

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

⁵⁷Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son^a. ⁵⁸Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her^b; and they were rejoicing with her^c.

⁵⁹And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child^d, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father^e. ⁶⁰But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John^f.” ⁶¹And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name^g.” ⁶²And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called^h.

^a 1:57 **the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.** Children, representing a vulnerable class, play a prominent role in Luke. Aside from giving an account of the births of John and Jesus, Luke records:

- The childhood of Jesus (2:41-52).
- The raising of the daughter of Jairus (8:40-56).
- The deliverance of a demon-possessed boy (9:37-43).
- Jesus' comparison of prayer to caring for children (11:11-13).

^b 1:58 **Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her.** How could they help but hear? The town of Hebron was certainly abuzz with news of the old woman having a baby, but that was not the whole story. Everyone knew who got credit for the blessing.

Notice also that this birth is called a mercy. I would have used the word *grace*, which would have been accurate. But what the locals heard from Zacharias and Elizabeth was that God was merciful. Sinners who are aware that they deserve the full vent of God's wrath count all of life's little blessings as merciful.

^c 1:58 **they were rejoicing with her.** This is Romans 12:15 (“Rejoice with those who rejoice”) and 1 Corinthians 13:6 (“[Love]...rejoices with the truth”) in living color. When you have the right kind of relationship with people their victories are yours. Nineteenth century Bible teacher J.C. Ryle called this “sympathy” a rare but powerful grace. He said, “it is one of those pins of the tabernacle which we must not leave in the wilderness.” He also added, “Our Lord was ready both to go to a marriage feast, and to weep at a grave. (John 2, John 11) Let us be ever ready to go and do likewise.”

^d 1:59 **on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child.** God commanded Abraham to circumcise all his male physical descendants (Genesis 17:12; 21:4). This was to be a sign of the covenant between Abraham and the Lord. Zacharias and Elizabeth were faithful to the commands of Scripture, as Matthew Henry points out, in the very city where Abraham circumcised Isaac.

^e 1:59 **they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.** Male children were named at their circumcision, like Isaac had been (Genesis 21:3-4). “They” refers to the priests. They must have thought they had authority to name the child even though his mother was right there. Zacharias, Jr. was logical since he was an old man with little chance of having another son.

^f 1:60 **his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.”** John means “gracious.” Gabriel had told Zacharias, who had certainly written this down for Elizabeth.

^g 1:61 **There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.** The priests questioned the name choice, blinded by their biases.

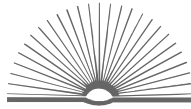
^h 1:62 **they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.** This may mean that Zacharias was deaf as well as mute.

The Gospel of Luke
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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⁶³ And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John^a.” And they were all astonished^b. ⁶⁴ And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God^c. ⁶⁵ Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea^d. ⁶⁶ All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be^e?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him^{f,9}.

^a 1:63 **he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.”** Since paper and pencils were not in use in the first century, Zacharias may have been writing with a stylus on a piece of wood covered with beeswax.

^b 1:63 **they were all astonished.** Why do you think they were astonished? Probably because this was no ordinary baby. Here was one more unusual event surrounding the birth of this child. The couple was old. An angel predicted the conception and birth in the temple’s holy place. A nine-month judgment on the unbelieving father had ensued. Now the mother takes on the other priests about naming the child “Gracious” and the father agrees.

^c 1:64 **at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.** Zacharias had had nine months to think about the unbelief displayed in his last words. He did not make the same mistake now. Paul put sins of the flesh in the same category with sins of the tongue when he said:

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*
Ephesians 5:3-4

Remember what your mother taught you about not being able to say anything good? The best “good” you can say is to utter words that exalt your God. This statement takes us back to Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp of Israel and forward to the mighty deeds of God proclaimed on Pentecost.

^d 1:65 **Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.** When God shows Himself in judgment or in working wonders it changes the way people look at themselves. For instance, Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead by God’s hand and Luke records:

And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. Acts 5:11

^e 1:66 **All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be?”** Sometimes the implications of events in our lives are so dramatic that our little minds need time to process the full implications.

^f 1:66 **For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.** The people here could see that an old couple had been given a child and that all the circumstances from conception to his name indicated that his mission would be important. This blessing was similar to the way God used David after his anointing by Samuel. The slaying of Goliath and the many other victories in David’s life can be explained by the repeated phrase “the Lord was with him.” Likewise the fiery preacher John.

⁹ 1:57-66 Evidence of the hand of the Lord is not when things turn out according to your dreams. Here is what you see:

1. God’s people are unified around the right things. There were times in the history of redemption when people were unified in their grumbling or in their disobedience. This is one of the pleasant times when the people were united in seeing God at work and praising Him for it.
2. God’s judgment is clear. God did not cease to work when He disciplined Zacharias. That was part of His work. We are blessed when we bear the marks of God’s discipline because it confirms that we are His. A congregation full of people who still sting from the memory of sin’s past consequences find the daily mercies of God that much sweeter.

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3. God's commands are obeyed. Zacharias and Elizabeth were believers. They were worshippers. They did not do what God commanded to get something from Him. They obeyed as the only legitimate response to His mercy.
 4. God's servants are humble. The big story in Hebron was God's mercy on the house of Zacharias and Elizabeth. The headlines in the Hebron Gazette that day would not have read "Local Couple Finally Gets What They Deserve." This is evidence that the couple saw things the way God wants us all to see things: His mercy always leaves us with far more good than we deserve.

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