

Zechariah's Song

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Great to see so many of you here this afternoon. If you've got a Bible, and it will really help you if you have a Bible that you can sing.

And we're going to be reading a song by Zechariah. Zechariah, John the Baptist's dad. And you'll find it in Luke chapter 1 and verse 67.

Last week we heard about Mary singing a medley as she bursts forth, singing a song full of scripture. She's been told that she is going to be the mother of Jesus, mother of the Messiah. She goes to see her relative Elizabeth. And Elizabeth gives her all these confirmations that God is really in this. And she sings this amazing song about how she is blessed, how she will magnify the Lord.

And between that song and the song we're going to look at today, one thing has happened. And that is that Elizabeth has given birth to a baby. And there's a bit of a kerfuffle about what they should name him.

[1 : 08] Everyone in the community says you should name him Zechariah after his dad. But Elizabeth's very adamant, you must call him John. And then Zechariah who can't speak because he's been struck dumb because of unbelief, writes on a tablet.

You shall name him John. And we break into our story right there. So let's read Luke chapter 1 verse 67. 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.

[2 : 19] 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. 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. And the child grew and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for this amazing song. We thank you that it shows us so much about the work and person and mission of your son, the Lord Jesus. So, Father, as we look at it this morning together.

Father, would you show us great things? Would you apply its truths to our hearts? And would we leave rejoicing in God, our saviour? Father, bless us in the name of your son, we pray.

[3 : 19] Amen. Amen. So, yesterday, last week Mary sung a medley. This week, Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby.

Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby. And hopefully I'll show you why. I think that's a good title. I want you to think of something you've had to wait a long time for.

Perhaps if you've got children and they've been talking about what they want for Christmas since about August. And they think the anticipation, they're going to burst. Perhaps you could think of when you were small and you wanted something for your birthday.

So you said, Mum, I want a new bike. But it was March and your birthday wasn't until October. And you had to wait and wait and then one day you opened it.

I don't think you opened bikes, they're a bit big. Perhaps it was a proposal. You were dating for a long time. And you thought any day now.

[4 : 23] I'm just assuming. Not being a female, this was not my experience. I was more the ditherer. Waiting for a proposal. You've been dating for a long time. You thought any day now there's going to be a muddy knee.

And a little box. And a question. And it's going to be great. But the weeks passed. And the months passed. And you thought, would this ever happen? Or perhaps you were waiting for a clean bill of health.

There's a few really interesting looks going on. Of wives looking at their husband and nodding. Or a clean bill of health. You know, you've been ill for seemingly forever.

Struggling, sore, pained, desperate. And then one day you woke up and energy had returned and the medicine had worked.

The operation was a success. How did you feel when the waiting was over? Something you'd wanted for so long had now arrived.

[5 : 22] Well, Zechariah is in that position. Zechariah has been married for decades. Zechariah wanted children.

But it turned out that Elizabeth was barren. And just as hope was fading, Zechariah went and did a stint in the temple.

And he waved an offering before the Lord. And an angel appeared and said, Elizabeth is going to give birth to a son. That's amazing. Something that Zechariah had waited so long for was now on the horizon.

But because hope was so slim, he said, I don't really believe you. And the angel strikes him dumb. And says, you will not be able to speak again until your wife gives birth.

And he's waited for nine months in silence. Not able to speak. And this day, Elizabeth gives birth.

[6 : 32] Just imagine how we feel. So excited. Finally, it's happened. Everything God told me is true. And I have a son. And I can just imagine the scene in the hospital, although I don't think it was a hospital.

That Zechariah is handed this newborn baby John. And he's overcome. And he's so excited.

And full of the Holy Spirit, he sings a prophetic praise. He sings a song where he's literally bursting because all that he's hoped for has finally arrived.

He sings a lullaby to his new son. But it is a distracted lullaby. Because I don't know if you clocked as we read it. He doesn't really sing about John the Baptist.

In fact, John gets one verse, verse 76. Where Zechariah says, and you, my child, finally, after he's gone on for a bit, like the fifth verse, he says, and you, my child, will be called a prophet of the most high.

[7 : 41] For you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way. Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby about his son, John, but seems to be focusing on someone else all the more.

And even when he gets around to mentioning John, it's only really to say that you're a warm-up act. You're really only part of Jesus' entourage to go before him.

You know that joke, don't you, that the Queen thinks that all of Britain smells like fresh paint.

Because everywhere she goes has been newly painted. And, yeah, I guess it's the same.

That John was going to be that advanced party to prepare people's hearts and minds to see their God. Just as John the Baptist, this baby, will bridge the gap between Old Testament prophecy and the Old Testament prophets and the Lord Jesus.

So John the Baptist's song, the song that Zechariah sings, is going to bridge the gap between all that God promised in the Old Testament and all that is now available in the Lord Jesus.

[8 : 50] Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby about a greater son given by his glorious God. See as well that Zechariah sings in the past tense, everything Zechariah sings about as though it's already happened.

Even though all the events he sings about are still to happen because Jesus is still three months away. Still haven't had that first Christmas in Bethlehem.

But because this is God's plan, guaranteed by God's faithfulness, he can sing with prophetic assurance. Because it's God who's going to do it and therefore it is as guaranteed as though it had already happened.

And as I was thinking about this week, I think this is exactly the song that John would have wanted his dad to sing. The whole of John's life was about pointing away from himself to the Lord Jesus.

And therefore the first words that come to his ears, I'm sure he would have been so delighted that his dad doesn't sing a lullaby about him to him. But he sings a lullaby to him about the Lord Jesus who was to come.

[10:04] Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby about a greater son given by his glorious God. So let's have a look at what this baby, this son, this other son is going to look at like.

Look at verse 69 with me. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. It's a pretty odd image, isn't it?

A horn of salvation. This is Old Testament imagery. Let's remember, Zechariah is a priest. He is a trained priest. His job is to teach people the Old Testament.

Therefore, when he's describing Jesus, he uses a very provocative Old Testament image. He says, Jesus is going to be a horn of salvation.

Time and time again, God in the Old Testament is described as Israel's horn of salvation. All through the Psalms in 2 Samuel and Ezekiel says, God is the horn of salvation for Israel.

[11:06] And the horn image is one of a mighty warrior. It is like the top trump of military personnel. The image we're supposed to think of is a wild bull with flared nostrils, head down, horns showing, ready to go into battle and decimate all of his enemies.

Zechariah says he's also from the line of David. So put those two together. What we have is a warrior king. We have a marauding Messiah, a conquering Christ.

We have someone who's going to come and fight for his people. Someone who's going to come and fight and win for us. Is there anything better than to know that God is fighting for you?

That God has fought for you. He's come and he's engaged in a battle that would cost him his life in order that you might be his forever. That's the truth of the gospel.

Our God fights for us. Our God has won us. And we are his because of what he has done. And in this quite dense passage and we'll go through it very, very quickly I promise.

[12:19] We have five pictures of all that Jesus fulfills. Of all that this divine champion will do for his people. As Zechariah sings this distracted lullaby.

And the first one is this. Jesus will bring redemption from slavery. It's there in verse 68. Praise be to the Lord the God of Israel because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

The first stanza of Zechariah's distracted lullaby is about God visiting his people and God redeeming his people. And we're supposed to read that and think Exodus.

We're supposed to think of Exodus chapter 3 where Moses is at the burning bush. And God said to Moses I have heard my people's cries and I have come to visit them that I might rescue them and redeem them from Egypt.

God's people at this time are enslaved in Egypt. They are under the foot of a cruel Pharaoh who is making them slave away. making bricks.

[13:30] And God said I have come down to rescue them. And Zechariah is saying this son who is coming is doing exactly the same thing in a new and better Exodus.

He has come down not just to rescue his people from slavery in Egypt but come to rescue them from slavery to sin and death and the prince of the power of the air. He has come to rescue them fully and finally.

And we know that though the Israelites left Egypt the first opportunity they got they turned away from God and worshipped themselves and golden idols so although they were free geographically spiritually they were still enslaved.

And Zechariah sings and says this Jesus who is coming this horn of salvation from the house of David is coming to set people free fully and finally in a new and better Exodus.

won't Jesus grow up and say if the son sets you free you shall be free indeed. Graham's going to go into this much more this evening as he talks about free in Christ being freed to love Christ and worship Christ and turn from sin.

[14:47] but no there's only two Facebook statuses when it comes to redemption slave to sin or free in Christ there's no halfway house there's no middle ground we're either in Christ Jesus or we're slaves to sin and Zechariah sings and says the only freedom available is in Jesus Christ the first picture is that Jesus is the one who brings redemption from slavery the second thing we see is that Jesus is the fulfillment of promise look at verse 70 as he said through his holy prophets of long ago verse 72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant the oath he swore to our father Abraham Zechariah sings that God is faithful he's saying none of this that is

happening is God playing jazz in redemption history he's not making it up this is not a new thing that God is doing this is something that

God has always said that he would do he knows that the covenants initiated by God when we get to the Old Testament have only been partially and temporarily realized and only for sporadic periods and he knows that God completes everything that he starts he knows that God is good for his promise and therefore he sees all of these promises tied up in the birth of this son given by a greater saviour he knows that the Old Testament has only been shadows and pictures and incomplete promises and he knows that God is good and will do all that he's promised to do and that is why Zechariah sings of this greater son that's why he sings of the promise to Abraham the promise to Abraham is that you will be the father of a great nation you will have a land I will be your God and you will be my people and that all nations of the world will be blessed through you and Zechariah knows that's not really been fully fulfilled it's been partial at best and temporal at most yes they've been in

Israel for 120 years there was just kind of a golden age particularly in David's reign but he knows they were exiled he knows that even now Israel is conquered by the Roman Empire and so Zechariah proclaims that that promise to Abraham will be fully fulfilled in Jesus that it is in Jesus that God's people will finally and fully be his blessed it's in the better and eternal promised land of the new heavens and the new earth ushered in by this Jesus it's only when Jesus has come that God's people will finally be his people with an undivided heart and he knows that it's only in Jesus the descendant of Abraham that all the nations of the earth will be blessed you see Jesus wasn't plan B God didn't have a stab at it in the old testament and when it didn't work he kind of drew a line got his tit picks out and said right

I'll send my son God from the very beginning said all of creation has always and only been about Jesus I gave you this stuff in the old testament so you know who Jesus was and what he's come to do when we got to the new testament the whole old testament is God getting us ready to see exactly who his son is and exactly what he would do Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby about a greater son because it is in God's gift of his son that the bible finally makes sense it's only in Jesus that the square of the old testament is finally circled and that we say yes God you are faithful to your promises because you've sent your son to make them all real and applicable to us thirdly Zechariah says there's deliverance from danger verse 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all those who hate us verse 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear the old testament

God does some incredible things to deliver his people he ambushes people God fights for his people we've just been going through Joshua and we've seen how he does that we saw the judges that time and time again God raises up someone and that he fights and delivers his people from danger Zechariah knows that old testament history has been about God delivering his people from danger he knows that his God is the God who fights for us protects us and defends us and ensures that no bad will come to us but he knows that that deliverance has not been full he knows that again an enemy came a difficulty came a nation came he knows even now that the Romans have occupied Israel and yet he sees that in Jesus there's final and full deliverance Zechariah sees forward that this life might be painful and enemies might seem to be winning that in this life there may be casualties but he says but know this that in Jesus there is real eternal deliverance and the wounds that have been inflicted in this life will be but fleeting memories and the scars that we've suffered will shine like the stars in the glory of Jesus

[20 : 45] Christ Zechariah says that do you want to be delivered from all your enemies will trust Jesus because he's the one who does it do you see as well that he just doesn't deliver us so we can sit in the hammock smoke a cigar with our slippers on verse 74 rescued from our enemies to enable us to serve him without fear he's rescued us and delivered us so we can be that kingdom of priests that God has been looking for since the creation of the world we are now in Jesus able to be holy righteous servants in his kingdom know that God didn't save you to give you an easy life he didn't save you for your own self advancement he saved you to be his holy his to serve him all of your days with all that you are Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby because the deliverance brought by this other son will elevate God's people to be a royal priesthood to Jesus

Christ forgiveness from debt he says in verse 77 that he's come to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins John the Baptist will tell people about a greater sacrifice how does John first introduce Jesus behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world

Zechariah has been a priest he's killed a lot of animals in his life year in year out people bring him animals and he kills them and he throws blood everywhere it just seems to go round and round and round and round and yet Zechariah says finally finally a son will come finally there will be a great high priest who himself will get onto the altar and be a once time sacrifice for all that sins will be forgiven that the debt that we have accrued by consistently falling short of God will finally be wiped clean as it's paid for by another in the

Lord Jesus we have categorically failed we are absolutely bankrupt because of our sin and Zechariah says now in Jesus there's forgiveness now in this one who is to come into the world there is hope and reconciliation as debt has been paid in full we are up sin creek without a paddle and the waterfall of death is lurking downstream and we are careering towards it and the only hope we have is this son whom Zechariah sings about the birth of this greater son means that our cosmic treason performed against a holy God can be wiped clean by the mercy of a benevolent and gracious God who would give his son for us now Zechariah sings at the top of his lungs his distracted lullaby saying that in Jesus there is forgiveness forgiveness to all who will come and turn from that sin and to

Christ and then lastly we have the dawning of a new day these last two verses are incredible 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 finally Zechariah brings home his distracted lullaby by singing of a new dawn he sings of a heaven filled sunrise that will never set as the sun of righteousness rises to shine life giving light to all who walk in darkness he says it's Jesus for whom Isaiah 9 is fulfilled saying Psalm 23 even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death I'm there and he's saying that is Jesus he's pulling all these old testament images of darkness and saying that in

Jesus the new sun has risen and it's totally obliterated though Zechariah knows that the coming of Emmanuel is the dawning of hope the birth of Jesus is the heralding of eternal hope to mortal humanity and I love this phrase to guide our feet into the path of peace you get to Isaiah 59 one of the lesser known songs in Isaiah and Isaiah spends the first 15 verses just categorically listing all the ways that humanity has fallen short he says things like their hands have been defiled with blood their fingers with iniquity their lips are overflowing with lies their tongues muttered wickedness justice honesty are absent from them Isaiah writes their feet run to evil and they are swift to shed innocent blood their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity desolation and destruction of their highways the last thing he says in

[26 : 18] Isaiah 59 the way of peace they do not know and there is no justice in their path they have made their roads crooked no one who treads on them knows peace Isaiah writes they don't know the way of peace best thing about Isaiah 59 is that from verse 16 to the end of the chapter it's like God says I'm coming down to do something about that it's like he's getting suited up to do something himself he talks about putting on a breastplate and a helmet he talks about coming as a warrior king to fight for his people and he says if they don't know the way of peace I'm going to come down and show them I'm going to come down and give them the ability to walk in my ways finishes by saying that a redeemer will come to Zion to those in Jacob who turn from transgression it's an incredible verse and Zechariah says I'm going to piece all this together in Jesus a sun will rise in Jesus death will be banished in Jesus those who don't know

God and sit in darkness will finally know God for themselves and they will finally be able to walk in my ways as in my son my spirit is poured out Zechariah sings a distracted lullaby as his gaze is filled with Messiah as his mind is flooded with Jesus the warrior king who comes to fight for his people and usher in God's perfect inaugurated kingdom of promise Zechariah is in essence just singing the words that the apostle Paul would pen to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 he says for no matter how many promises God has made they are yes in Christ and so through him the amen is spoken by us to the glory of God Paul is saying that the whole Old Testament is about Jesus Zechariah is saying the whole Old Testament is about Jesus Zechariah sings of Jesus our redeemer our promised Messiah our deliverer our forgiveness and the eternal sunrise of our new day

Jesus our everything the one who like Zechariah is to be the distraction of all of our lives let me pray Father God thank you for this great song Father thank you for this great song that focuses our minds on Jesus Father thank you for this great song that centres all of the Old Testament on Jesus Father thank you that this song shows off Jesus in all of his glory the one who completed

redemption the one who forgives us of sins the one that you promised of long ago and now at Christmas we celebrate that he's finally come and Father I thank you that because of him we can live in the dawn of new day of Messiah a day where death has lost its sting a day where sin no longer rules and a day where Christ can truly be our all in all so Father bless these things to us Father distract our minds this Christmas with things of your son and that we might cling to him and love him and serve him in righteousness and holiness the very thing that he's freed us to do Father thank you for Jesus and may we love him more and serve him most amen I will Bob take him do anything never he I will take him to see him a them inquez he eu