

Sunday, December 11, 2022 | Go Tell It on the Mountain

Week 4 | Luke 1:57-80 | "God's Loving Correction"

Towards the end of November, we started our Luke study two weeks ago by kicking off the series "Go Tell It on the Mountain." And during that message, we unpacked the four things Luke wanted his audience to know. Firstly, Luke was among many who had written about Jesus' life. Secondly, though he was not an eyewitness, he was close friends with those who were. Thirdly, he took all he had heard and placed the facts of Jesus' life in order. And, lastly, he wrote all that he wrote because he wanted to give his reader, Theophilus, certainty about the things he had been taught. And the takeaway for us was that we are to see ourselves as Theophilus. In other words, we are to imagine that Luke is writing to us and that, like Theophilus, we are to share the Gospel with others.

Two weeks ago, we moved to the story of an elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. We learned through their life that God will always keep his promises. No matter if we are cynical and slow to believe, like Zechariah, or we're disgraced, like Elizabeth, the Lord will stay true to his word, and for those who believe, he will even redeem his people.

Last week, we were introduced to the mother of Jesus, Mary. Through her example, we learned that God's grace is unmerited, he blesses those who believe in his promises, and those blessings reverse the believer's fortunes. And the natural outcome for those who are the recipients of God's unmerited favor is worship. In other words, they'll magnify the Lord.

Today, we'll return to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. And not only will their baby boy be born, but ol' Zechariah will get his voice back. For nine months, that priest hadn't said a word. He'd remained silent, contemplating his lack of faith (cf. Lu. 1:18-23). But God will give Zechariah another chance. And so, not willing to make the same mistake twice, we'll hear a recovering cynic sing a song of faith. Once his heart had been gripped by disbelief; now, his tongue would be loosed in a prophetic melody praising the wondrous works of God. Quite literally, Zechariah's tune will change. The dissonant tones of doubt and cynicism will be drowned out by the harmonic hues of belief and idealism. But how does such a drastic change take place? It is the result of a loving God chastening his son.

READ: Luke 1:57-80 (ESV)

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.

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 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, 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 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.

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.

Notice how faith does **three** things for our recovering cynic, Zechariah:

i. A declaration of faith unties a cynic’s tongue (vs. 57-66).

The change in tense from Elizabeth's "he shall be called John" to Zechariah's "His name is John" is significant.¹ It was as if Zechariah was saying, "The boy already has a name! It's already been decided! Listen to the woman; it's John!" Nine months of being unable to speak taught this old

¹ Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 168.

priest that obedience to God is best when done immediately and emphatically. And just as Zechariah responded without hesitation, his speech was returned to him in like fashion.

God's principles are often at odds with our cultural norms.

Elizabeth and Zechariah naming their son "John" was a diversion from what was expected (Lu. 1:59-63), and the only reason they did so was that they wanted to be obedient to God (Lu. 1:13). Later, Jesus will give his now famous Beatitudes which is, if anything, a subversion of the shared beliefs of our world—i.e., it is not the rich who are blessed but the poor, it's the mourners who have God's favor, not those who rejoice, etc. (Lu. 6:20-23; cf. Matt. 5:1-12).

Thus, it seems that while Christians should never be militaristic towards our neighbors, we will, nevertheless, live a life that is at odds with this world's trends. Here are some examples of where Christians ought to run counter-cultural:

The world says, "I determine my identity." The Word says, "I am made in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26-28).

The world says, "Marriage is for any two individuals." The Word says, "Marriage is for one man and one woman" (Gen. 2:24).

The world says, "Work every chance you get." The Word says, "Take time to rest" (Ex. 20:8-10).

The world says, "Only the strong survive." The Word says, "All life is sacred" (Ex. 20:13).

The world says, "Do what makes you happy." The Word says, "Do what makes God happy" (Deut. 6:4-9).

The world says, "Parents are irrelevant." The Word says, "Parents are indispensable" (Pro. 1:8-9).

The world says, "Punch them in the face." The Word says, "Turn the other cheek" (Mat. 5:38-48).

The world says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." The Word says, "He who has treasures in heaven wins" (Matt. 6:19-21).

The world says, "Find yourself." The Word says, "Lose yourself" (Matt. 10:39).

The world says, "Follow your heart." The Word says, "Follow me" (Matt. 16:24-26).

The world says, "Remember how they hurt you." The Word says, "Remember to forgive them" (Mat. 18:22).

The world says, "Love yourself." The Word says, "Love others as yourself" (cf. Mar. 12:31).

The world says, "Fear what they'll do to you." The Word says, "Fear what God will do to you" (Lu. 12:5).

The world says, "Obey the powers who reign." The Word says, "Obey the Power who reigns supreme" (Ac. 5:29).

The world says, "Get more." The Word says, "Give more" (Ac. 20:35).

The world says, "You're enough." The Word says, "You fall short" (Rom. 3:23).

The world says, "Vengeance is sweet." The Word says, "Vengeance is God's" (Rom. 12:19).

The world says, "Look out for yourself." The Word says, "Look out for others" (Phil. 2:4-8).

The world says, "Accept me for who I am. Don't change me." The Word says, "I am accepted as I am. God change me" (1 Thess. 4:1-8).

The world says, "Godliness make us rich in this life." The Word says, "Godliness makes us content in this life" (1 Tim. 6:3-10).

The world says, "Sex is for everyone." The Word says, "Sex is for a husband and wife" (Heb. 13:4).

Interestingly, Paul addresses the tension that exists between compliance with the world versus conversion by the Spirit when he said in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Needless to say, this moment was charged with emotions. We're told the crowds "rejoiced" with Elizabeth at the birth of her son. Yet they were also perplexed at the choice of his name. They were then even further perplexed and in wonderment when Zechariah confirmed that his son would be called "John." To top it all off, their hearts were finally gripped by fear when that old priest began to speak for the first time in months! And all of this led them to talk about what they say and to speculate about "What sort of child will John be?" This would be a moment they would not soon forget. Imagine later in life, when John would come preaching, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," how all that proceeded those words—Zechariah's voice being restored and Elizabeth's barrenness being reversed—ensured that his

message about the coming Lord would not be ignored. Finally, the people would get the answer to their question, "What sort of child will this be?" Doubtless, the answer to that question will come later as John grows. However, that question also sets up Zechariah to praise the Lord. In other words, the Benedictus answers, "What sort of child will this be?"

ii. A declaration of faith leads a cynic to praise God for what he has done (vs. 67-75).

Zechariah's song can be divided into two halves, with the first half characterized by past tense verbs—i.e., "he has visited... [he has] redeemed...has raised up..."—and the second half characterized by present tense verbs—i.e., "And you, child, will be...for you will go before the Lord..."

When Zechariah's song is oriented in the past tense, he primarily deals with how God has already moved to bless Israel. What is curious, however, is that his song does not seem to deal with distant events but something that's only just transpired so that it can barely even be called the past. He prompts his recollection by saying that God has "visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation..." The flow of thought led to this idea of a "horn of salvation," which is both a way to refer to a ruler—i.e., Messiah—and a way to indicate his strength—i.e., strong like that of a horn. It seems then that this old priest is thinking of someone specific. And, doubtless, he is referring to Mary and her unborn child. After all, Mary had spent three months in his house. He had come to learn, just as his wife, that Mary was the vessel by which God would visit his people.

This visitation, as Zechariah explains, was something spoken about by the "holy prophets from of old." And its effect on the Israelites is that they would be "saved from [their] enemies, from the hand of all who hate them..." This reference to "enemies" would likely imply the Romans; however, he extrapolates further by saying "all who hate them" suggests more than a particular group. Regardless, Zechariah's point is that they will be saved from all those who would do them harm, and this act of salvation is, as he describes it, an act of "mercy" and remembrance of God. It is not that the Jews deserve God's salvation. Salvation is, and always will be, motivated by God.

Ultimately, the goal of God's visitation is not only to deliver the Israelites from their enemies, and it is not only proof of God's mercy, but the purpose for why the Messiah has come is so that his people "might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." God's people, past, present, and future, are saved so that they might serve. Not out of obligation or compulsion but appreciation and compassion. What reason do we have not to serve God when he has done so much for us?

iii. A declaration of faith leads a cynic to praise God for what he will do (vs. 76-79).

Zechariah transitions from past tense to present tense verbs when he says, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord." How amazing that his son, John, would be instrumental in the advent of the Savior? He will not be some bystander but the very "prophet of the Most High" who will go before the Lord, preparing his way by giving "knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." The people would not know that salvation had come and that they could be forgiven of their sins without John. Zechariah explains that this "tender mercy of God" will cause the very "sunrise" to visit humanity. And just as the rising of the Son gives "light to those who sit in darkness," so will this particular light give to those who sit "in the shadow of death." And this light, Zechariah explains, will ultimately "guide our feet into the way of peace." And given his comments above (vs. 71), we can assume that Zechariah refers to peace from enemies. However, given that this second half of the song deals with the "forgiveness of their sins" (vs. 77), this "peace" is also a ceasefire between them and God. No longer will they be separated and at odds with God; they will be reconciled at once to the Lord through this coming Messiah whom John prepares the way for.

Zechariah's phrasing throughout the second half of his song our expectations that the Israelites would accept John and, by extension, the One he proceeded. Interestingly, there is no hint of the drama that would unfold later. As we know, while many will welcome the Messiah, there will be significant opposition to him, and not from some foreign power, but from his own house. But, as they say, that is for another day. At this point, Zechariah is hopeful about what his child means for his people. The long-promised Messiah has finally come, and his son, John, will be the Lord's herald, preparing the people so that they are ready to welcome their King.

So, what's the takeaway?

Even the cynic can be made to sing of faith when the Lord lovingly corrects his unbelief.

It is hard to know who exactly Theophilus was. But, considering that Luke wrote this account of Jesus' life to give him "certainty concerning the things [he] have been taught" (1:4), it is perhaps possible that Theophilus, like Zechariah, had grown cynical about the things he had been taught. Maybe Luke's friend needed his faith to be reassured precisely because it had begun to waver. If so, we hear, in the subtext of Zechariah's story, the gentle and loving admonishment from Luke to his reader, "I know your faith has grown thin. I know you've faithfully walked with the Lord these many years and you're wondering if God's salvation has

indeed come. Take heart. The dawn is upon us. The Son has come. Here. Listen to the words of old cynical priest who had been chastened and restored by God."

Although old and well-seasoned, Zechariah still had much to learn about faith. And like a patient father, God lovingly rebuked Zechariah for his lack of faith. God was longsuffering and willing to give that old priest a second chance. And through God's tender mercies in sending his Son and silencing Zechariah, a cynic turned into a worship leader. This demonstrates that the Lord's chastisement is for our good and is proof of his love.

READ: Hebrews 12:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The Lord's correction is never pleasant, but it is needed if we are to walk in his ways. And, most importantly, someone under the chastisement of the Lord can rest assured that they are the children of the Lord. Jesus will later explain to a church who had lost their way in Rev. 3:19, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." God's loving reproof and discipline are for our good, dear Christian. And ultimately, it is far better that we be corrected than left alone to our own devices. To sin without thought of being corrected is a scary place to be. This is why, be wary, my friend, if you can sin without feeling convicted. If so, that is proof that you are not a part of the family of God.

So, what's the takeaway?

Even the cynic can be made to sing of faith when the Lord lovingly corrects his unbelief.

Video Description

Go Tell It on the Mountain | Week 4 | “God’s Loving Correction”

TEXT: Luke 1:57-80

Today, we'll return to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. And not only will their baby boy be born, but ol' Zechariah will get his voice back. For nine months, that priest hadn't said a word. He'd remained silent, contemplating his lack of faith (cf. Lu. 1:18-23). But God will give Zechariah another chance. And so, not willing to make the same mistake twice, we'll hear a recovering cynic sing a song of faith. Once his heart had been gripped by disbelief; now, his tongue would be loosed in a prophetic melody praising the wondrous works of God. Quite literally, Zechariah's tune will change. The dissonate tones of doubt and cynicism will be drowned out by the harmonic hues of belief and idealism. But how does such a drastic change take place? It is the result of a loving God chastening his son.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: