“A HORN OF SALVATION”

Luke 1:57–80

Key Verse: 1:69

“He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David…”

“Save!” It’s a word used in many ways. In soccer or hockey it means to prevent the opponent from scoring. “Save” can mean to keep or store up. We save important documents on our computer, or memorable photos or sentimental items from childhood. We’re urged to save time or money, or save for retirement. “Save” can also mean to rescue or protect. We can be saved from death on the operating table, or saved from drowning by a lifeguard. But being saved can also go deeper, like being saved from substance abuse or a messed up relationship. Today Christmas means many things to many people: Gifts and trees and songs and lights and warm drinks and family and memories. But Zechariah’s song tells us Christmas is really a celebration of how God sent Jesus to save us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through these words today.

Let’s first look at verses 57–66. These verses record the birth of John the Baptist. It was such a joyful moment for elderly Elizabeth and her relatives and neighbors. But the real emphasis here is on the baby’s name. The relatives thought he should be named after his father Zechariah or some other relative. But Elizabeth said his name should be John. When they turned to Zechariah, he made it clear: the name is John. Then after nine months of silence, Zechariah could speak at last. There are several lessons here. We should share others’ joy, like Elizabeth’s neighbors and relatives. Even more, we should obey God rather than human customs or what people expect. And finally, we should learn to entrust our children to God’s hand. The phrase “The Lord’s hand was with him” is so powerful. It shows us the best parenting possible. We’re not to be helicopter parents, overprotecting and trying to control our children’s lives. Parents should focus on pleasing and obeying God in their own lives, and dedicate their children to God. Then God will work in their children’s lives and help them.

The next section of the passage records Zechariah’s song. Let’s look at verse 67. Like Elizabeth, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. His song is a prophecy. Let’s read verse 68. There are some important things here.

First, it says “he has come to his people” (68,78). The Greek word here is “epeskepsato,” which means “to visit,” “to look into a situation in order to help.” It especially means to visit those who are suffering but who’ve been forgotten or overlooked. Zechariah saw that this is what God was doing in sending Jesus. Jesus came for all the suffering, forgotten, overlooked people of the world.

Second, it says he has “redeemed them”. The Greek word is “lutrosis”—it means “ransomed,” as if they were kidnapped, or “bought back,” as if they were held in slavery. Humanly the Israelites were not in literal slavery at this time. But there are many kinds of slavery. There’s political slavery, or economic slavery, or spiritual slavery. In slavery, we can’t get out—we’re trapped. It was true of the Israelites in Zechariah’s time, and it’s true of so many people still today.

How has God redeemed his people? Let’s read verse 69. The phrase “He has raised up” emphasizes it’s something God has done. God has sent an important, wonderful person to his people. It especially suggests something royal or kingly. So Zechariah says it was “in the house of his servant David”—meaning in David’s lineage. Simply speaking, God was sending the Messiah.

Zechariah calls the Messiah God was sending “a horn of salvation.” It wasn’t a trumpet or trombone; this “horn” was like an animal horn, like on a powerful ox or bull. The horn of an ox or bull is so strong it can defeat any other wild animal or even the most skillful, clever human. In several places the Old Testament describes the Messiah, the future king of Israel, as a “horn” (1Sa2:10; Ps132:17; Eze29:21). The Messiah came as King who is powerful and strong enough to deliver his people. In other words, as “a horn of salvation,” he’s our Savior. “Savior” can sound outdated. But there are many references to “saviors” in our culture today. In romance novels or movies, he’s this handsome, genuine, noble guy who comes to sweep a woman off her feet. In other movies, he’s like Iron Man or Superman or even a messed up savior like “Deadpool.” But Jesus is such a different Savior. First of all, he’s real, not somebody’s fantasy. And he’s strong enough to get us out of the worst situation.

Look at verse 70. It tells us that God kept his promises that he made through so many holy prophets (1:55). Now let’s look at verse 71. Here the word “salvation” is repeated again. What kind of salvation is it? It says, “…from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.” Some people think others are out to get them. We call it “paranoia.” It’s a kind of mental illness. In reality, no one is even paying attention to them. But it says here that we do have enemies. Who are our enemies? They’re both spiritual and human. The devil and all his demons hate us and want to destroy us. Actually, some humans also hate us when we try to follow Jesus. Jesus said they will exclude us, insult us, and reject us as evil because we belong to him (6:22). He also said they’ll even curse and mistreat us (6:27). But Jesus saves us from all kinds of enemies. He protects us from harm. How? Jesus gives us spiritual victory. There’s the familiar expression, “You are your own worst enemy.” It refers to our own sinful nature which is always there ready to ruin our lives. So Jesus even saves us from ourselves. We’ll see a bit later what that looks like.

What does God sending us a horn of salvation show us about him? Look at verse 72a: It says it was “to show mercy.” Jesus’ coming shows God’s mercy. Mercy to whom? It says “to our ancestors.” God’s mercy in our lives is often the expression of his faithfulness to people who are now dead. It could be our parents, grandparents, or someone in the past who put their hope in God and really prayed for us. God’s mercy to those people is expressed in his faithfulness to remember them, honor their faith, and answer their prayers.

Look at verses 72b,73: God’s sending Jesus also shows that God remembered “his holy covenant.” Basically, God remembers. People forget, but God never forgets. What was this holy covenant? God said to Abraham: “you will be a blessing…and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” What did it mean, and how would God do that? It was God’s promise to send Jesus through Abraham’s offspring. Also, it was a promise that all those who walk in the footsteps of Abraham’s faith God would use to bless the whole world. When we receive Jesus, we become part of that holy covenant with Abraham. We become Abraham’s true descendants, and God becomes faithful to us, too.

So how does Jesus enable us to be a blessing and bless the world? Let’s read verses 74,75. As verse 71 said, Jesus saves us from our enemies. But these two verses show us what Jesus’ salvation in our lives actually looks like. It’s not a life of selfishly abusing his grace, like an addict. Jesus saves us so that we can serve God. It may seem that only special people serve God. But actually, Jesus gives each of us his saving grace so that we too can live for God and serve God.

It may sound nice, but it’s really hard to do in practice. What makes it so hard? It says here, “without fear.” Sometimes fear is our own worst enemy, too. Fear bothers us in lots of ways. Fear prevents us from making commitments. Fear makes us keep quiet about our faith. Fear makes us calculate about serving God. When we’re afraid of people, we can’t serve God. But Jesus saves us from all our fears. Some start out serving God but then slip into a self-absorbed life. They start compromising with sins and the world. In doing anything we can start out strong, but then can’t finish. In fact, the end of our lives can become so ugly that it overpowers all the good we tried to do earlier. It’s what the devil really would love to do—sabotage our Christian lives. But Jesus enables us to serve God in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. Jesus is the one who makes us holy and righteous, not our own efforts. Jesus is the one who saves us from hypocrisy, from living before people. Jesus is the one who gives us the Holy Spirit and who changes our character from the inside out, to be more like God. Jesus is the one who enables us to finish our lives on earth remaining in him. Jesus our horn of salvation enables us to serve God faithfully and in every phase of life. But we have to depend on Jesus from the beginning to the end.

Look at verse 76. Zechariah finally turns to the baby he’s holding, his own son, and says a few words to him. He says his son would become a prophet of the Most High and prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus. Parents can have strong ambition for their children, or maybe no ambition at all. Many people struggle to live up to their parents’ expectations. It can turn into a life-long struggle, with no solution. But this wasn’t just a priest’s expectations for his son; it was God’s revealed will. God would use John’s life to get people ready to receive Jesus. It was a hard life to go on before the Lord and prepare the way for him. It was kind of like going into a classroom where students have really bad attitudes and no desire to learn. How would John help people get ready for Jesus?

Read verse 77. What does this mean? To know his salvation, we first have to know what kind of sinner we are. If we’re unaware of our own sins, then his salvation, his forgiveness, won’t mean a hill of beans to us. We’ll keep acting like sin is not a problem and that we don’t need Jesus. We’ll keep acting like a victim, like our problem is our situation or other people. On the other hand, we might feel like our sins are too much, like we’re washed up, a hopeless case. But when we really accept that I’m a sinner and that his forgiveness is for me, even for all my sins, we can know his salvation.

So what effect does Jesus’ forgiveness have on our lives? Let’s read verses 78,79. Here Jesus is also described as the rising sun. He’s not like an interrogation lamp that’s switched on and is blinding and scary. He’s gradual and gentle, just like the rising sun, and even more beautiful. His light brings new life, new hope, and healing. So many people are living in darkness. In darkness we’re confused and scared. In the shadow of death we feel hopeless and meaningless. But Jesus shines on us and gives us clarity and hope and meaning and direction. He guides us into the path of peace. What is this path of peace? It’s the path of peace with God and peace with others. This peace comes from his forgiveness.

Let’s read verse 69 again. Like Zechariah, let’s praise God who sent Jesus to be a horn of salvation for us. This Christmas may we experience his salvation very personally, know his forgiveness and peace, and gain new hope and courage to serve God in the new year.