JESUS, THE HORN OF SALVATION

Luke 1:67-79

Key V 69  “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his    servant David.”

One of America’s most famous presidents, JFK once said, “We are a great and strong country, perhaps the greatest and strongest in the history of the world. But greatness and strength are not our natural right. They are not gifts which are automatically ours forever. It took toil and courage and determination to build this country and to maintain it.” I think that he was successful in fanning into flames the American peoples’ spirit to be strong and great. Today Zechariah’s song speaks of the strength and greatness of Jesus. Now I may finish my message for you know the conclusion. But I still have half an hour left to talk about his song.

So let’s begin with v 67. “His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:” Here the author Luke points out that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. My question here is, “What made him to be filled with the Holy Spirit?” In order to answer this question I am obligated to explain the previous portion of this long chapter. Let us look at v5-7. “In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.”  Zechariah must have prayed for a son all his life. To make a long story short, God finally answered his prayer and had the angel Gabriel come to Zechariah, telling him of this good news. He had hard time believing the angel and asked how this could be, because he and his wife were so old at this point. Gabriel told him that he would be struck dumb; not being able to speak for nine months until his son is born. In God’s intervention, I think that a certain place in his brain may stop working properly for a while. During this time Zechariah must have repented of all his unbelief. He might have asked himself, "Why didn't I believe the word of God? Why was I so skeptical? What a fool I was!" He observed silently what God was doing. He must’ve felt God’s mighty hand upon him and his wife. Finally his son was born. In this way God blessed their family with a miracle. On the 8th day, his neighbors and relatives gathered to circumcise the child. They wanted to name him after his father Zechariah. But his mother Elizabeth spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." Then they turned to Zechariah to find out what he would like to name the child. Since he could not speak, he asked for a writing tablet iPad, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and he began to speak, praising God.

Before delving into the content of Zechariah’s song, I like to share briefly about my recent Thanksgiving trip. After our long church meeting on Thanksgiving Day, thanks to someone’s recommendation, my wife and I took a trip to San Simeon, California. Some of you may not know where this is. It is close to San Luis Obispo and it’s about 250 miles to the north from Downey. There is a remarkable thing there. Hearst Castle! It’s consisted of over 71,000 sq ft buildings filled with valuable artistic collections. It’s built by William R. Hearst, a successful journalist and politician. Influenced by his father who owned silver mines in CA, he grew up with dreams of greatness. One day he made a trip to Europe with his mother when he was a 10 year old boy and where he was fascinated with European buildings; especially mediterranean style castles. He thus dreamt the dream to build such outstanding castle in America some day. Several decades later when he almost retired, he made his long time dream come true by constructing hearst castle on the top of a mountain in San Simeon; pouring out all his assets to achieve this goal. In this way this magnificent castle become the symbol of Hearst achieving his ultimate personal dream. But no matter how magnificent it may look, it has nothing to do with God’s eternal and redemptive purpose.

In today’s passage another young man is inspired by his father, and lives to fulfill a dream as well. However, the dream that John, Zechariah’s son, pursues is not his personal dream, but one that is carried out through him by the Holy Spirit.  The dream that he was driven to pursue was to announce the coming of Jesus. God had worked in advance through his father, Zechariah. V 17 reads, “and he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” It is planned before the creation by our Sovereign Lord and today prepared his father to see where God was coming from. Before Gabriel had spoken to Zechariah, Zechariah may have dreamt of having a family and perhaps also to become the leader of a great priestly line; the greatest of which had ever existed on earth. Unfortunately he didn’t even have one son. However, God had a different plan for him. There were more important things in store for Zechariah than producing a legacy of powerful priests. Upon realizing what great plans God had to carry out during the time of Zechariah and his son, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and praised God with a song. So I would say that it’s God’s divine wisdom to refine a levite, Zechariah. (Malachi 3:3)

Now let us examine his song inspired by the Holy Spirit. Look at v 68. "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.” Here take notice of Zechariah’s mention of the “God of Israel.” As a Jewish man and as a priest, Zechariah must have known what he was talking about. He was talking about the God of Israel who is the God of the entire Old Testament. He could envision God’s whole plan unfolding from the Old Testament promise to God’s chosen nation Israel to send a savior. Jesus said in Jn 4:22, “salvation is from the Jews.” Through Israel came God's ancestors of faith like Abraham or king David, God’s law and God's covenants. It was the God of Israel who used Israel as a nation of witnesses to reach all nations. In the Old Testament God had promised that he would send his one and only Son Jesus as the Savior of the world (Gen 3:15, Isa 9:6). God had also promised that when the time for Jesus’ coming came near, God would send his forerunner to the world for preparing his way (Isa 40:3-5, Mal 4:5). Since God promised the coming of the forerunner, about 400 years had elapsed. During these long and silent years God’s people suffered under foreign powers such as Persia, Greece, and Rome. The more they suffered, the more intense their longing for the coming of the Messiah became. They expected the Messiah to come soon and free them from the oppression of those ungodly nations. The Israelites waited for the coming of the Messiah more than 4 centuries. They became impatient and unbelieving, thinking that God had forgotten his ancient promises. But God did not. When the time came for the Savior of the world to appear, God broke the silence and began to intervene in human history. Zechariah said, “..he has come.” Here the verb "has come" means "has visited." God has visited his people.

 Look at v 70,72,73. “(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham:” In spite of his people’s unbelief and impatience, God remembered his promises and kept them all. Though we are unfaithful, our God is faithful. Thank God for his great faithfulness to each of us. Zechariah sensed that the time of waiting was over and that the birth of his son was not only his own personal joy but marked the very important moment that signals a new chapter in God’s history of salvation.

Zechariah also said, “has redeemed his people.” Zechariah realized that God has come for a clear purpose to redeem his people. However the way of God’s salvation is not by the sword but by redemption. Here "redeem" means "set a slave free by the payment of a ransom." Man was originally created to be free. But when man disobeyed and sinned against God at Satan’s deception(Gen 3), man became a slave to sin and Satan. As slaves to sin and Satan, men lost the meaning and purpose of their lives and became restless wanderers on earth. Eventually they died one by one. However Zechariah foresaw that the Savior that God was sending to this world would be the one who redeems us from eternal death and condemnation by paying a ransom for us.

Look at v 69. "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." Here the horn is not a French horn or a cream horn, but according to the footnote, it is an animal horn, symbolizing its power and strength. (Psalm 92:10a) In particular horns are provided to some animals as a means of defence & offence. The anatomy of these animals is such that when their bodies are positioned to fight, all of their strength is concentrated in the horn. The tips of a bull’s horns, for example, are very small, thus when he charges, all of the momentum of his rush is focussed into the small area of its horn on each side. This greatly increases his effectiveness, force, and impact when he makes contact with the object of his enemy. The horn here speaks of strength.

 The other possibility is that the “horn” refers to the horns of the altar. (Exo 30:1-3, 10; Lev 16:18) On the altar used for sacrifices in Old Testament times were small protuberances at the corners. These were called horns. Some of the blood of each sacrifice was wiped on these “horns of the altar” as part of the ritual which dealt with the offerer’s sins. Just as the Old Testament priest would present the blood of the sacrifice to God, by wiping it on the horns of the altar first, so Jesus presented his own blood in atonement for the sin of mankind.

I believe that both uses of the word ‘horn’ are equally appropriate in connection with Zechariah’s remark. Just as the horn of the bull focusses all of his power at a specific point, so Jesus was the focus of both God’s anger against sin and his mercy toward sinners. God hates sin and at the same time our loving God loves sinners with his compassion and his great mercy. None other was ever so strong to save as was the Lord Jesus Christ when He died on the cross by shedding his precious blood. This is the one and only way for us, though we are sinful, to be justified before God. We can approach God the Father only through Jesus Christ. He is the high Priest who has made the ultimate sacrifice once and for all.  Jesus, the horn of salvation, is the one who saved us all by presenting Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. So horn is a symbol of victory.

But there are different horns that the Bible also mentioned: the horn of Satan. While the horn of salvation is the the power of salvation, the horn of Satan is the power of sin and death. Rev 12:3 says, "Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads." Satan has seven heads while man has only one head. This means that Satan is at least seven times smarter than man. Lately brain fitness program so called ‘Lumosity’ designed by neuroscienciests helps us to speed up our brain function for it slows down as early as age 30. But it can’t beat Satan’s 7 brains. MacBook Pro is clearly one of our most advanced and high end laptops. With the latest-generation dual-core Intel Core i7 processor, the MacBook Pro can not even beat seven head Satan and his smartness having 7 core processors. Satan has also ten horns. What about man? Well, as you know, man has no horns at all. So Satan is constantly piercing people without any vacation or holiday or Christmas with his ten formidable horns such as horns of sexual immorality, drugs, alcohol, wealth, worldy ambition, selfishness, envy, pride, worrying about the future, and unbelief. Even in this chapter, nine months ago, one of the most righteous men those days, Zechariah himself was pierced by unbelief, one of Satan’s powerful horns. He did not mean to utter unbelieving words to the angel in such a important momentum who came to announce the good news of his son’s birth. But he did so because he was pierced by Satan’s horn and became unbelieving momentarily although he had been upright throughout his life time. But as his spiritual eyes were opened and through the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart, he realized that though he had no strength to overcome Satan’s powerful horns, God would send his Son Jesus as the horn of salvation for us. He saw that Jesus the Horn of Salvation would come to crush the horns of Satan one by one.

In the v69b, 71b, & 74a, Zechariah says, “in the house of his servant David, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to rescue us from the hand of our enemies." I think that this portion is very appealing to us for we have been studying 1 & 2 Sam so far. It means that Jesus would rescue us from the hand of Satan just as King David rescued his people from their enemies. King David and his mighty men, defeated all of their enemies and established the United Kingdom of Israel. This was only possible when the Lord gave David victory wherever he went. (2Sam 8:14b) God also promised to raise up David’s offspring to establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2Sam 7:11b-13) According to God’s promise, Jesus was born as the descendant of David. He was born in Bethlehem, the hometown of David. This means that Jesus would also defeat all of our enemies as David had done for his people.

So my next question would be, who are our enemies? We think that our enemies are people or certain nations who hurt or betray us. Some people think that their church or family members are their enemies. Others still think that their employers are their enemies. Often we think that our worst enemy is our self. In some sense this is true. But ultimately our real enemy is Satan. The literal meaning of Satan is false accuser or adversary. He is the enemy of God and of all mankind. Therefore, we must not blame others. We must not even blame even ourselves. We must be aware of the cunning and deceptive temptations of Satan and fight against him; seeing that he’s working in those that we may believe to be our enemies. But Thank God that, in his great mercy, he sent his one and only Son Jesus as the Horn of Salvation for us. Through his sacrificial life on earth, his death and resurrection, Jesus proved himself to us that he is the horn of salvation who is mightier than any of the horns of Satan. Although we are weak, our Lord Jesus is mighty. We must turn to Jesus, who is the horn of salvation for us, claiming that we have victory in Jesus. Jesus can rescue us one by one from the hand of our enemy Satan. But this is not the end of the story.

Look at v 74b, 75. "...and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." Jesus has a clear purpose enabling us to serve God rather than serve Satan. God gives us a holy desire to serve Him and His will. But often times as the situation get tougher and our faith get weaker, we are tempted to throw in the towel and abandon our holy life. But God still wants us to be faithful to the end. Jesus said in Mat 24:13, “but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” God wants us to serve him all our days through our college life, 30th, 40th, all the way until 120 year young and inherit the kingdom of God as our eternal reward. Jesus enables us to serve God all our days. We cannot serve God to the end of our lives with our own. So it is another reason that we need Jesus the Horn of Salvation for our spiritual strength and renewal. Then he enables us to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness to the end of our lives.

Look at v 76, 77. “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 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.” Here Zechariah mentions about his new born son briefly from God’s perspective. He is to be a prophet of the Most High, or better known as the herald of the Messiah. A herald’s job is to go on before a king and announce the king’s arrival. “The king is coming; the king is coming!  Bow down before the king!” In this way, the king could enter honorably. Zechariah personally accepts God’s mission for his son for he knows the meaning of his son’s life within God’s redemptive history. In this way he as a father he must have planted faith in him through the Word of truth until John grew and became strong in the Spirit (80) and preach the message of repentance so that people might have the knowledge of salvation.

Nowadays people don’t want to hear about sins, much less repentance. God’s words are treated with contempt and not properly spoken. In churches, misinterpretations of the scriptures, messages that focus on worldly prosperity, or that focus on socializing are prevalent.  Such things will fade. The true gospel is to know the way of salvation through the forgiveness of sins and believing in Jesus as the Savior and Sovereign Lord. Those who accepted John’s message repented of their sins and prepared themselves to stand before living God. So preparing the way for the Lord is to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

Lastly look at v 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.”

Last Thursday, I was shocked at the extreme brutality of North Korean Leader, Kim J. Eun who executed his uncle, signalizing that he is in charge and that anyone who seeks to create any kind of alternative power center is going to get crushed politically and physically. It was the most dramatic shake up in N.K. leadership ever existed in decades. There is no mercy found at all over there. People are living in darkness and shadow of death literally. May the Lord have mercy on them and set them free. Spiritually the darkest moment of night is right before the dawn.

Praise our loving God who is filled with compassion and tender mercy upon us. Jesus is also compared to the Rising Sun. Just as the sun powerfully dispels the darkness of the night and sheds his light to all creations, Jesus dispels darkness from our hearts and lives and shines God’s hope and love into our hearts. Jesus then guides our feet into the path of peace. Living in darkness means living without hope, meaning and direction. Jesus the Rising Sun gives us a clear direction, meaning, hope and vision for our lives. In Jesus we can also have new day, new beginning, new hope and new relationship with God and others. In Jesus the Rising Sun, we can welcome the new year with new hope and vision; full of the Spirit like Zechariah who produced a man of the Holy Spirit to focus on serving God our eternal Father.

One word: Jesus, our horn of Salvation.