

Luke 1:57-80**7 Reasons to Sing**

We are going to Luke 1 today.

Two years ago, there was a man in California named Loren Krytzer who was struggling financially after his career as a carpenter ended when he was injured in a car accident. And one day he was watching Antiques Roadshow and he saw them appraise a blanket that looked just like a blanket in his house. And they appraised it for half a million dollars.

So he took the blanket he had to an auction, thinking maybe he could get a few thousand dollars for it. It was a blanket his grandmother had laid out for cats to give birth on - not how you'd treat a precious heirloom. But that day at the auction it sold for \$1.5 million. It was an old Navajo blanket, in good shape. That thing that just laid around in the family room turned out to be a massive treasure.¹ It had been there all along, but hadn't affected his life because he didn't know what it was worth.

But once he knew its value, everything changed for him.

And we are people who are in need of constant reminders of the value and worth of Christ. Because if being a Christian becomes something we just get used to, or if Jesus becomes for us just that thing that's always around, his impact on our lives will diminish.

But we get together on Sundays to look again and again at Jesus, because it is in grasping more of who He is and what He has done for us that we are strengthened, that we are filled, we are rooted and grounded. Listen to Ephesians 3:14-19:

Ephesians 3:14-19 “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is

¹<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/20/krytzer-sold-navajo-blanket-thought-to-be-worthless-for-1-point-5-million.html>

the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So we want to know again the things that surpass all knowledge so that we can be filled with the fullness of God. That's the goal in opening up the scriptures and presenting Jesus week after week.

And maybe today you'll be able to say, like that man who sold the blanket, "I can't believe this was mine all along" and have your faith refreshed.

Or maybe today you'll say "I want that to be mine" and receive Jesus by faith.

This passage talks about what God is like and what He has done for us in Christ, and the big application will be that we leave here with more joy in the treasure we have in Jesus than we came in with.

If you remember where we are in the story,, an old priest named Zechariah is serving in the holy place in the temple, and an angel shows up. Which is frightening for the old man. And this angel, Gabriel, tells Zechariah that he and his also aged wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son, one who would prepare the way for the Lord. Zechariah doesn't believe what the angel says, so the angel disciplines him: he makes him unable to speak (and maybe unable to hear) until his son, John, is born.

After meeting with Zechariah, the angel heads over to Nazareth and lets the virgin girl Mary know that she will also be having a baby, and that her baby will be the Son of God. Mary asks questions, as you would expect, but believes. Zechariah questioned with doubt and disbelief, she questioned with faith.

Then Mary meets with Elizabeth, and when she does, baby John in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. Then Mary sings a song about how God has come to her in her humility to give her this child. God acts, God shows his grace, and she sings for joy.

And today, the scene shifts back to Zechariah and Elizabeth, about 9 months or so after that angel showed up in the temple:

I. God is a Good Father (Luke 1:57-65)

Luke 1 57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother

answered, “No; he shall be called John.” 61 And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

So just as the angel told Zechariah to do, he named his child John.

Earlier in this chapter it said Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous and blameless. They were holy people, but he sinfully doubted the word of God and received the discipline of the Lord to straighten him out. Which will happen to all faithful Christians. We will stray and wander, but God is a good Father, so He administers discipline to bring us back and straighten us out.

At that moment, when God allows some hardship as discipline into our lives, we will do one of two things. We will either accept His accusation and our guilt, and then turn back to him. Or we will accuse God of treating us unfairly. We accuse ourselves or we accuse God of treating us wrong. We will run to God in his discipline in faith and repentance, or we will run away in pride and disobedience.

And look how Zechariah has grown. Before, he argued with God’s word. God made life very difficult for him for 9 months. But there’s no self-pity, no shaking his fist at God and saying, “Of course I doubted, I’m 90 and my wife is 90 and you said we’re going to have a baby!”

He has accepted the discipline, and now believes and obeys and soon sings God’s praise. When it is time to name his baby, even though he isn’t following convention and giving him a family name, even though the whole community thinks what he is doing is weird in naming him John when nobody in the family is named John, Zechariah just says, “His name is John.”

Not, “I’m thinking of naming him John.” Not, “I want to keep the name Zechariah in the family but the angel said call him John so I’m deciding what to do.”

He didn’t decide if he was going to obey God, he just obeyed him. Before Zechariah was deciding whether he would believe, and God’s discipline was unpleasant. But here he gets another chance to be faithful, he knew what God required, so this time around there was no pushing back on God, there was just obedience.

John says, "I learned my lesson - I'm gonna go with God's word without reservation and we're going to call this kid John."

In fact, he says, "His name is already John." He is recognizing God's complete authority over his son. In scriptures, the one who names something has authority over that thing. God gives Adam authority over the animals, for example, and Adam exercises that authority by naming them. Parents name their children. But Zechariah and Elizabeth don't do the naming here, they are perfectly submitted to the authority of God.

So now there's faith where there was doubt, obedience where there was pushback. A righteous person receives the discipline of the Lord and changes.

God shows Himself to be a good Father here, He is bringing Zechariah to a place of faith and obedience through some gentle discipline. And likewise, He is working in our lives is to bring us to a place of faith and obedience.

He's a Father who is actively working to cultivate us into children that reflect his character more and more as the years go on. He isn't content for us to be like old Zechariah, where we push back on God's commands and we waver. He doesn't want us to hear his word and then weigh our options and decide whether we will believe and obey in this situation. He won't allow us to live in a way where we select which parts of God's word we will believe and obey. He doesn't want to command us and then have us weigh our options.

Jesus is not content to get a place at the table of our lives. Jesus isn't content to just have his voice heard among all of the other voices. Jesus's voice is the voice that raises the dead. His is the voice we hear and believe and obey, not the voice we consult.

There's a big difference between a Lord and a life-coach, a God and a consultant. We don't accept Jesus as buddy and life-coach, we accept Him as Lord and Savior.

For Zechariah here, there was a newly refreshed faith that fully submitted to God's authority, which left no room for weighing options.

And we might think that that would be a joyless and stuffy way to live - wholehearted obedience to commands that will restrict and limit us. And Jesus fully acknowledged that living for God restricts and limits us:

Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

So yes, the way of following Jesus is hard and the gate is narrow. But it leads to life. This is not rules for rules' sake or sacrifice for sacrifice's sake - it leads to life! It's like we have to crawl through a very narrow tunnel to get to a broad valley. But it does lead to a broad valley! And those who really know Christ don't feel crushed by it, they are liberated by it.

In some ways a life of following God is like a marriage. We've all known someone who used to hang out with the group of friends a lot, but then got married, and now most of his time is spent with her. And from the outside, it looks like he has given up his freedom and his life. But, if its a healthy marriage, from the inside, he is saying "I'm doing exactly what I want to do! I actually prefer this to bowling with you guys!" Yes, there are restrictions, but it's a narrow gate that leads to life. I'm really not bitter about giving up bowling with the boys in exchange for time with her.

And when we live for Christ, giving up what we are called to give up to follow Him, from the outside it looks restrictive and too limiting. But from the inside, if we really know Him, we are saying, "this is really living. This is what I was made for."

And old Zechariah, now corrected and living in faith and obedience, doesn't whine about giving up his freedom. In fact, the next thing he does is sing!

We are still in the first chapter of Luke and we are already coming up on the second song in this story. People who give up their freedom to be part of God's story *sing about it!* Mary will suffer the scorn of being an unwed teenage mom, but God is at work, so she sings! Zechariah has been disciplined into faith and obedience, but he found the way that leads to life, so he sings!

And these people are singing even when things around them are really bad. Dr. Luke was careful to point out in verse 5 that these were the days of King Herod. These were dark and hard days, days with no freedom, days with wicked rulers. The world was dark. There was Roman tyranny, Roman idolatry everywhere as the state religion, there was corruption and apostasy within judaism, but God was clearly on the move. And as dark as the days were, the work of God caused his people to sing.

Even when politics are bad and church is bad and the future looks dark and circumstances are troubling, there are people singing for joy at the work of God.

And in our culture that is increasingly hostile to the faith, in your school where none of the other kids want anything to do with Jesus or his ways, one of the best things we can do is live with a joy in God despite all the darkness. Despite the things that people who don't know the joy of Jesus are saying about us and our God and his ways. God gives a subversive joy that endures despite the threats, that sings in the night in prison, that belly-laughs when everybody else is fearful. It's not a phony joy that doesn't ever lament or acknowledge problems. But it is a confidence in God in the midst of the problems.

The whole community comes around Elizabeth and rejoices at God's work. They knew this work of God is significant. They knew that a baby conceived in old age must mean they were living "at the turning of the tide," to quote Tolkien. And together they are storing these things up in their hearts and celebrating God's faithfulness.

One of the most compelling aspects of our testimony to the reality of Christ is that God is making his people *a city of joy* in the midst of *a city of fear*.

So take this in, revel with Zechariah here at the treasure we have in Christ:

II. God Visits (Luke 1:67-68)

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people

The first thing Zechariah sings about is that God is a God who visits His people. And this is not just that God stops by, but that God intervenes. God made a visitation to Israel when he appeared in the burning bush in Exodus and that led to the rescue of His people. And now, here again, God has visited to redeem.

There is a very big difference between trying to get the nice sentimental feelings of religion and worshipping a God who is some things and not other things, and who has really shown up and done things in time and space.

We are not trying to be a church of Kanye where we experience nice vibes that are disconnected from reality, but a church where we gather to be reminded of God's visitation, and to worship that God who has acted in real ways in time and space. Christianity is not an escape from reality, but worshipping the God who made reality and has acted in reality.

2 Peter 1:16-18 "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice

was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”

God acts in history. God really shows up, and when he does, shapes history. And Peter says these aren't just nice stories - we saw Jesus. We were with him on a real mountain when we heard a real voice speak and call Him His son. We were with this God when He visited.

Christians are not people who gather to soak up the feels and scatter to try to follow the rules, but people who have come to know the God who made all things and entered into creation in Jesus, who gather to worship Him and hear his sure word, and who leave to spread His message, to strive to live by faith, to love our neighbors in real tangible ways, because God is a God who has come to be among us.

We have not followed fairy tales, but a God who has visited His people.

III. God Redeems (Luke 1:68)

But notice in verse 68 that it says God visited and redeemed.

To talk like this would have brought the Exodus to mind. That was a visitation of God to redeem his people. This is what God in the burning bush told Moses to say:

Exodus 6:6 “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

God is a redeeming God. And to redeem someone is to purchase that person, usually out of slavery, and free them to something better. It was used to describe the act of purchasing a slave in bonds and setting the slave free.

And all throughout the ministry of Jesus, comparisons to the Exodus, when God freed the slaves from Egypt, were being made. Jesus came to give the true and better Exodus, to pay the price for us that justice demanded and to free us to serve Him.

The thing Zechariah is singing about here is that God is so devoted to His people that he redeems.

There's a story of a boy who built a model battleship. He meticulously followed the instructions and made it perfectly. He painted his name on the bottom of the boat, sealed it up, because of course, you have to test it out. So he went out back where a drainage ditch flowed through his yard and put the ship on the stream. The ship did well, it floated and stayed upright, but he didn't anticipate how strong the current would be that day. And before he knew it, the ship got away from him. He ran along shore trying to get ahead of it, but it was moving too fast. Eventually it slipped into a culvert under the road and was gone. Depressed, he started saving his money again and went into the store that sold him the kit to begin with. But he was surprised to see, in the display case, the ship he had built. Somehow the owner of this shop had come into possession of it, and it was so well-built that the owner set an exorbitant price on it.

The boy said, "That's my ship." The curmudgeonly owner said, "It's mine now, if you want it, you have to pay for it." The boy didn't have the money, so he went home, sold some things, did some chores, saved up, and came back to the store. He walked up to the counter and said, "I'd like to buy my ship please" and poured his ziplock bag full of quarters and bills on the counter.

He brought it home and displayed it proudly on his shelf. His mom came into the room and said, "You got your ship back!" He beamed with pride and said, "It's twice mine, because I made it and I bought it."

And when Zechariah sings about a redeeming God, he is singing about the fact that God has so set his affections on His people that they were now twice His. He made them and He bought them. And how much more can we praise him, now that we know that the price of redemption was the life of God's son? He redeemed us at great cost to Himself.

And how much does that reality bring peace and comfort to us? When we wonder if He loves us because our circumstances are hard, or when it has been awhile since we've seen Him work supernaturally and we wonder if He cares.

He loved us enough to make us and to buy us back from our cruel owner, so His love for us doesn't have to be in doubt. We've had that all along!

69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

IV. God is Faithful to His Promises (Luke 1:69-70)

He says here that God has raised up a horn of salvation in David's line. And a horn was a symbol of strength and honor and dominion. An animal with horns, like a bull, would use

those horns in defense, and you would see a horn and not want to mess with that animal. You mess with the bull, you get the horn.

And here they were, in days of weakness and trouble, and God raises up a horn of strength. And he is probably referring to this promise God made in Psalm 132:

**Psalm 132 11The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:**

**“One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.**

**12If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.”**

**13For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:**

**14“This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.**

**15I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.**

**16Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.**

**17There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.**

**18His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine.”**

David was the greatest king of Israel, and God had promised a new strong king in his royal line, and it is just as God had promised. God had said a king would come and sit on David's throne forever. And Zechariah is singing about the fact that He is here - God is doing what He said He would do just like He always does.

Compare this faithfulness of God to every other God we are tempted to serve. We are tempted to serve money because money promises to secure us and give us peace and freedom. But it never does. John D. Rockefeller, the billionaire oil tycoon, was famously asked how much would be enough. And his response was “one more dollar.” That God says, “Come to me and you will find rest,” but we only find insecurity there. We think it will get rid of our fears, but it just creates more fears - what if I lose this?

All gods make promises they can't fulfill.

But Zechariah is singing, and we sing, because God always delivers. Yes, He operates on a different timeline than we do. From our perspective we often cry out, “How long, O Lord?” But a day is like a thousand years for the Lord, He doesn’t forget what He said He would do. And in the end, we will be able to look back at a long list of perfectly kept promises.

So we can trust Him. We put all of our chips in on Him, we can go all-in. We can trust him with our hearts and hopes and emotions and life. There will be days we might doubt because He seems to take so long, but where else will we go? What’s a better alternative? He’s faithful.

Now its worth noting here that, so far, Zechariah is not singing about his baby, John.

He is singing about Mary’s baby, Jesus.

So he has a strong understanding of what God’s doing here.

Imagine doing that.

I’ve visited a lot of people up in the birthing unit at Strong, and they all, of course, talk about their baby and how beautiful the baby is and how amazing this is. But nobody has ever said, “It’s really great, but if you think our baby is great, you should see this other baby that was just born. That kid is amazing! Yeah, our baby is sleeping and eating and all, but man you need to go down the hall and see this other baby.” No, you tend to think your baby is the best baby of all the babies. But Zechariah sings a song here that definitely mentions his baby, but that’s actually all about the other baby.

John would have a significant role to play, but John would grow up to point to Jesus and say, “He must increase, I must decrease.” Jesus was the supreme one here.

V. God is Merciful (Luke 1:71-72)

71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;

72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers

God’s mercy is mentioned a few times in this chapter alone. And if you’re a Christian here, there’s no doubt that you’d say He’s a merciful God. A helpful distinction to make is that God’s grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve, and God’s mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve.

The lines aren't always that clear between the two, but the point is that God is a God who gives us far far better than we deserve. And we say we believe it, but often, it seems like functionally we don't. We live more like I'm the merciful one in the relationship and I'm giving God better than He deserves.

So we come to believe in Christ, we start serving Him, we start sharing with others for Him, we make sacrifices for Him, and we start to think, "I'm really a good person for doing all this. I'm going above and beyond. I kind of deserve more credit than I'm getting for this. I endure a lot for God. I've shown God a lot of mercy."

Or we'll hear from someone who has left the faith, "I did so much for Him and He did so little for me." I was merciful.

We have "big me, little God" theology. Its nice of me to do so much for God. But that's the polar opposite of how people received Christ in their day. They said, "He is so merciful. Everything He does for us is so much more than we deserve."

The fact that He would intervene at all, rescue at all, especially at the price of His own blood, what kind of amazing mercy is that?

And it was that reality that has been so transforming in the lives of millions of people throughout history - that God would save a wretch like me can't not change us if we believe it. That's what Zechariah sings next:

VI. God Rescues to Make Us Servants (Luke 1:72-75)

72b and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

God's redemption was always from something and to something. He freed from Egypt so the jews could serve Him without fear in the promised land. And He frees us from sin so that we might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness.

That's what God does when He saves a person.

He saves us to serve Him in holiness.

We believe God's forgiveness is free to us, because it was paid for by the death of Jesus. We do nothing to earn it or keep it. The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. And we can't do anything that would make Him take it back.

But if we have really received that, it makes us holy. If it isn't making us holy, we haven't received it. Any talk that I've been forgiven so now I just sin it up with my get out of hell free card misses the fact that being forgiven is being rescued from that. It is being freed from sin.

Heidelberg asks, "But does not this doctrine make men careless and profane?"

Answer: By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

If this kind of utterly free grace doesn't change you at your very core - you haven't received it.

Now we might be tempted to stop preaching free grace because it can be abused. But when it is really grasped, it can't be. It is transformative. So a better strategy would be to double down on it - to preach it more, until the realization that we are saved and forgiven by the free gift of God does transform us.

VII. God Forgives Sins (Luke 1:76-80)

**76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,**

**77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,**

**78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high**

**79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."**

**80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until
the day of his public appearance to Israel.**

John came to point to the Jesus who would give forgiveness of sins. Not because we worked for it, but because of His mercy.

And if you are a Christian, this is what you have from God. The total, free forgiveness of sins.

Whatever sins you confess to Him, whether you committed them before conversion or after, whether you've committed them a thousand times or only once, whether they're

egregious and shocking or relatively small, they have been forgiven completely by the blood of Christ.

Fear and apathy and doubt, lust and addiction, adultery and divorce, all of your guilt, all of your shame, all of your rebellion, all of your wandering, all of it was paid for by Jesus Christ, and if you have received Him by faith, God has removed them as far from you as the east is from the west.

And though you may still see the results of sin: lingering addiction, regret, shame, insecurity, that is not the evidence that God does not forgive you.

Whatever you think the worst part about you is, it is worse than you think, and if you have by faith laid hold of Christ, it is really forgiven. Jesus paid for it on calvary.

The world around us is flailing around trying to find a way to get justice without forgiveness, but nobody can stand. Old pictures, old tweets, old stories keep coming back up, and one by one every moral crusader has their baggage exposed and their history brought up to condemn them. We think we're getting justice but we're all throwing stones from our glass houses. There's no remedy for the past outside of Christ.

But in Christ we have forgiveness of sins. Because yes, what happened in our past really happened, and none of us would want all that baggage poured out on the stage for all to see. But the Gospel says it every bit of it was taken care of by Christ. All of our guilt, all of our shame, all of our past, the things we regret most deeply.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Our forgiveness is that complete.

So we sing.

7 Reasons to Sing

I. God is a Good Father (Luke 1:57-65)

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VI. God Rescues to Make Us Servants (Luke 1:72-75)

VII. God Forgives Sins (Luke 1:76-80)

Questions for Discussion in Small Group:

- 1. How is joy and song a powerful testimony to God's goodness?**
- 2. How is God's faithfulness to his promises an encouragement in your specific trials?**
- 3. How is the idea of free grace abused?**
- 4. What is a right view of free grace?**
- 5. How is it significant that God rescues us from something and to something?**