

JESUS, THE RISING SUN (The Song of Zechariah)

Luke 1:57-80

Key Verse: 1:78,79

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

Today's passage is about Zechariah's song. Most old people sigh habitually with an old man's fatalism. But Zechariah, though he was old, sings a song of praise like a young man. As the angel had said, John was born; and now he was eight days old. It was the day of his son's circumcision. So Zechariah had to sing a song of praise to God for giving him a son in his old age. To our surprise, his song was mainly about Jesus the Messiah. His song of praise teaches us about the tender mercy of God and several things about who Jesus really is.

First, Zechariah named his son John, not Zechariah Jr. (57-66)

As we studied, Zechariah had a childless problem which made him very fatalistic. Nevertheless, he kept the life of faith to the end in that unbelieving generation. Then God blessed his family. Elizabeth gave birth to a son, as the angel had said (57). Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy (58). The Bible says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Ro 12:15). It is beautiful to see that Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives shared her joy, rejoicing. May God restore the joy of community in this beautiful land, as was in the past.

According to Jewish custom, on the eighth day, they came to circumcise the baby. Circumcision was a ceremony held to consecrate and dedicate a boy's life to God. During the ceremony, they also named the baby before God. Their relatives were sure to name the baby after his father Zechariah: "Zechariah Jr., the blessed one" (59). But his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John" (60). They wondered and said, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name" (61). Then, they turned to Zechariah to ask his opinion on this. Since Zechariah was made dumb because he had not believed the angel's words (20), they spoke to him in sign language in order to figure out his opinion (62). Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John" (63). Their neighbors were surprised by the old couple. It was not easy for the couple to obey God's word through the angel. In order to obey God's instruction, Zechariah had to ignore Jewish traditions and had to become an object of criticism. At that time, Jewish traditions were the backbone of the Jewish people. Zechariah also had to overcome his human desire to call his son "Little Zack." How could Zechariah and Elizabeth obey the angel's instructions in such detail? It was because God's words were in their hearts. Believing seems to be an easy thing to do; so, many people say, "I believe in God," not knowing that believing definitely involves obedience. We must know that faith and obedience are one body.

When Zechariah had dedicated his son to God, his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God (64). The neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things (65). They were surprised that an old woman who had been barren bore a son and was feeding him at her own breast, and that Zechariah, who had become dumb for the last nine months, now, suddenly, was singing a song of praise. They were even more surprised to see that the child was not an ordinary one. So they asked, "What then is this child going to be?" Luke comments: "For the Lord's hand was with him" (66). When two old people kept the life of faith and obeyed God's word in detail, God's mighty hand was with their family.

Second, Zechariah's song (67-80)

Zechariah's song was not about his son John. In verses 67-79, Zechariah praises God who sent his one and only Son as he had promised. In his song of praise, Zechariah praises God's faithfulness in keeping his promises, and he introduces Jesus in several ways.

Firstly, "he has come and has redeemed his people" (67,68). Look at verses 67,68. "His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 'Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.'" For the past 300 years, the people of Israel had not heard any word of God through the prophets. They could not believe any more what God had promised. In addition, their situation in that time was hard to bear. They were groaning under the oppression of the Roman yoke. People despaired without any hope. But

Zechariah had faith in the coming of the Messiah, as God had promised. Now, the promised Messiah was about to be born--the one whom Zechariah and devout men had wearily looked for. Zechariah was captured by surprise and rapture at last, when he realized that God's promises concerning the Messiah were about to be fulfilled. Zechariah began to praise God, moved by the great faithfulness of God in keeping his promises.

Look at verse 68. "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people." The verb "has come" literally means "has visited." God chose the people of Israel to be his own people out of all peoples. God also gave them a mission to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6a). Yet, his people did not thank God for all the privileges he had given them. Instead they disobeyed his words. Finally, they abandoned God. So God did not have to visit these rebellious people. But in his great mercy, God visited them first. No one wants to apologize first. But God visited his people first. We call this "God's initiative." In order to visit his people, Almighty God humbled himself, lowering himself to the position of a servant. In order to visit his people, Almighty God came to this world as a helpless baby in a manger.

Secondly, Jesus is the horn of salvation (69-73). Let's read verse 69. "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." In the Bible, there are two kinds of horns: one is the horn of salvation, and the other, the horn of Satan. The horn of salvation is the emblem of the glory and power of God Almighty (Dt 33:17; Ps 148:14; 1Sa 2:1,10; 2Sa 22:3; Rev 5:6). The horn of Satan is the power of sin and death (Da 7:21; Rev 12:3; 13:1). Jesus came to this world as the horn of salvation to destroy the horn of Satan.

What the people of Israel needed was salvation from their enemies. They had suffered as a slave people for 400 years under the yoke of Egypt, where only ungodly people lived. The ungodly people were the bitter enemies of the people of Israel. After the Exodus, they lived in the promised land flowing with milk and honey. But they were under the constant threats and fear of their enemies in the promised land. God gave them David as their shepherd and king. David destroyed all their enemies. While King David ruled, his people enjoyed love and peace. But it ended too soon. In the past, the enemies of Israel were neighboring countries who had harassed them. But the real enemy of Israel was not the neighboring countries, but Satan in their hearts. The cleverness of Satan is most deceptive, for he has seven heads while man has only one head (Rev 17:3). The power of Satan is also most destructive, for he has ten horns while man has no horn at all. Many people think they suffer because of their future security problem. But actually people suffer because of Satan's pranks. This applies to all mankind.

The horn of Satan has been the most fearsome one to mankind; when it impales a man, it leaves him in a critical condition throughout his lifetime. There was a movie entitled "Matador." The angry bull saw a very popular matador. Then the bull pawed the ground several times with his hoof to be ready to charge. He rushed out of the pen toward the matador and impaled the man before he was ready. The matador was wounded fatally. Likewise, whoever is impaled by the horn of Satan becomes a living dead. Satan misses no chance. One young girl wanted to experience a boy just one time and forget about it. As soon as she finished enjoying the boy, she tried to forget the boy as if nothing had happened. But the horn of Satan impaled her through her guilty conscience. Since then she has been a mentally crippled woman. The horn of Satan is the power of sin. Those who are impaled by the horn of Satan become fatally wounded. One young man studied hard and read many classics in order to know the good side of humanity. In fact, he did everything to please his parents. But one day, he heard that his father had run away from home. He became blank. Next, his heart was broken. Then the horn of Satan impaled him and he became useless from that time on. He became a vegetable man.

We must know that Satan is very deceptive. Satan does not always appear to us as a horrible figure, as T.V. often depicts. For example, Satan came to Eve in the form of a colorful and silky serpent (Ge 3:1). Satan made use of Eve's aesthetic sense and induced her to take the forbidden fruit. As a result, she disobeyed God's word. She also caused her husband to disobey the holy command of God. Eve did not see the horn of Satan behind his make-up. In Romans 1:29-31, we can see many kinds of ugly people: the wicked, the evil, murderers, inventors of evil-doing, and senseless, heartless, ruthless people. These are pictures of people impaled by the horn of Satan. But praise God, for he has raised up a horn of salvation to crush the horn of Satan. Praise God that he rescues us from the horn of Satan.

Thirdly, God enables us through his Son to serve God without fear all our days (74-75). There is a clear reason why God saves us from the horn of Satan. Look at verses 74,75. "...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." God saves us from the horn of Satan so that we might serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days. Everyone has a

deep desire to be holy, as God is holy (1Pe 1:16). When we do something for the holy God, we are happy indeed. On the other hand, those who do evil, intentionally or unintentionally, experience unutterable misery and tragedies in their souls. These days many people say, "Have fun." This is Satan's appeal to our sinful nature. Man is happy when he participates in the divine nature (2Pe 1:3,4), because God made us so. God made us to be happy when we serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness.

Fourthly, Jesus is the giver of the knowledge of salvation (76,77). Look at verse 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..." Zechariah's son would be used as the forerunner of the Messiah. In ancient times, a forerunner went before a king, shouting, "The king is coming! Bow down!" Zechariah knew that his son's life would not be easy like that of a king's forerunner. However, he was happy that his son would be called "a prophet of the Most High."

After making a brief mention of his son, Zechariah keeps on praising Jesus. Look at verse 77. "...to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins..." Man cannot be happy without the true knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. For example, a physically sick person is not happy. A mentally sick person is also not happy, because he thinks of everything eccentrically. A spiritually sick person is very unhappy because he is very sick with sin. Physically sick people can be healed by medicine. But spiritually sick people are incurable because there are no medicines for those who are sick with sin. In history, no one has ever mentioned the knowledge of salvation for man's sin. Uniquely, Jesus gives us the true knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

Fifthly, Jesus is the rising sun (78,79a). Look at verses 78, 79a. "...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death..." Until Jesus came, men were sitting in the darkness of sin. But Jesus came to this dark world as the rising sun. John 8:12b says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." One young girl was pretty, but her father once said, "You are not pretty like your older sister. You look ugly." From that time on, she began to doubt her father's love for her. Soon, she said to herself, "I am an ugly duckling to my father." She sorrowed day and night for nearly 20 years before meeting Jesus. But through John's Gospel study, heavenly sunlight began to shine in her heart. She began to see herself as a beautiful woman. After marriage she could believe that her husband is the best man in the whole world, even though no one else says so. Jesus, the rising sun, drives out the shadow of death from our hearts. Jesus, the rising sun, heals us and helps us grow, just as the sunlight nourishes green plants. Jesus also enlightens us to see God and his glorious kingdom, for he is the rising sun.

These days many people take psychedelic drugs. Why? They want love and peace. But there is no love and peace for them, because they are badly wounded by the horn of Satan. There is no love and peace for them because they are under the shadow of death. But Jesus, the horn of salvation, rescues us from the hand of Satan. And Jesus, the rising sun, shines upon us to heal us and save us and make us smile. May God bless you when you have the rising sun, Jesus in your soul.