

GOD ENABLES HIS PROMISE – LUKE 1:68-75

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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 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— 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 fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Nine months of silence had preceded this joyous event. At least nine months of silence on the part of the father. But finally the longed for event arrived. A baby was born to Elisabeth, the wife of Zechariah in her old age. According to Hebrew custom, they waited eight days before they fulfilled the law of circumcision, a sign of the covenant which God had given to their great forefather Abraham. It was also at this time that the child would be named. Zechariah would perform the circumcision on his new-born son, a miraculous son that had been announced to him nine months earlier. A prayer was said before the circumcision, once again a tradition of the Jews, this prayer was coupled with passages of the Old Testament. The prayer would have gone something like this: Our God, and the God of our fathers, raise up this child to his father and mother, and let his name be called in Israel Zacharias, the son of Zacharias. Let his father rejoice in the issue of his loins, and his mother in the fruit of her womb.

Of all of this, Zachariah was a deaf and dumb witness. But he would have noticed a disturbance by his wife during the prayer when the name of the child was inserted. Instead of Zacharias, the name of his father, this child's name was to be John. The elders signaled to Zachariah, to see if this was indeed the aged fathers wish. Zachariah asked for something to write with, and he scratched out these words, “His name is John.” Immediately, Zachariah's tongue was loosened and now he burst into jubilant praise of the name of the Lord.

This is the lead in to the song of Zachariah that we have before us this morning for consideration. It is a man's jubilant response to the Lord's blessing upon not only him, but upon all of Israel, even upon all of the world. He gave witness and testimony to the promise of God being fulfilled. And really, isn't that what we do when we celebrate Christmas every year? We give witness to the promise of God being fulfilled. For we know that without God, nothing would be fulfilled. We see how God not only makes these promises, but that GOD ENABLES HIS PROMISE to be fulfilled.

1. He makes the dumb speak
2. He makes the deaf hear

(1)

We only have a small picture of what it would have been like for the Jews of Jesus' time who believed that the Messiah had come. Ever since the time of Abraham, God had promised to send a Savior from their race. It was a promise they narrowly interpreted as just a Savior for the Jews. It was a

promise that had been given to their forefather, great King David. In fact, that is what our first lesson was talking about this morning.

David had just finished his years long building project constructing his grand palace, and now wanted to build a house for the Lord. But God had different plans. Not only did God say that David wouldn't be the one to build God's house, God said that he would be the one to build David's house. There would be a ruler who would build not only David's house but God's house as well. While his son Solomon would fulfill this prophecy in part, God ultimately had in mind his own Son, who would be born of David's line, who would combine David's house and the Lord's house under one roof. This is the promise that God made to David.

But at the time of John and Jesus' birth, it certainly didn't look like God would keep his promise. While the some of the Jews had returned to the Promised Land, David's line was cut off, there was nothing special about it; no wealth was associated with it. It truly was as Isaiah foretold, **"the stump of Jesse."** And yet from that stump a shoot would spring forth. That shoot was the promise of God. And we see how GOD ENABLED HIS PROMISES to be fulfilled.

The first step in ENABLING HIS PROMISE was coming to the father of John the Baptist, Zachariah. There, the angel Gabriel announced that Zachariah's son would prepare the way for the coming Messiah. But Zachariah, didn't believe this message, and for his unbelief was struck dumb. He physically was not able to speak for the entire pregnancy of his wife. And over those long months he pondered the angel's words, he pondered God's promise to his people. And when the time came for the naming of the child, he verbalized God's promise. GOD ENABLED HIS PROMISE to be fulfilled through Zachariah. For without Zachariah's words, we would not have his beautiful song of prophecy.

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." No doubt Zachariah had the words of our first lesson in his mind when God told David he would establish a ruler on his throne. So sure is Zachariah of these words that he uses the past tense, as if it is already accomplished, even though the Messiah had not yet been born: **"He has come"** **"He has redeemed."** And to God it is as good as done.

GOD ENABLED HIS PROMISES to be fulfilled by allowing the dumb to speak. For nine long months Zachariah had to endure silence for his unbelief in God's promise. But now, look at the change of heart, look at the change in his speaking. Instead of doubt, he proclaims the wondrous words of God. And think about how amazing that is, think about the power that God has over his creation. Not only can he hold the tongue of someone who disbelieves, but he can loosen the tongues of those he has chosen. Recently in our Sunday morning Bible class we saw a perfect example of God loosening the tongue of a donkey to speak to get his message across.

And so the same God that has given us the tongue to speak, the same God who allows us to speak, has ENABLED US TO FULFILL HIS PROMISES. We who were dumb are able to speak. And yet, even to those who like to talk, I wonder if the words we speak are always the words of praise to the GOD WHO ENABLES HIS PROMISE to be fulfilled. Sometimes it almost would be better if our tongues were muted with the ways that we use them. Maybe they have not always been in the words of unbelief in a promise of God, but maybe just in a way that displeases him. Or maybe we make the excuse that we do not know the words to say.

Whatever the case may be, take heed to the old saying: God made us with two ears and one mouth, so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. So maybe before you open your mouth again without thinking, maybe before you complain about not knowing what to say. Listen with your ears to what God is speaking to you.

(2)

Because not only does GOD ENABLE HIS PROMISES to be fulfilled by allowing the dumb to speak, but by allowing the deaf to hear. Every indication we have from the story of Zachariah is that in addition to being mute, he could not hear either. This is indicated by the signs they had to give him. But just as his tongue was loosed with his faith, so also his ears were opened to hear. But it was not only his ears that were opened. It was the ears of all those listening to him as well. These were ears that could certainly hear words and noises, but they had not yet heard of God's promise fulfilled. GOD ENABLED HIS PROMISE to be fulfilled by allowing the deaf to hear.

Because we were all at one time deaf. Deaf to the word of God, unable to hear it, and thereby unable to respond to it. The Bible also uses other pictures to describe our state in sin. **"Dead in sin."** **"Blind to the light of God's truth."** And so it doesn't matter how loudly music is being played, a deaf person will not be able to hear it. It doesn't matter how much you try to wake a dead person up, they will not get up, it doesn't matter how bright a flashlight you shine in a blind person's eyes, they will not see it. And so it doesn't matter if a great theologian of the faith were up here preaching to you, the deaf cannot hear.

But GOD ENABLES HIS PROMISE to be fulfilled. HE ENABLES the deaf to hear. The apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 10: **"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."** Such a simple phrase, and yet what does this mean? It means that God does not come to us randomly with a vision of heaven and cause us to believe (that doesn't mean he cannot). It means that we don't all of a sudden decide to make a decision for Christ. It means that God works through his Word to create faith in a person's heart to believe. It means that God is the one who chose us to believe before we ever chose it for ourselves. God is the one who enables the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dead to become alive. We are merely the objects of his affection.

And yet we are so much more. Because he enables the deaf to hear, he also enables the mute to talk, to talk about his promise. It is a promise that does not take a doctorate in theology to speak. It's a promise that God loved us that he sent his Son to save us from ourselves so that we can live in heaven with him. It's the promise of Christmas fulfilled, and as we will see in the next few weeks, it is the promise of Christ for the world. In two days' time, on January 6, the church celebrates Epiphany (that, by the way, is twelve days after Christmas). Epiphany reveals much about Christ specifically that he was born for all people of all time. We remember the wise men who came from the East, we remember Paul's missionary journeys spreading the gospel to the gentiles.

Christmas is about a promise fulfilled – God's promise to send a Savior to the world. Our rejoicing echoes that of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. Because of that promise, he has enabled us to believe it. He has enabled us to share it with others. It is all so fitting, this story of Zachariah's song. The question of unbelief had struck the priest dumb, just as unbelief in general cannot speak coherently. The answer of faith restored to him speech, just as faith loosens our tongues to sing God's promise fulfilled. The faith that enabled Zachariah to speak is the faith that enables us to speak as well. It is faith that

comes from God alone. For God not only ENABLES HIS PROMISE to be fulfilled, but he enables us to believe that promise. A promise that we too as gentiles can rejoice in too. Amen.