Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Zachariah's Song of Salvation: The New Covenant, Part 3
Scripture: Luke 1:67-80
Code: 42-21

We are having a wonderful time these days, studying the gospel of Luke, the third book in the New Testament. I would invite you to open your Bible to the gospel of Luke. I don't make any apology for week after week, year after year opening the Word of God and teaching it to you because I really don't have anything to say that could even compare with what God had said. The whole mandate and calling of a preacher is to make God's Word known. And so Sunday after Sunday, month after month, year after year we look into the Word of God and we discover here such profound and immense treasures of truth that once we have begun to develop an appetite for the Word of God, frankly nothing else will satisfy us.

Luke chapter 1. Let me give you a little bit of background. Years ago a book was written entitled The Greatest Story Ever Told. And as you might guess, it was the story of Jesus Christ, which, in fact, is the greatest story ever told. This is the very story we are being told by Luke. Luke is a biographer of Jesus. There were four biographers of Jesus...Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of them writing about the life of Jesus from a perspective unique to each writer, covering the same story, the same truth. But when you put all four gospels together, you get this perfectly harmonious composite picture of the record of Jesus Christ. One of those four writers and a marvelous one at that is the writer Luke. By profession a physician, but by divine calling a diligent historian, a careful biographer, a thoughtful theologian and most of all a committed disciple of Jesus Christ.

He was commissioned by God Himself to write the story of Jesus Christ, the greatest story ever told. Actually Luke really took that seriously and he penned the longest of the four gospels. Though there are more chapters in the gospel of Matthew, there are more words in the book of Luke, and even having finished Luke, he wasn't finished with what he wanted to write so he just kept writing the story and wrote 28 more chapters that we call the book of Acts. Fifty-two chapters in the history written by Luke so I say he is a diligent historian. He starts before the birth of Jesus, goes through the conception of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the commission that Jesus gives to His apostles and then launches in to the story of the spread of the gospel and the establishment of the church in the world which is recorded in the gospel of Luke and then the book of Acts.

So, we're studying, really, a biography. But it's more than a biography, it's also a theology. Luke is a very thoughtful, very careful and somewhat systematic theologian. We're not very far into this book, we're only at the end of chapter 1. We're already being introduced to the profound depths with which

Luke understands theology. And in his most remarkable way as he unfolds the story in the form of a narrative, it is injected at precise points with rich theology.

Now as Luke begins to unfold the greatest story ever told, he starts with two great miracles...two miracles really in the same category, two conception miracles. In one case, an old barren couple, an old priest by the name of Zacharias, probably in his seventies, married to an old woman named Elizabeth in her seventies, not able to have children, barren all their lives, having a stigma for that barrenness, God miraculously allows them to conceive and have a son. That's the first conception miracle you're introduced in Luke's narrative. The second one is even more remarkable because this one is not to otherwise barren people being miraculously being able to conceive, but this is one in which a virgin who has never known a man conceives a child by the work of God who literally implants the child in her womb. That woman being Mary, the virgin, who is pregnant with the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, Jesus.

The whole great redemptive story of Jesus then is launched by Luke with two conception miracles. In both cases there is an appearance of the angel Gabriel and in redemptive history nobody had heard from an angel in five hundred years. There hadn't been a prophet in over 400 years. There hadn't been a miracle in 400 years and there hadn't been multiple miracles in longer than that. But Luke says at the time when the Messiah was coming into the world, angels appeared, a prophet is born, miracles happened. And there is a flurry of divine activity which, in a sense, is previews of coming attractions because when the Messiah comes there will be massive miracles wrought by Him and by His apostles, the likes of which the world had never seen before and has not seen since.

The remarkable unfolding of the greatest story ever told then is built around these two narratives of conception miracles and births. The first is the conception and birth of a man named John and John is the prophet, the first prophet in 400 years and the last Old Testament prophet and by the words of Jesus, "The greatest prophet up to that time who had ever lived." His responsibility was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the herald of the Messiah, the announcer who would point to and identify the Messiah and who would get the people ready for the Messiah's arrival by having them face their sins and repent and be prepared to receive their Savior. The second birth is the birth of the Messiah Himself, Jesus, who is planted, as it were, in the womb of Mary to be born as Savior and King, the Lord of salvation.

Now for this morning we come to the end of chapter 1. We have just read about the birth of John. The birth of Jesus occurs in chapter 2. We've already studied both conception miracles. We have gone through the announcement by the angel Gabriel in both cases. We have met the parents of John. We have met the parents of Jesus, Mary being His earthly physical mother, Joseph His sort of adoptive parent who wasn't involved in the birth but nonetheless was the father by adoption. We have gotten introduced to the families. We know the angelic involvement. We know the conception miracles that have occurred and John has now been born, as we noted earlier in the chapter.

At the birth of John the Baptist, a very common ceremony occurred eight days later and that was circumcision. That was a traditional Jewish occasion in which that surgery occurred which identified every male child with the nation Israel. And it was probably on that day of circumcision when everybody was gathered together, family, friends, the miraculous work of God occurred int he life of Zacharias, he had been unable to speak the whole time of his wife's pregnancy because of his unbelief, his tongue is loosed at the time of the circumcision of this child and out of his mouth, starting in verse 67, comes praise to God.

Now remember, Zacharias is a priest in Israel. He understands Jewish theology. He understands the Old Testament. So what comes out of his mouth is just rich with Old Testament understanding. It's just loaded with it. Verse 67 says his father, Zacharias, probably holding this little eight-day-old baby in his arms, his father Zacharias being filled with the Holy Spirit which several times in this first chapter of Luke is an indicator of someone is about to speak the Word of God, and that was the case with Zacharias. Filled with the Holy Spirit he prophesies and he gives us a message right from God, though certainly true to his own thoughts. He prophesies and he says this, "Realizing what's happening, 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."

And I just note here, Zacharias knows what's going on. He knows that the Messiah is already in the womb of Mary because Mary has just spent three months at his house visiting them. He knows the Messiah is to be born and that is the culmination of redemption. He knows the Messiah is the horn of salvation, horn meaning the authority, the power. He knows the Messiah is coming. This is not a song of praise for his son who is the forerunner of Messiah, although he does speak to the child in verses 76 and 77, calling him the prophet of the Most High who goes before the Lord to prepare His ways. He knows the role that his child is to play. But he knows more than that, that the birth of his son signals the arrival of Messiah who is only a few months behind, already forming in the womb of Mary. And so he is celebrating the blessedness of God who has brought redemption. He is celebrating that redemption and salvation has finally come, long awaited.

Any good and faithful priest would have his heart filled with the hope of redemption. A priest's, you see, job was to bring his people before God. That's what they did. They were the intermediaries between God and the people. They cared about God's will. They knew God's Word and they cared about God's people. And any true and righteous priest, and he was such, would have cared about the salvation of his brothers and sisters in Israel. He cared deeply. And when he heard this most incredible news, this most remarkable news that the Messiah was to be born, the forerunner already being held in his own arms, his own dear son was to be the prophet of the Most High who would make the people ready for the arrival of Messiah, he knew what was going on. This was the high point. This was the great pinnacle of redemptive history. The Redeemer was about to be born, the great Messiah, the King, the Savior of the world was soon to appear. Angels, messages from God,

miracles and the Messiah, he understood that, but he understood it in an Old Testament way. He understood it with an Old Testament perspective.

And let me talk about that for just a moment by way of review. You cannot understand the flow of redemptive history, you cannot really get the clear picture of the relation of the Old Testament to the New unless you understand the significance of the term "covenant...covenant." God made certain covenants with Israel, pledged or promised in the Old Testament to be fulfilled later on by what is accomplished in the New Testament. It's sad to say there has been tremendous amount of misunderstanding about the covenants. There's an awful lot of, I think, needless dialogue about what the covenants are, what the covenants mean, how we are to understand the covenants, what their nature is, whether they've been revoked, or whether they're permanent, how they're going to be fulfilled, are they literally to be fulfilled or are they figuratively to be fulfilled, what are the actual covenants and so forth and so on.

I don't really think it's that difficult. It is a very critical issue in understanding redemptive history to understand the covenants. Frankly, that's why I've slowed down a bit, I've slowed down a lot, frankly, at this particular point because I have to deal with this. If for one reason, it's critical for you to understand it, for another reason, it's critical for me to teach you what I believe is in this passage by way of the rich intention of the Spirit of God to inform us. Furthermore, we are getting ready, myself, Dick Mayhue and Phil Johnson, to write a 1500-page, one volume systematic theology that is largely dependent on an understanding of the covenants. And so it's critical to cultivate my own thinking in this area as well. And I confess to you that as I approach a passage, typically I'll read about 20 books on the passage that elucidate that passage to me, and after having done that I still was left with what I thought was sort of across the surface treatment of this text, and so I sort of set the books aside and started to dig into the text itself and that's when I began to discover or uncover the covenantal indications that load this entire document that comes out of the lips of Zacharias and was recorded for us by Luke. It is, of all things, a treatment of the significance of covenant fulfillment in the coming of Messiah.

And as I told you last time, as he sees the Messiah coming to bring redemption to Israel, first of all, as well as to the world, as he sees the arrival of the Savior that he calls the "horn of salvation," he sees this in fulfillment of three great Old Testament covenants. The first of those Old Testament covenants we call the Davidic Covenant. It was a covenant or a promise made by God to David. It first appears in 2 Samuel chapter 7, we've gone over that, we won't do it again. But he knows that. And notice verse 69. Zacharias says, "God has visited us with a saving visit, accomplishing redemption for His people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us," and immediately he connects it to the house of David, His servant, as he spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, which involves deliverance, or salvation from our enemies from the hand of all who hate us.

He knows immediately that the arrival of Messiah is the fulfillment or the potential fulfillment of the promise God made to David back in 2 Samuel chapter 7. God said to David, "I'm going to bring a Son out of your loins some time in the future and I'm going to give him a kingdom like no other kingdom has ever existed. I'm going to give Him a glorious kingdom, He is going to reign over Jerusalem. He is going to reign over Israel. And through that nation going to reign over the whole world." Indications of the Davidic Covenant also occur in other portions of the Old Testament. The Davidic Covenant then was the promise that a Messiah would come who would be King. He would establish the royal line of David again in Jerusalem. He would reign over Israel, that is to say they would be a sovereign nation with their own sovereign King, something they had not experienced really for a long, long time. They were either under Babylonian rule, they were under the rule of the Medo-Persian Empire, they were under the distasteful and heinous and idolatrous and pagan leadership and rule of Greece, and then and now as the New Testament was written, they were under the horrifying idolatrous, pagan, Roman occupation. They were forever and always besieged by their enemies and those who hated them.

But the promise to David was some day they would be free from all of that. Some day they would be a sovereign nation with their own sovereign King who would not only be sovereign over Israel, but who would rule the entire world with a rod of iron. The psalmist had referred to that as well in Psalm 2 and many other places. Well Zacharias realizes that the arrival of Messiah signals the fulfillment of this Davidic Covenant, that this redemption involves fulfillment of the promises to David.

There was, secondly, another great Old Testament covenant that God made with Abraham, even before the Davidic Covenant, He made a promise to Abraham. It's recorded in Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 18, Genesis 22, and repeated several other times. And that promise was that God would give to Abraham a great nation, a great land and immense blessing. Well the fact of the matter is, they didn't have their land at the time of the New Testament. Their land was occupied by the Romans. Their land had been literally whittled down to a small portion of the original promise given to Abraham. There was tremendous conflict. They were not experiencing blessing in that land. They were not experiencing righteousness and holiness in that land. But Zacharias knew that that was what God had promised to Abraham and so he says in verse 72 that the Messiah is coming, the redemption will be accomplished, the horn of salvation is coming because God is remembering His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham, our father, to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies because of the fulfillment of Davidic promise, would then be able to serve Him without fear, without fear of oppression, without fear of assault or attack from enemies and there would be holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. That was Abrahamic promise.

Well Zacharias knew these covenants. The Jews had lived in the light of their fulfillment. They had waited and waited for them to come to pass.

But there's another covenant here in this passage that is critical to everything. And while David is mentioned, and Abraham is mentioned, the name of this third covenant is not mentioned but it is the New Covenant and we know that because of its component parts. Starting in verse 77, after that brief address to the child John in verses...in verse 76, he comes in to verse 77 and introduces the New Covenant. And here is the nature of the New Covenant, "God has promised to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins." There's no issue of forgiveness in the Davidic Covenant, there's no mention of forgiveness in the Abrahamic Covenant, but it is the New Covenant in which God promises the forgiveness of sins in which verse 78 God expresses tender mercy. It is the New Covenant, verse 78, that brings the Sunrise from on high which shall visit us to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and it is the New Covenant that guides our feet into the way of peace.

Now when you read that...and when I read that, first of all, it didn't strike me that that was all New Covenant, but when I began to take those phrases that are used here, those references to forgiveness, tender mercy, the Sunrise on high shining in the place of darkness, the shadow of death and guiding our feet in the way of peace, when I went to the Old Testament to find the source for that, it was all New Covenant context. This is, in fact, the third great covenant, the New Covenant.

Now I remind you, there are three other covenants in the Old Testament. One made to Noah that God would never again destroy the world by water, that's the Noahic promise. One made that God would have a permanent priesthood by which people could have access to God, the Priestly Covenant. And then the Mosaic Covenant was the Law of God in which God stated His moral perfection and His holy and righteous standard. But none of those three, not the Noahic Covenant, nor the Priestly Covenant, nor the Mosaic Covenant, had a salvation feature. Those were not covenants associated with salvation, there's nothing in the promise to Noah that requires salvation. There's nothing in the Priestly promise requiring salvation. There's nothing in the Mosaic Law that can save at all because no man can be saved by the law. But the Davidic and the Abrahamic Covenant required salvation. In other words, they couldn't receive the King and His Kingdom, they couldn't receive the land and its blessing unless they were saved, so there had to be a saving covenant and that's the New Covenant.

I'll say it another way. When God made the promise to David of a coming King to establish the glorious throne of royalty in Jerusalem, bring Israel freedom from all its enemies, bring them sovereignty and autonomy and a Kingdom like no other kingdom that ever existed, a Kingdom that would literally spread itself across the whole world and that the Messiah would reign over with a rule of iron...with a rod of iron, a Kingdom that would never end, that would be eternal, that was an amazing and thrilling promise the Jews had long awaited its fulfillment. And when God promised Abraham a great nation, a great land, great prosperity, great blessing and the righteousness and holiness and all of that, that was a great and thrilling and amazing promise and they long waited for that. But they hadn't received either fulfillment and they still haven't received them today. Why?

There's a barrier, the barrier is disobedience. That's the barrier...disobedience. THey couldn't please God. They couldn't keep the Mosaic Covenant. They couldn't keep His law. They were disobedient. They were sinful so consequently the nation has been cursed.

Now mark this. There has always been a faithful remnant who saw their inability to keep the law, who came to God, confessed their inability to keep the law, recognized their sin, pleaded for mercy, pleaded for grace, asked for forgiveness and were forgiven. There's always been a penitent remnant even today. But as a nation, the nation continues to be in an unfulfilled condition. They have never yet received the fulfillment of Davidic and Abrahamic promise because as a nation they have never repented and believed. They're still cursed by their inability to keep the law. Throughout all, however, all of this history, there have been individuals...individuals who have believed God, seen their sin, cried out for mercy and who have been forgiven on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ, even though they lived before He died. That's why the Bible calls Him the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. God applied the virtue of His death, the substitution of His death for sinners, to sinners even before He died as well as sinners since His death. So there's always been a faithful remnant.

There is today. There are in this congregation many Jewish people who have seen their sinfulness, repented, come to God, asked for mercy and put their trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior. But as a nation, they have not repented and the barrier of disobedience is still there. They're trying to earn their right to Abrahamic and Davidic fulfillment rather than realize they can't earn it, fall on their face with a Beatitude attitude and cry out for forgiveness and grace provided through Jesus Christ.

You can take all the promises to Abraham, take all the promises to David, you can take all the threats that came through Moses, all the threats of cursing and terrible devastation to those who disobey, add up all the promises, add up all the threats, dump them on people and they can't change the heart. They can't change the heart. There's nothing in the Davidic Covenant that can save the sinner, there's nothing in the Abrahamic Covenant that can save the sinner, there's nothing in the Mosaic Covenant that can save the sinner, there has to be another covenant that can change the heart and that's why God gave a New Covenant cause all the threats and all the promises cannot break the power of sin. They cannot forgive sin. They cannot create a new heart. So in verse 77 we're introduced to the New Covenant.

And what is its nature? "To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins." Not a theoretical knowledge of salvation but an experience of salvation that comes by the forgiveness of sins. Now we read that New Covenant material in the Old Testament two weeks ago, Deuteronomy 29 and 30, particularly chapter 30 verse 6, it says, "The New Covenant...here's how the New Covenant works...you get a new heart...you get a new heart." We saw that it involves the forgiveness of all sin. We went to Jeremiah 31 verses 31 to 34, we went to Ezekiel 36 verses 25 to 27 and what did we find? The New Covenant is this, God promises a new heart, a new spirit. He

promises to write His law on your heart. He promises to forgive all your trespasses. He promises to plant His Holy Spirit in you. That's New Covenant promise. That's what the sinner needs. And Israel will never experience the promises to David, never experience the promises to Abraham being fulfilled until they come to the promise of God in the New Covenant, the promise of forgiveness and put their trust in God for forgiveness by virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in their place. And we as Gentiles, therefore, will not enjoy that same Kingdom, we'll be there receiving also the promises to David and Abraham, that's not going to happen to any of us until Israel comes to New Covenant faith.

Now the New Covenant is what John preached. Look at Luke 3...Luke chapter 3, this is just kind of a preview of what we're going to see in a little bit. But in Luke 3 we get the picture of what John preached. John didn't come preaching Davidic promise being fulfilled, that would come if they believed. He didn't come preaching Abrahamic Covenant fulfillment, this is what he said, he came into all the district, verse 3, Luke 3:3, "Came all around the Jordan where he had been, growing and maturing," as verse 80 of chapter 1 tells us, "and when he came into his ministry and started it, he stayed in the same district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

Listen, folks, he was a New Covenant preacher. He was not preaching the Mosaic Law, that can't save. He was not preaching Davidic promise and Abrahamic promise are going to come to pass no matter what, he was preaching the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. In fact, down in verse 8, some of the Jewish people were...they didn't like his message. And so, he says to them, "You better bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance and don't begin to say to yourselves..." he knew what they were saying, "We have Abraham for our father." That's not going to do you any good. You're not going to have any blessing promised to Abraham unless you come to repentance and the forgiveness of sin in the New Covenant. It's not going to happen. They were hanging on somehow to the fact that because they were Jews God was mandated to fulfill promises to David and Abraham no matter what. And John came saying the way to Davidic blessing, the way to Abrahamic fulfillment is through New Covenant forgiveness.

Now remember, the New Covenant was ratified by the death of Christ. The reason God can forgive sin is because Jesus paid its penalty. That's why Jesus took the cup that night Luke 22:20 and said, "This is the New Covenant in My blood." What makes the New Covenant possible, that is to say why God can fulfill the promise of forgiveness, is because Jesus has paid the price for sin. Jesus died for your sins, died for my sins, satisfying the justice of God. He paid the penalty. He took our sentence. He was executed for us. Therefore God can forgive those who come to Him penitently and ask for it. First Corinthians 11:25, Paul says when you take communion, realize the cup is the cup of the New Covenant.

So what is the New Covenant? It is a promise by God unilaterally made by God, irrevocably made by God, it is an eternal promise by God by which He will change sinners' hearts and forgive their sins.

He'll do it for anyone, some day for the whole nation Israel. Originally the promise was made to Israel. It was the New Covenant given to the nation Israel. But actually the New Covenant is personal. The Davidic Covenant is universal, it's the Kingdom all over the world. The Abrahamic Covenant is national, it's their land full of blessing. But the New Covenant is personal, it has to occur in an individual heart. Some day will happen, all Israel will be saved. Some day they will look on Him whom they've pierced, mourn for Him as an only Son, that's the Messiah, and a fountain of cleansing will be open to them and they'll be washed from their sins. That's what Zechariah promised. This is the New Covenant. The writer of Hebrews says it's a New Covenant, he says it's a better covenant than any other covenant because it's the only covenant that can forgive sin. It's the only covenant that can deal with disobedience. It's the only covenant that can change the heart. It's the only covenant that can make things right with God.

So what comes in the New Covenant? Grace, a new heart, a new spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sin, eternal fellowship with God, that's the New Covenant. And that's exactly...go back to chapter 1...that's exactly what Zacharias understood. He understood exactly what was going on, that this coming of the Messiah brings the fulfillment of the salvation that is actually experienced by the forgiveness of sins. This is a personal covenant.

It can't come by accumulation of merit. It can't come by works. It can't come by religious activity. It comes only by God's grace active in justifying the ungodly, as Paul said in Romans. Only when sinners repent of their sin, only when sinners recognize they have violated the law of God, only then when they come to God in penitence and ask Him for forgiveness and grace and mercy will their sins be forgiven. And only when they're forgiven will they then have a new heart, a new spirit, dwelling in...the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of all the blessings promised to Abraham and David then come to pass. That's available to any sinner today anytime. It's available to any sinner at any moment. And some day all Israel will embrace that. Romans 11 says, "Some day all Israel will be saved." But until that time, anyone can receive New Covenant salvation, the forgiveness of all their sins, a new heart, the law of God written in them, a new spirit, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, redemption, forgiveness and grace. What a blessing, nothing like it.

Why would God do this? Verse 78, Zacharias understood that what the Old Testament said about God was...and it said it very often...was the motive for everything because of the tender mercy of our God. It's because of God's mercy. That's all you can say. What is God's tender mercy? It's splanchna eleos, and I use those words because splanchna means something in your middle, sometimes translated bowels. It's something down deep inside of you. And eleos literally means merciful. It is the deep-down mercy of God. The reason offered a New Covenant, God could have just turned His back on impenitent wicked sinners and left them cursed, but He didn't because there's a deep seated desire for doing good, there's a deep seated feeling of mercy, there's a deep seated attitude of compassion that causes God to show favor to wicked sinners. It's a glorious attribute, by the way, and it's celebrated all throughout the Old Testament, most notably maybe in Exodus 33,

Moses says, "I want to see You, God, I want to see You, I want to know what You're like." And God says, "Okay, get over there in that rock and I'll let My glory pass by and you'll see My mercy." That's what God is like.

'He's a God who shows mercy to thousands. He is a God known as a pardoning God. The prophet said, "Who is a pardoning God like You?" He is motivated by mercy and loving-kindness. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Down deep in the nature of God, in the essential fabric of His being there is a compassion and a tender-heartedness and a goodness that He longs to extend to hopeless, helpless sinners in the midst of their miserable fallen rebellious condition. That's what's behind it. That's what's behind it.

And Zacharias knew about it. He understood it. He understood the mercy of God, the tender-mercy of God. The word "tender" is that splanchna, that deeply felt mercy of God. And that God because of that deeply felt mercy desired to forgive sins. But that's not all. He understood more than that. We saw last week in Jeremiah 31, we saw it in Ezekiel 36, those two passages that describe the New Covenant, we saw the issue of the forgiveness of sin laid out. That's part of the New Covenant. But I want you to look, this morning, at verse 78 and 79 because I want you to see the next statement and how critical that is to the New Covenant as well.

He adds another dimension, and again this isn't whimsical, this isn't off the cuff, this is right out of the richness of his grasp of New Covenant teaching in the Old Testament. He defines further the New Covenant as that which...in which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

Now what did he...why did he pick that metaphor? Well because that's explicitly Old Testament New Covenant language, and I'll show you that. Let's look at it. Verse 78, as he further describes this great fulfillment the Messiah will bring to the New Covenant, he describes it as the fulfillment as the Sunrise from on high visiting us. The word "sunrise," literally is "rising." It doesn't identify the body that rises, whether it's the sun or the morning star or the glow of dawn that precedes the sun as it's just below the horizon. He simply is talking about the rising...we could even say the first light, the dawning. He is saying the New Covenant is the dawning from on high. Now where is on high? Where's that? Where's on high? Heaven. Now in the morning the sun rises, of course, from the sky and so there's a clear metaphorical connection, but he's talking about there's going to come a great light from heaven, not the sun, not the morning star, not the glow of dawn that precedes the sun, not the first light of the day physically, there's coming from on high another Sun, a Sunrise who will shine on those who will sit in darkness and the shadow of death. That's right out of Isaiah chapter 9. He's referring to the first light of Sunrise that breaks the spiritual darkness of the world. He's speaking about the dawning of the heavenly Son, S-o-n, the Son of the Most High, the Savior who is the divine light who will break into the world's deep darkness and end the soul's night.

Now this old prophet...this old priest, one old verse he knew in the Old Testament was that verse in the last chapter of the last part of our Old Testament, the last prophet, Malachi, gave the last words and the last words of hope and promise that he gave were these, Malachi 4:2, you can see it, it's in the last little six-verse chapter of your Old Testament. And what did Malachi say? He said, "Get ready, folks, get ready, the Sun of righteousness...s-u-n...the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His beams, get ready the Sun of righteousness will come." It's 400 years since then, at least, and the Sun of righteousness hadn't arisen and it was darker than it had ever been. Where was the Sun of righteousness?

Well, when Zacharias heard that his son was the forerunner to Messiah and that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah, and knew the Messiah was coming, he says the Sunrise from on high shall visit us. He knew exactly what this was. This was the fulfillment of Malachi 4:2 and he knew it.

And such a magnificent metaphor, such a magnificent designation for the Messiah is picked up by other New Testament writers. In fact, 2 Peter 1:19 describes the time when the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts, when the darkness of your heart is dispelled, when the blackness of sin's night is ended as the dawn takes place as you put your trust in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. Jesus Himself, Revelation 22:16 said, "I am the root and offspring of David, I am the bright Morning Star." Whether the Morning Star, the glow of dawn, the Sunrise or as Zacharias used the word the rising, the dawning, all...it refers to the same thing. He sees the coming of Messiah as the promised dawning that would break the darkness of the nation Israel, the darkness of the world, the darkness of sinful hearts. It was a saving visit. Messiah was coming and He would shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

The Bible talks about darkness in two ways, intellectually and morally. Intellectually darkness means ignorance. Morally darkness means sinfulness. Man is pictured in moral darkness, intellectual darkness, literally under the shadow of eternal death. Darkness is used, for example, to describe matters unknown, matters hidden. Darkness is used to describe ignorance and error. Darkness is used to describe sin and wickedness and iniquity. Darkness is used to describe the presence of Satan. Darkness is used to describe hell which is outer darkness. So here, metaphorically, is the whole world of unconverted people sitting in the depth of darkness and the shadow of death. And in that condition waiting for the light to shine and as Zacharias anticipates the coming of Messiah, he remembers the words of Isaiah chapter 9 verses 6 and 7, "A child will be born, a Son will be given and that child, that Son," referred to in verses 6 and 7 of that chapter, in verse 2 is referred to as the light that shines on those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death.

God, says 1 John 1:5, is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. Consequently when the Messiah comes, the light comes...the light comes. The people, wrote Isaiah, who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine upon them.

So, Zacharias knew that the coming of Messiah was the coming of the light. Turn to Isaiah, for a moment, with me. I'm going to refer to one, turn to Isaiah 59 and I'm going to wrap up with this. But in Isaiah 42, just another comparative passage, again I'm so thrilled by the way in which Zacharias pulls the Old Testament in to this, he in verse...verses 1 to 7 of Isaiah 42, the Lord introduces My servant, the Messiah. Behold My servant, the Messiah. Later on identified as the suffering servant. "My servant whom I uphold," Isaiah 42:1, we'll get to chapter 59 in a minute, "My servant whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom My soul delights," that's how God refers to the Messiah, "I have put My Spirit on Him." He's introducing the Messiah in Isaiah 42.

But further, I want you to go down to verse 6, if you happen to be there. Just listen, "I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand, watch over You, I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the darkness and those who dwell in darkness from the prison." That's God talking to the Messiah. I have called You in righteousness, I will hold You by the hand, I will watch over You, I will appoint You as a covenant to the people. What kind of covenant? What kind? A New Covenant. As a light to the nations to open blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. Isaiah 42 then views the coming of Messiah as light as part of the New Covenant.

But most notably go to chapter 59 and I'm going to try to do this as rapidly as I can in the next few minutes. There's a problem in Israel, we've been identifying the problem. We've got Davidic promise, they've got Abrahamic promise, it isn't being fulfilled. It still isn't being fulfilled. What's the matter? What's the deal? Is the Lord impotent?

Chapter 59 verse 1, "Is the Lord's hand so short He can't save? No, the Lord's hand is not so short it can't save. Does it not understand the problem? Does He not hear us? Is His ear so dull it can't hear? Neither is His ear so dull it cannot hear." The problem is not with God. It's not that God is impotent and it's not that God is indifferent. The reason Davidic promise hasn't been fulfilled, the reason Abrahamic promise hasn't been fulfilled is not because God can't or doesn't care. The problem is in verse 2, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

People say, "Well why did God do this?" And, "Why did God do that?" "What's the problem with God?" "What's wrong with God?" That's not the issue. It's not that the Lord is impotent and it's not that the Lord is indifferent. It is that you are iniquitous. And he goes on to describe this horrible sin. Your iniquities have separated you from God, your sins have hidden His face from you, your hands are defiled, your fingers are full of iniquity, your lips have spoken falsehood, your tongue mutters wickedness, every part of your anatomy is wicked. You sue each other, you're not honest, you're confused, you trust in confusion, you speak lies, you conceive mischief, you bring forth iniquity, you hatch adder's eggs and weave the spider's web. In other words, you try to poison and ensnare

others. You can't hide. You can't cover yourself. The web you weave for yourself doesn't fit and doesn't work as clothing, doesn't cover you. Your works are works of iniquity, acts of violence in your hands. It just goes on and on like this.

That's the problem. Look at the middle of verse 9. "We hope for...what?...we hope for...what?...for light. Where's the light in the midst of the darkness? Oh, behold darkness. We hope for brightness but walk in gloom. We grope along the walls like blind men. We grope like those who have no eyes. We stumble at mid-day in the twilight." To show you how blind we really are, we're like dead men, verse 10 says, we're as good as dead, we can't see anything, groping in the dark, groping...

It's not that God can't save. The New Covenant, listen, New Covenant salvation is always available. It's available today, it was available in Isaiah's time. It's always been available. If you repent and believe God and trust in Him and ask for forgiveness, He will do that. It's always been available. The problem is not God. God is not limited to save. It is your iniquities that have created the problem. You want light, you can't find it.

Verse 15, look at the middle of the verse where the paragraph starts. The Lord saw, the Lord looked down and saw the situation. It was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice and He saw that there was no man and was astonished that there was no man to intercede. Point? If somebody is going to solve this problem, it has to be Him. Nobody can do it. No human leader can do it.

So, I love this, verse 16, "His own arm brought salvation." He said, "I'll do it Myself. I'll go down and save them Myself. And His righteousness upheld Him." So you know what? He puts on His battle clothes, verse 17, this is where Paul borrowed his language in Ephesians 6, "He put on righteousness like a breastplate. He put on a helmet of salvation on His head. Put on garments of vengeance for clothing. Wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle." He got ready to go to battle to save sinners. It was God Himself. He said there's no man to do it, I have to do it Myself.

So you know what He did? He provided an intercessor. He provided an intercessor, according to chapter 53, someone who would intercede for the transgressors, someone who would bear the sins of many. He provided a Savior, an intercessor, the suffering Servant, Messiah. I love this, verse 20, Isaiah 59, "God determined this...a Redeemer will come to Zion and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," those are two references to Israel, "a Redeemer will come and He'll come to those who turn from their transgressions." He'll come to the penitents, He'll come, He'll come.

Why? Why does God do this? Why is God going to do this? Verse 21, here it is, has to be this way, "As for Me this is My covenant...this is My covenant." Here's the New Covenant again. The language here is New Covenant language. Again if you go back to verse 9 and 10 you see the darkness waiting for light, you see this passage again as the other passage in Isaiah where light, the coming light of the Messiah is connected to the fulfillment of New Covenant promise. This is My Covenant,

My New Covenant, the Covenant that spells this out, My Spirit is upon you, My words I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth or the mouth of your offspring, nor the mouth of your offspring's offsprings, says the Lord, now and forever. It's an eternal covenant, I'm going to change the heart, I'm going to change the words that are written in the heart and in the mouth and I'm going to put My Spirit in you. That's all New Covenant language...New Covenant.

And notice immediately verse 1 of chapter 60. And there's no chapter divisions in the Hebrew text. And notice again it's connected with light. Zacharias knew all these connections. He knew this passage well. The New Covenant involves this, I'm going to fulfill My Covenant. How is it going to happen? Verse 1, "I'm going to rise, shine for Your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon You." That's the rising of Messiah. "For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear unto you and nations will come to your light

and kings to the brightness of your rising."

Old Zachariah, as he goes through his paean of praise there at the end of the first chapter of Luke and as Luke records it, they both knew and they knew well that the Sunrise from on high not only fulfilled Malachi 4:2 but it also was connected directly to New Covenant promises. And they knew the New Covenant was being fulfilled through the coming of Messiah and only by virtue of its being fulfilled could they receive the blessings promised to David and Abraham. By the way, that's the millennial condition. When the light has come, Israel's been saved and the glory of the Lord has risen on them and the light shines forth from them so that the nations come to their light and kings to the brightness of their rising, verse 4 says, "Lift up your eyes right about and see," they all gather together, they come to you, your sons will come from afar, your daughters will be carried in the arms then you will see and be radiant, your heart will thrill and rejoice. That's all the salvation of Israel. Israel will be saved and enter the Kingdom and the light will be fully shining on them and through them, it will shine all over the world.

You know what? It will go on even after the Millennial Kingdom, that's a thousand-year earthly Kingdom. Go down to chapter 60 verse 19, well, end of verse 18...end of verse 18. "You will call your walls salvation and your gates praise." I mean, that's all there will be is salvation and praise for salvation. And then verse 19 describes the New Jerusalem, the eternal state in the new heavens and the new earth, "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light, but you will have the Lord for an everlasting light and your God for your glory, your sun will set no more, neither will your moon wane, for you will have the Lord for everlasting light and the days of your mourning will be finished. Then all your people will be righteous, they will possess the land forever. The branch of My planting, the work of My hands that I may be glorified." That's the eternal condition. According to Revelation 21 and Revelation 22, the New Jerusalem has no sun and the eternal state has no stars, has no moons, it only needs the light of the glory of God as its light.

So, you see, the New Covenant is connected to the coming of the light, the Son, the glorious dawning of salvation and millennial glory and eternal glory.

Who is this Messiah? Who is this Messiah? The Jews are still not believing it's Jesus. Who is this Messiah?

Go to chapter 61, very quickly, you look at verse 1, here's the message He brings when He arrives. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me." That's right. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon the Messiah." Whoever it is the Messiah chooses. As we read earlier, the Spirit of the Lord is going to be upon Him because the Lord has anointed Me. How are we going to know the Messiah when He comes? Because He's coming to bring good news, the gospel to the afflicted. He's coming, being sent by God to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to prisoners, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. And we'll stop right there.

When the Messiah comes, that's what He will do. He will have the Spirit of the Lord God on Him. He will be anointed by God. He'll bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the broken-hearted, bring liberty to the captives, freedom to prisoners and proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. Whoever does that is Messiah.

Now turn to Luke for just a quick moment, chapter 4 and here's an amazing fulfillment. Luke chapter 4, verse 14, we're early in Jesus' ministry. We need to carefully look at verse 14, remember it said that whoever comes, the Spirit of the Lord God is going to be upon Him. Look at verse 14, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, just as Isaiah 61:1 said. The news about Him spread throughout all the surrounding districts. He began teaching in the synagogues, was praised by all. He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up, as was His custom, entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and He was asked to stand up and read. The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him...how interesting, how providential. And He happen to open the book and found the place where it was written, He found chapter 61, this is what He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those that are down-trodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." Exactly out of Isaiah 61:1 and 2, quoted it to the letter, closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him because they wanted to hear what He said. And He began saying to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Whoever fulfills Isaiah 61:1 and 2 is the Messiah. And they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

Now how is...go back to Isaiah 61 for just another minute, I know I'm taxing your finger dexterity here...digital dexterity, I guess would be a better way to say it. But Isaiah 61, how does He do it? How does He save? How does He come and save us? Verse 10, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,

my soul will exalt in my God." Here's how He does it, "For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with the robe of righteousness." Folks, that's justification...that's imputed righteousness. He covers us with His own garments of righteousness. He covers us with His own garments of righteousness. It's just so thrilling, so thrilling. He does it by the glorious blessing of imputed righteousness. He covers us with garments of salvation.

So Isaiah 62:11, the prophet says, "Lo, your salvation comes. Some day they'll call you the holy people...verse 12...the redeemed of the Lord." That's New Covenant language, New Covenant promise. God promises the New Covenant forgiveness, light dawning to dispel the darkness, light that will light the millennial glory, the earth and shine forth from a redeemed Israel to the world and a light that will eternally shine in the glories of the new heaven and new earth so that there will be no sun, or moon, or stars, but only the light of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ and through all of us who share that glory.

Zacharias knew all that. He knew that this was New Covenant fulfillment, forgiveness, mercy, the Sunrise bringing light to the darkness, all of that came right out of those New Covenant passages in Isaiah. And one other, 79, the end of the verse, he throws this in, not whimsically, he says the last feature to mention about the New Covenant is that it will guide our feet into the way of peace. Oh so long they had no peace...peace, peace and there is no peace...peace, peace, where is that elusive peace?

In Isaiah 59:8 they didn't know the way of peace. But the New Covenant promised peace, personal peace, world peace, eternal peace. Listen to Isaiah 54:10, he knew every New Covenant passage, he just pulled them all out. Isaiah 54:10, "My loving kindness will not be removed from you...I love this...and My covenant of peace will not be shaken, says the Lord who has mercy on you." In the covenant of mercy and the covenant of compassion there was the promise of peace so that he even calls it "My covenant of peace." That's the New Covenant. What an immense, rich, profound insight we get from just three little verses. Forgiveness, a new heart, a new spirit, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, the knowledge of God, the law of God implanted, light shattering the darkness, and peace in place of turmoil, peace forever...all that Zacharias anticipated would come in the Messiah, all would come in the Messiah. And it did, but not until Israel comes through the New Covenant will they know the Davidic and Abrahamic fulfillment. You and I when we believe Christ and receive New Covenant salvation, we receive blessings now that are like those that will come through Abrahamic fulfillment, and we receive the rule and the sovereign reign of Christ in our lives personally like will come in the Davidic and earthly Kingdom of Christ. But the real promise fulfillment won't come until Israel repents and just(?) say(?) pray for the salvation of Israel for in it lies their only path to blessing.

And then the curtain falls on John in verse 80, all it says about his life from eight days until the time he launched his ministry is, "He continued to grow physically, become strong in spirit...he grew spiritually...he lived in the desert around the Jordan area, the hill country of the Jordan area, the hill

country of Judea, until the day of his public appearance to Israel." And we'll get to that day in chapter 3. Meanwhile we go back to the birth of Jesus next time. It's not Christmas next Sunday but we're going to study the birth of Christ.

Father, thank You for our time in Your Word this morning. We know that it's just barely possible to scratch the surface of these things in a brief time and yet we know that Your Spirit can take us individually and personally as we look together at the scriptures on our own and take us deeper and deeper into these rich life-changing truths. Thank You, Father, for the wonder of Your Word and the great promise of the New Covenant salvation. May every heart here turn to Christ, every person be saved. May You be gracious to every sinner and save them, bring them to faith in Jesus Christ, bring them to a recognition of their own sinfulness. Give them life out of death and light in darkness. Save them, Lord, save sinners for Your glory, we pray. Amen.

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