have what is called the Dead Sea Scrolls that came from their library in the Qumran in this particular area. So, wonderful things have happened, and wonderful things are going to happen, but the question is, to whom will it happen? Scripture will say over and over again to those of you who are afflicted, to those of you that you are needy, to those of you who are broken and contrite in spirit, if you'll humble yourself under the mighty of hand of God, the things that you have happening to you that have

brought you into a humble position is God preparing you for good. I know we don't think that way, but you will literally see this pattern happen over and over and over again. So, we as believers, have the greatest of hope when we see the most difficulties of circumstances because we know that this is God's way of preparing for good.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your wonderful word and the encouragement that we receive from it. Lord, there are times in our life that we feel like, “Wow, it's been 3800 years, 4000 years. It's been too long. We're too old. We're too young. Things are too hard. It's impossible.” And this is where You begin to work. When all of our ability seems to wane and even our ability to speak seems to be lost, this is where You announce good, and we begin to realize that it's for the purpose of giving You all the glory. In no way taking any of that and saying, “That was me that made that happen,” because that would just be a lie. You're causing us to recognize just how good You are

and in the day of darkness, it is just accentuated; the praise is even grander. We begin to realize that You're gathering together your friends. And You're gathering together Your friends so that they might proclaim words of praise on the hills of Judah. Lord, thank you for preparing our hearts.

Now, with your heads bowed and your eyes closed, perhaps difficult times have come into your life and your thought is, "How could anything good come out of this?" Be encouraged. This is where good is born. Give God thanks. Begin to think in terms of anticipation rather than dread. God will do good. He has a track record.