



3: The HERO of the Story (Luke 1:56-79)

Have you ever had the perfect chance to honor Jesus but - instead - you pushed Him out of the way - and *YOU became the Hero of the Story?* Today we see that while *God wants to use us IN the story* - He alone deserves to be **the Hero of the Story.**

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teachingnotes

John the Baptist Born & Circumcised

Luke 1:56-59a (NIV) Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child...

Circumcision on the **8th day** was in obedience to God's command (Gen. 17:12 & Lev 12:3). We will see the same for Jesus later in the story (Lk 2:21). The act of circumcision brought the baby into the covenant people, just as Abraham had done 2000 years before with baby Isaac (Gen. 21:4). Although not an Old Testament command, by the 1st century naming boys on the day of their circumcision was a common practice.¹

- Sometimes babies were named because of a physical characteristic (Esau "hairy"), a parent's response to God's goodness (Samuel "asked for"), or to honor God (Elijah "Yahweh is God").
- Most often, the child was named after the father or grandfather.

He Will Be Called...

Luke 1:59-62 (NIV) On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah but his mother spoke up and said, "No! **He is to be called John.**"

They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

The **FATHER** was to name the child, but Elizabeth is bypassing this custom, and giving him a name that no one in the family has. The friends and relatives aren't going to let her get away with this, so they ask Zechariah what he wants to name the baby. They **made signs** to Zechariah. Evidently Zechariah was *both mute & deaf.*

Zechariah Disciplined for Disbelief

Luke 1:13b, 18-20 (NIV)Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John...Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

Now was the **appointed time** the angel had spoken of. John had been born. Now *the decision is made by the head of the household,*

Luke 1:63 (NIV) He asked for a writing tablet and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "**His name is John.**"

The Hebrew name for **John** (*Yohanan*) is full of meaning - **Yahweh has given grace.**²

- Not only has God given grace to Zechariah & Elizabeth - a barren couple,
- but John's life would direct people to Yahweh's greatest proof of grace - Jesus Himself!

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 89.

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 97.

Zechariah Unmuted

Luke 1:64–66 (NIV) Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and **he began to speak, praising God**. All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” **For the Lord’s hand was with him.**

For 9 months this couple’s communication was squelched. For 9 months the priest could say nothing to honor God. But the first thing Zechariah did was to begin **praising God** with his mouth instead of *questioning* God with his mouth. This miracle had a ripple effect throughout the community and beyond. This child was a special part of God’s plan, and everyone waited to see who *Yohanan* (John) would become.

The man who God had disciplined for his lack of trust, is now being greatly used to point others to God’s plan. This should not come as a surprise to us because it is the theme of the Bible. **God rarely uses angels and visions to offer forgiveness to people.**

BIG TRUTH: God uses Forgiven People to Forgive People

Here are a couple of examples:

- (Acts 8) An **Ethiopian man** is reading Isaiah 53, but *rather than the Spirit of God doing the work* - no angel or dream - the Spirit chooses to include Phillip. Phillip is told exactly where to go and approach & he explains that Isaiah 53 is speaking of Jesus. **Phillip has been forgiven...**and now explains God’s offer to forgive the Ethiopian. The man quickly responds, surrenders his life, & looks for a place to follow the command of Jesus to be baptized.
- (Acts 10) God gives an angelic vision to **Cornelius**, but the angel doesn’t offer salvation or forgiveness. Instead, the angel tells Cornelius to invite Peter to his home. But *why not the angel? Why the process of bringing Peter to tell about the saving work of Jesus?* Simon Peter...*the one who personally knew Jesus & His forgiveness*, shares God’s plan to forgive people...and the whole family of Cornelius bows their knee to King Jesus!

God uses Forgiven People to Forgive People

So now God uses Zechariah & Elizabeth in the same way. The baby they hold, John the baptist - will do the same. **Those who have experienced God’s forgiveness, will offer God’s forgiveness to others**. Rather than use angels or visions, God will use John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord.

Zechariah’s Praise to God

Luke 1:67–75 (NIV) His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: “**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 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and **to enable us to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness** before Him all our days.

Zechariah’s first words in 9 months honor **the Lord** (Yahweh), **the God of Israel** who has come **come to his people and redeemed them** (meaning - buying from bondage). *But just HOW had the God of Israel come to his people?*

This **horn of salvation** is NOT referring to John. He wasn’t from David’s family...**but Jesus was!** Zechariah is prophesying about Jesus who would be born **in the house** [family line] **of David**, from the tribe of Judah. The term ‘**horn**’ refers to the strength of an animal³ that would lower its horns and drive away its enemies. So this **horn of salvation** was raised up from King **David’s** family. (Note: Zechariah would have come from the tribe of Levi in order to serve as a priest.)

Salvation from our enemies was not referring to God’s plan to bring political freedom to the Jews since they continued under the reign of the Romans for years to come. In fact, 70 years later the Jewish War against the Romans ended in the destruction of the temple and over 1 million Jews slaughtered.

☛ **Richard Lenski:** “This is deliverance from our real enemies, sin, curse, damnation, all the power of the devil.”⁴

The oath **God swore to Abraham** was to give him many descendants, through whom ALL nations would be blessed. Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of this, and it was His coming that would **enable** His Jewish followers **to serve Him without fear**, to live **in holiness and righteousness before him all their days**.

³ Stein, 99.

⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 107.

Zechariah's Prophecy Over His Son

Luke 1:76-79 (NIV) 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, because of the tender mercy of our God 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."

Zechariah's hope for his son was not that he will rule and reign. Instead, Zechariah wanted his son to serve **the Lord** as the One who is worthy of praise. John would be the one Malachi 3:1 & Is. 40:3 says would **prepare the way** for Yahweh (**Lord**).

John is like the moon - having no light in and of himself - but brilliantly reflecting the glory of the Son. John was NOT the hero of the story, yet he would be used by God to point countless people to **the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins**.

❓ *Is that OUR hope for OUR children? Would we pray that our children will grow to reflect the glory of Jesus... to give people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins? (This is God's plan for changing the world.)*

God uses Forgiven People to Forgive People

John was to point others to the **salvation** that was coming to bring **forgiveness of sins**.

The rising Sun would **come from heaven** - What an incredible metaphor for Jesus coming to Earth! This phrase is likely based on Malachi 4:2.

Malachi 4:2 (NIV) But for you who revere My Name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

All this points to **the HERO of the Story** - Jesus who brings salvation - forgiveness, LIFE & peace. And that message of mercy will spread as...**God uses Forgiven People to Forgive People**.

❓ *Have you experienced God's forgiveness in your own life?*

- **If not...**we would LOVE to talk with you further about Jesus and the evidence that has brought us to trust Him.
- **If you HAVE experienced God's forgiveness**, then it's your great privilege to tell your story and offer that forgiveness to others.



► Ask God for an opportunity to **share how God has forgiven** you & take it! Focus on JESUS as the Hero of the story.

heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

* Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!

* Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Steve & Debbie Bass** (850-673-7952), **Tim & Joni Hughey** (850-464-1156), **Mark & Dot Mancil** (850-253-5405), **Boss & Amelia Mulkey** (850-464-6717), or **Tom & Martha Waddail** (850-973-0011).

discussionquestions

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. **Read Luke 1:57-64.** The name John (Hebrew 'Yohanan') means "Yahweh has given grace". How did John's name prove to demonstrate what God had done in the life of Zechariah & Elizabeth? Name some ways that Yahweh (Hebrew name for God) has given YOU grace.
2. It is amazing that the primary way that God offers His forgiveness is this: **God uses Forgiven People to Forgive People.** Share an example about the power of a person who has been forgiven much offering forgiveness to others.
3. Who was the forgiven person/people who told YOU of God's forgiveness? Who have YOU told about God's forgiveness within the last few months? If you haven't, why haven't you? (This question is intended to challenge you to share with others who need forgiveness.)
4. **Read Luke 1:78-79 & Malachi 4:2.** Take some time to share how the characteristics mentioned in these passages are fulfilled through Jesus.
5. What did you learn from today's study? What challenged you most & what can you do to live it out?
6. Ask how you can pray for one another. Then do it!