

Luke Chapter 1 Part 2 – John Karmelich

1. In this lesson we cover the second half of Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Luke. To put it simply, the text focuses on Mary the mother of Jesus praising God for what He's about to do in her life. We also will read of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist praising God around the time of the birth of their son. In summary this whole lesson is about specific people praising God for what He's done, is doing and going to do in the world.
 - a) As I read the text a few times, I kept thinking about why we do praise God. Do we do it because say, we're in church and everyone else is doing it? Do we do it just because we're supposed to? Every so often it dawns on me that if we're going to be spending eternity in God's presence, we should get used to praising Him as I suspect we'll be doing that a lot of that in heaven.
 - b) With that said, let me give my lesson title: "Why do we praise God?" Yes of course it will tie well to the text of this lesson. At the same time, if we claim we are Christians, we need to understand why praise is important and talk a little about what praise of God really is.
 - c) To explain where we are in the chapter, it's a good idea to review a little where we last left off: The Gospel of Luke opens up by telling the story of how an angel named Gabriel was sent to Jerusalem to tell the father of John the Baptist that he'd soon have a son who will have the specific privilege of pointing the way to the Messiah. The term Messiah refers to a king who would rule the world forever. That father of John was named Zechariah. He was an old man. His wife was physically past the age of having children. Bottom line is God said they would have a male baby in their old age and they were to name him John. Zechariah does not believe the angel and to make it simple, Zechariah is told he won't be able to talk until around the time when this birth will occur.
 - i) All of that will lead to this chapter as we'll read of Zechariah's wife Elizabeth who as a pregnant woman will start to praise God when "that" Mary visits.
 - ii) The other key story in this chapter is the same angel pays a visit to Mary who is living about 75 miles away. The angel tells Mary that she has the unique privilege of being the mother of the Messiah. Yes, then much of this chapter is about Mary giving praise to God the Father for "God the Son" in her womb. In fact, she refers to her baby as her savior, which gives tells us she believed that her upcoming baby would somehow be her own savior, as well as the savior of the Israelite nation.
2. OK John, most of us reading this are veteran Christians who are already familiar with stories that are surrounding the birth of Jesus. Why should we study these verses, and don't just say because they are in the bible. The answer is not to learn ancient history, but to learn a little about why we do praise God, how we should praise Him and why we should make praise an important part of our lives. As I said earlier, I'm convinced we're going to be spending a lot of time when we get to heaven praising God so we might as well get started here and now. Even if that doesn't motivate us to praise Him, we should learn to do it, as it is beneficial for our lives here and now. We don't just praise God to lead others closer to Him. We should praise God out of gratitude for what He is doing in our lives. To say it another way, gratitude and happiness are linked. If we want to be happy in life, we have to be grateful for what God has done for us, in good and especially in bad times. It's about perspective and having the right perspective about whatever situation we are in at the present moment. Praise to God should be genuine and heart felt. The way we express it is not as important as whether or not we are sincere in our gratitude to Him. In other words, we do not have to be perfect in our theology, just truly grateful for what He has done in our lives.
 - a) With that long sermon out of my system, we're going to focus in this lesson on how and why how Mary and the parents of John the Baptist all praise God. The issue is what we can learn from this praise fest. With that said, we should be ready to start singing.

3. Chapter 1, Verse 39: At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.
- a) To begin the story, let's remember that Mary was probably about 14 years old, when this story takes place. Imagine being a young girl in a small town and getting a visit from an angel telling you that you'll be the mother of the Messiah. One of the last things that the angel told her (as I stated in the previous lesson) is that this angel also told her that her older cousin Elizabeth about the fact that she was already six months pregnant.
 - b) The point is Mary now had someone she knew who she could talk to about the fact she is or is about to be impregnated by God Himself. Let's face it; if an angel of God just told us about a miracle that was about to take place, we would want to share that with someone. Mary's immediate family probably would not believe that story and would think that she was sleeping around with someone and that's why she was pregnant. However, the angel told her of someone else she knew who hopefully would believe the story. Therefore, this verse says she hurried to travel what is about a 75-mile journey from where Mary lived to where her cousin Elizabeth lived.
 - c) It's sort of fun to think about how this played out. Did she just ask her parents, mind if I borrow the family donkey for a bit while I travel a long way away to visit my cousin? It's sort of like our kids asking to borrow the car for a trip. The bottom line is the parents probably didn't understand why she wanted to make this trip, but they agreed to let her go. They probably figured Zechariah and Elizabeth are an older couple who would take good care of her while she was gone. You can imagine the parents' shock when she came told them the story of the angels' visit. Even if she kept her mouth shut about that angelic event, the fact that she came back pregnant would require a very difficult explanation.
 - d) OK enough background. Time for the "praise fest" to begin, starting with the next verses.
4. Verse 41: When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"
- a) Again, it's fun to think about how this played out. You have to remember that Mary can't call Elizabeth ahead of time and say she's coming. They couldn't even send a letter. Mary just had to show up on her doorstep and see what happened.
 - b) Now think about this whole scene from Elizabeth's perspective. She had to be convinced that her husband was visited by angel simply by the fact she was pregnant. Elizabeth has been pregnant now for six months (Verse 26) and living with a husband who can't talk (as stated in Verse 20). Now she hears Mary at the door. Elizabeth's first words were not, "Hi Mary, what a wonderful surprise. Are your parents here too?" Instead, her first words are (Verse 42) "how Mary is blessed among women and blessed is the child you will bear!"
 - i) If that isn't a strange enough greeting by itself, Elizabeth then refers to Mary as the mother of my (Elizabeth's) Lord in Verse 43. One has to understand that the word "Lord" means one who is in charge of one's life. It's amazing to consider how much Elizabeth understood without any visit herself from an angel.
 - ii) With that said, Elizabeth then said that the reason for this greeting is because of the baby inside of her leaping for joy. Any woman who's ever been pregnant can relate to the idea of a baby reacting to certain things. By the way, if one has any doubts about how God feels about abortion, here is a pre-born baby "jumping for joy" and that alone speaks of the wonder of human life while still in the womb.
 - c) Elizabeth's final greeting words to Mary that she will be blessed if she believes what God has said to her. Stop and think about all of this from Mary's perspective. Mary hasn't said a word yet about her own angel meeting and this is the greeting she gets from Elizabeth.

- d) Before I go any further, I need to talk a little about the Holy Spirit and His role involved in the topic of praising God. First, let me talk about the Holy Spirit from an Old Testament perspective. The commonly held idea was that the Spirit of God (same concept) can come and go as He pleases. In other words, it was the Spirit of God that inspired the writers of the bible to write what they have written. At the same time, the Spirit was something that can come and go whenever He pleases. Let me give an example: Did King David or the apostle Paul write things not in the bible? Most likely. However, those other things were not God inspired and not preserved for all of history to study.
- i) There is one prayer in the Old Testament that I'm convinced Christians can't pray. It is in Psalm 51:11 when David (the author) asks God not to take His Holy Spirit away from David. Let me rephrase that. We as believing Christians can say those exact words, but I don't believe the Holy Spirit can abandon who He is designed to protect. I base that statement on John 14:18 where Jesus says He will not leave us as orphans. The idea is that the Spirit protects those who believe in Jesus.
 - ii) Let me give an illustration that may help here: A habit I've had for a long time is when I sit down to read my bible I ask the Holy Spirit to guide what I read. I don't want my reading time to just be a time of casual reading. I want God to inspire me as I read, and I silently invite Him to my reading. The Holy Spirit has traditionally been described as a gentleman. That means He won't go where he's not invited.
 - a) Think about it this way. When we do something we know is not pleasing to God, we get a feeling it is wrong. That's the Holy Spirit guiding us. You can tell you are one of Gods due to that sensation you get when you or I do something we can sense is wrong or simply not God's will for our lives.
 - iii) Does this mean I can throw away my bible and just trust God's Spirit to guide me? Hardly. In fact it is the study of His word that teaches us what is His will for our lives at any given moment. We still have to learn right from wrong and based on that actual knowledge then the Holy Spirit can guide us as He desires we go.
 - iv) The reason the bible doesn't talk a lot about the Holy Spirit is because His job is to get us to focus on Jesus and God the Father and not Himself. Kind of like the book of Luke has almost no mention of the author himself, the Spirit of God wants us to focus on God and not Himself. That is why there is not a lot of text about Him in the bible to begin with.
- e) OK, nice lecture on the Holy Spirit. What does any of this have to do with the Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Luke? My point is that the Christian "church" hasn't started yet. We are reading of the Holy Spirit inspiring both Elizabeth and John the Baptist who is not even born yet speaking "In the Spirit".
- i) OK then, how do I know if and when I'm speaking in "the spirit" to God? First of all, it's not based on the style of words we use. We don't have to use King James English to praise God. The correct answer is that we are praising God because it is heart felt. It's kind of like giving it one's all, whatever one's all is at that time.
 - ii) Think of it this way: When the government tells us we owe say \$1,000 in taxes and we try telling the government, I only have \$10 on me, so you'll have to accept that. Then watch what happens. My point is you can't give the government "leftovers". Why would God expect anything less? No I'm not talking about how much we do donate to our church. I'm talking about praising God, like we mean it and nothing less is what He deserves.
 - a) To put it another way, we may not have the correct knowledge of theology to praise God the same way Elizabeth did in this prayer. However, what God is interested in is praising Him like we mean it. So why praise Him? Does God get anything out of it? No. We praise Him to get our perspective right about our world and remind ourselves who is really in control of it.

- f) Let me end this lecture on the Holy Spirit and praise to remind us why we should praise Him. Remember why God wants us to live a certain way: It's not to get more saved. It's to be a good witness for Him. God wants us to use our lives to make a difference for Him in this world. Praising Him either privately or in a group setting gets our focus upon Him and reminds us who's really in charge of our lives. Think of praise as a way of getting our focus upon God so that He can guide our lives for His glory. With all of that talk of praise out of my system, let's get back to Elizabeth and her praise of God.
- g) Elizabeth stated that Mary is blessed "among" women. It doesn't mean she is not in need of Savior herself. It just means she is blessed because she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus. I can't accept the Roman Catholic notion of Mary as a "co-redeemer". There is not any hint of that anywhere in the Scripture. If anything, we'll read in a few verses of Mary herself stating that the baby is her Savior. That means that Mary understood the idea that she is a sinful person herself. However, I'm jumping ahead of the text here.
- h) The next thing Elizabeth does is she blesses the child (Jesus) herself. That's just a way of praising Jesus to realize that this baby to be is something special. Think of it as Elizabeth's way of giving praise to Jesus even before He was born.
 - i) Remember that Elizabeth most likely had no idea that Mary was going to even show up at her doorstep one day. When Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, she refers to Mary as the "mother of my Lord". It's a realization of who is really in charge over one's life.
- i) Let me put it this way: Did Elizabeth realize that Jesus would die for her sins? Probably not. The Old Testament concept of the Messiah would be like King David, who would conquer all of Israel's enemies and be in charge of one's life the same way any king is in charge of all people living under that king. Still, I suspect that Elizabeth got the idea of the Messiah ruling forever, and that is why the greeting to Mary is what it is.
- j) Finally, after making the statement that her baby leaped for joy, she declares a final word of blessing that anyone who believes what the Lord (God) will accomplish is blessed. It's a way of being a public witness for Jesus through praise, by stating in effect, "Blessed is he or she who believes what will be accomplished through Jesus".
 - i) Let me state what may be obvious for most knowledgeable Christians, if Jesus did not rule as a king over Israel, did He fulfill what was promised as stated here by Elizabeth? That's why I believe in a literal Jesus returning to rule the world from Israel one day. Many Christians hold a view called "Amillennialism". That word means that Jesus rules from heaven and there is no literal ruling of Jesus as a king from Jerusalem. To state this another way, that view is that God is finished with Israel as a nation. The fact that Israel happens to exist today after 2,000 years is a coincidence and has no biblical purpose. To state what I hope is obvious, I don't hold that view. In fact when God told Mary (in the last lesson) that Jesus would rule from David's throne, (See Verse 32) that promise has not been fulfilled as his throne was not in heaven, but in Jerusalem.
- k) To sum this all up, Elizabeth greeted Mary with a few verses of praise to God, because the Holy Spirit was influencing Elizabeth at that moment in time. I also believe that Mary did write that down or remembered it vividly. That's why when Luke interviewed Mary a lot later, these words were recorded in the bible for all of history to study.
- l) All of this leads to Mary's response. As one reads the next set of verses, know that bible scholars have nicknamed Mary's response, "The song of Mary" or "The Magnificent" as she praises Jesus. The word "magnificent" is based on the Latin translation and is not in the text we are about to read. As I like to put it, praise is contagious. Elizabeth started to praise God, and Mary is about to say in effect, "Let me join you in praise to God. Watch me get on a roll as the Holy Spirit will now guide this young girl to say a few good words herself." With that said, let's read what Mary actually said here.

5. Verse 46: And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
- a) Stop and think about how well you knew about the bible at age of say 13-15. Did you get the idea of Jesus as "Lord" or just God the Father as one's Savior? For what it's worth, this little speech by Mary that runs for about 10 verses is full of Old Testament references to other bible text. It's kind of like Mary saying, "I may not know my bible as well as others do, but let me just praise God based on what I do know and praise Him like I mean it!"
 - i) That's the type of praise God is looking for: We don't have to be bible experts in order to praise Him, just praise Him based on what we do know and how we do believe He can work in our lives both on the grand scale and our individual lives.
 - b) Did Mary get the idea that Jesus would die for her sins? Probably not. Whatever she did know about the Messiah was probably based on whatever her parents taught here which is the idea that a king would rule over them forever. She probably expected a king like David who would overthrow Rome and set up Israel as a kingdom again. However, she did get the idea that she needed to be saved. This comes back to the argument made by some Roman Catholics that Mary is a "co-redeemer": If that's true, why does she refer to Jesus as her Savior? She needs a savior the same way you and I need one.
 - c) With that said, Mary is just starting to get on a roll praising God here. Let's see what else we can learn about Mary based on what she says in the next few verses.
6. Verse 48: for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,
- a) There is a pattern to Mary's praise that I want you to notice. First she just praises God for who He is in Verse 46. Mary refers to God as both her Lord and her savior in that verse. If you can't think of anything else to praise God, just state those two. As I love to state, to be one's Lord just means that we acknowledge God is being in charge of our lives. To be our savior means that we accept the idea He saved us from our sins. With that said, here is this young girl thanking God that He has picked her to be the mother of The Messiah. Mary realizes all generations will consider her blessed for that role.
 - i) OK, this is all interesting. What does it have to do me? Well, for starters, any one of us can praise God for being our Lord and Savior. While we can't praise God for having the privilege of bring Jesus into this world, we can praise God for having the privilege of sharing Jesus with others. We too, like Mary are blessed beyond our ability to comprehend. If you have doubts about that, read Ephesians 1:3 that states, "who has blessed us...with every spiritual blessing in Christ." What does that mean? It means that whatever spiritual gifts God will give Mary in heaven, we too get that same gift. If you think you are nothing special consider what it means to have "every spiritual blessing".
 - b) Let me put all of this theology another way: Suppose we're having a really bad day and don't feel like praising God right now. When I get like that, my wife will tell me to state 10 things I am grateful for at the moment. If you can't think of any thing, start with being grateful that God has chosen us to have every spiritual blessing one can imagine. If one considers that eternal benefit, life's problems don't seem so bad in comparison. Yes we still may have bills to pay and this life to deal with, but no matter what, we are still saved and get to spend eternity with God. What problem can compare to that blessing?
 - c) While we're in the mood for giving God thanks, let's get back to Mary's "praise fest".
7. Verse 49: for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name.
- a) Remember that this is a 13-15 year old girl speaking. Her education was limited. Mary comes from a simple, rural background. Notice the phrase "has done". Yes it can refer to the visit from the angel. However, I think this is also Mary's attitude about her life. She's grateful for what she has in life and grateful that she has been chosen for eternal salvation. Of course, she doesn't realize what life has ahead for as the mother of Jesus, but she's only focused on gratitude, and that's a good lesson for all of us.

8. Verse 50: His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
- a) When we start praising God, it often helps to think just beyond ourselves. In other words, it is not just us who are being blessed by God but anyone and everyone who trusts in Him in history. If Mary is praising God by herself, why extend the scope of that prayer for all people? Sometimes praise is about seeing the big picture. It is that reminder we all need every now and then that the world does not revolve around me. That we each fit into the bigger picture of the world in effect revolving around God and His desire for our world. On that thought, let's move on to the next verse of praise.
9. Verse 51: He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
- a) The focus in these three verses is on the entire world, not just the Israelites. To explain the verses here, it is helpful to remember that God the Father is not an old man sitting in a big chair somewhere. My point is Mary is not being literal when she says in Verse 51 that He does mighty things with His arm. It is acceptable to use word pictures of God that we can relate to in order to praise Him. We don't always have to be literal. We should just praise Him in sincerity and do our best to describe what He is doing in our world.
 - b) As I stated earlier in the lesson, praise and gratitude go hand in hand. In these verses, we read of Mary realizing that those who oppose God's will, never win in the end. They may have power in this world for a while, but they still die like everyone else. I recently heard a story about Joseph Stalin, the president of Russia in World War II, who killed millions of his own people in order to maintain his power. His daughter stated at his death how that he shook his fist at God, and then died. My point is death wins for those who oppose His will and death loses for those of us who spend eternity in His presence. In effect, that is what we read Mary praying in these verses. At the end of the life, those who only cared about themselves leave this world "empty" and those who care about pleasing God will win for all of eternity.
 - c) Let me describe Mary's praise of God another way. Do you think Mary had problems in life? At the least she was living the life of a poor farm girl, probably engaged to a man she didn't know well. Also the Romans oppressed the Israelites at that time. My point is she could just complain about how hard her life was, or she could focus on God's blessing on her life. You want a reason to praise God? At the least it gets us in a better mood than if we just sit around our homes and focus all day on our problems.
 - d) With that said, Mary has a few more verses to go here.
10. Verse 54: He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."
- a) Mary ends this prayer by limiting the scope of her prayer from the whole world down to the Israelites. We tend to forget that Mary was Jewish. She is focusing her prayer here on anyone and everyone who is Jewish to say in effect, God has called out a group of people with the purpose of being a witness for Him.
 - b) Remember that Mary was pregnant with who she assumed would be the one who would overthrow Rome. Again, the Jewish concept of the Messiah was one who would rule over the world forever from Jerusalem. That's why the angel told her (Verse 32) that her baby would have the throne of Mary's ancestor David. That's why I literally hold the view that Jesus will return one day and literally rule the world from Jerusalem. If you ever wonder why most of the world is so dead-set against a Jewish country existing today in Israel, one can sort of see the spiritual war behind that idea just based on the concept of Jesus coming back to rule the world one day from that location.
 - c) Meanwhile, Mary is praising God because even as a young teenager, Mary got the idea of God being merciful to any and all Israelites who trust in God. I believe that would apply to Christians as well as we are trusting in that "Jewish God" to guide our lives.

11. Verse 56: Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.
- a) We interrupt this "praise fest" for about a half dozen verses to say what is occurring at this time while the main characters in this chapter are praising God. The simple point is that Mary stayed with her older cousin Elizabeth until the time her baby (John the Baptist) was actually born. Was she required to stay that long? No, but that is how Luke was able to know all of these details. Besides since they both had visits from angels they could relate to each other's lives. Besides that, with Elizabeth's husband being mute they could talk all day long without interruption.
12. Verse 57: When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.
- a) One has to remember that in that day and time, not every baby survived. Also given the fact that Elizabeth was old and now had a baby, it was celebration time as the baby lived and she had a baby boy. At this point the baby's father still couldn't speak. I'm sure with all the excitement the father Zachariah was pondering about the angel's promise that said in effect he would not be able to speak until the baby was born. Still, the couple had to be happy given the fact they probably prayed for many years for a child. Now in their old age, God did a miracle and provided them not only with a child, but with one who would have the Holy Spirit upon him from birth and have the privilege of leading people to the Messiah. Even though Zachariah couldn't talk, I picture him jumping up and down with excitement over the baby.
 - b) OK John, we know all of this history. What's the point? Praise of God is not just when we are trusting in promises for the future, but also in moments of happiness to give Him the credit for the happiness we have at that moment.
13. Verse 59: On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."⁶¹ They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."
- a) Before I talk about the verse itself, let me share with you why Jewish boys were always circumcised on the 8th day of their birth. First of all, doctors tell us that they don't feel it until the 10th day, so there is no pain involved. This ritual has been performed for many millenniums with no negative long-term consequences. Before my oldest daughter was born, my wife didn't tell me whether we were going to have a boy or girl. I figured it out, as she never brought up the topic of circumcision. Sorry, I drifted off topic. My point is simply that the 8th day is chosen to represent a "New Beginning". Just as God rested on the 7th day, so the 8th day represents a new beginning. To circumcise a baby represents his new life serving God, so the 8th day represents a new beginning in God's calendar.
 - i) By the way, if you take any of the names or titles for Jesus as written in the Greek language, every one of them has numerical values equally divisible by eight.
 - b) OK enough of all of that. Back to the verse: On that eighth day there was a gathering in the town for the circumcision. I suspect Zachariah's fellow priests showed up along with family and relatives. At that time the baby's name was officially recorded so it can be put in the Temple records. I'm sure the crowd assumed that Zachariah wanted to name the boy after himself. Since Zachariah couldn't talk, the officials in charge asked Elizabeth the name of the boy and she said, "John". Since she had no relatives by that name, the officials were wondering why she pick that name?
 - c) So what was Elizabeth going to say to this crowd? My husband who can't talk, was told by angel to give the baby that name? That would be tough for everyone to believe. All she could do was be insistent about it and effectively say, "His name is John, deal with it!"
 - d) I can't leave this section without bringing up a cute story about my second daughter when she was little. She asked me one day, "Dad is this your favorite bible verse, as it says his name is John?" I said no, but enjoyed the moment. I had to explain to her that my name is translated from the Croatian name "Ivo" which was my grandfather's name.

14. Verse 62: Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.
⁶³He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."
⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.
- a) These verses are the last break from the "praise-fest" to describe what is happening in this chapter. It's sort of a bible version of a band on stage is taking five while announcements are being made or the collection plate is being past. OK, enough of that, back to the text.
 - b) Notice in Verse 62 the phrase "they made signs to his father". If you recall, Zechariah can't talk. Most commentators speculate that he can't hear either. Either that or people thought he couldn't hear either because he was mute. Bottom line is some sort of sign language is used to ask Zechariah about his son's name. The writing tool was probably a board with candle wax on it. Bottom line, Zechariah wrote what is translated, "His name is John".
 - c) The way I visualize this miracle happening is the moment he wrote that, he realized that he could talk again and the punishment for doubting the angel had now ended.
 - d) I'm sure Zechariah spent a lot of time thinking about what he would say if and when he would ever talk again. Me, I'd be tempted to start with something like, "Honey, I've been quiet for 9-10 months now. Let me comment on some things you said, or I'd be tempted to talk about my encounter with the angel the way I remembered it. Instead, Zechariah is going to use this moment to offer up his own praise to God. It's as if he thought, if I ever get a chance to talk again, I'm going to use that first moment to show my gratitude to God for what he's done in my life and not waste my precious voice complaining about things I can't change.
 - e) Besides that Zechariah had a captive audience who came to watch the baby's circumcision ceremony. The crowd probably suspected that the boy would be special just by the fact this older couple gave birth to him, let alone the miracle of Zechariah speaking again.
 - f) Given all of that, Zechariah used this opportunity to preach about God and in effect praise Him not so much for given him his voice back, but to praise God for what He's about to do with bringing the Messiah into the world and be grateful for his own role in this.
 - g) If there is one thing I love to preach, is that our time is precious and we should use it to make a difference for God. Here is Zechariah, a man who lost his voice and now has it again. I suspect it dawned on him during that lost period of time how he hasn't used his voice to praise God enough and now he's not going to waste another moment. With that said, it's time to focus once again on praising God for the good not only that he has done in our world in the past, but for the good He's going to do in our future. Here goes:
15. Verse 67: His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:
- a) Let me comment on Zechariah being filled with the Holy Spirit, but stating something that Jesus says about John the Baptist much later in this gospel. (Luke 16:16.) Jesus point essentially is that in effect the "Old Testament ended with John the Baptist". What Jesus meant by that is that up until John, the purpose of prophesy was to point the way to the coming of Jesus as the promised Messiah. I bring that up here as all of sudden the Holy Spirit was upon Zechariah that wasn't a daily occurrence in the Old Testament. Then it was only given at times when people could correctly prophesy about God and His plans for our world.
 - b) My point is simply that we as Christians take the Holy Spirit for grant it that He can and does work in our world all the time. It wasn't like that before the Christian church came into existence. As I said earlier, next time you read your bible or even say, sing in church, quietly pray for the Holy Spirit to be a part of that experience so that together you or I can praise God for what He has done, is doing or will do in our lives as He has promised He will do in the bible. Then watch God work well in that situation.

16. Verse 68: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
- a) Notice where Zechariah starts his prayer. Remember this is a man who lost his voice probably about 10 months earlier. The first thing out of his mouth is not, "Thank God I can talk again, or let me tell you what really happened back at the temple". Instead he realizes God is in charge of all things and praises God for that fact. The first thing he says is praise to God of the Israelites who has come to redeem His people.
 - i) Stop and think of the history of Israel up to this point. It's been about 600 years since Israel was an independent nation. They were taken into captivity as two separate nations (The Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah) many hundreds of years ago. Now many Israelites are back in that land but as servants to the Babylonians, then the Greeks and now the Romans. They were taken into slavery for disobedience to God's desire for their lives.
 - ii) My point is despite all of that disobedience, God didn't give up on that nation as His promise of a redeemer (Messiah) was an unconditional promise made to King David roughly a thousand years earlier. Here was his wife Elizabeth and Mary, his cousin, both of whom were fairly trivial people even among this obscure area called Israel that was at that time just a small part of the Roman Empire. Yet in spite of all of that negative history of Israel over the last 1,000 years or so, God is still keeping His promise to King David that a descendant of his would be "THE" Messiah, an eternal king that would rule forever.
 - b) Notice that Zechariah's first words were on the fact he could talk again, nor even on the birth of his son John. Zechariah's first words were focuses on God Himself and the fact that the Messiah is now about to come into the world. Did Zechariah get the idea that Jesus would die for His sins? Probably not. Zechariah probably thought Jesus would lead a revolution to overthrow Rome and establish an eternal worldwide empire with Jerusalem as its center. That was the expectation of the Messiah. That's an unfulfilled aspect of what God promised that Jesus would do, which is why the bible spends a lot of time talking about His Second Coming to fulfill that aspect of the role of the Messiah.
 - c) Anyway, the point of these few verses is that Zechariah is taking his first change to speak again to praise God for what He promised King David a thousand years ago, that He'd do by bringing the Messiah into the world, and as predicted by Old Testament prophets long ago. The reason we know all of this is because I'm pretty positive Mary was there and she could tell this to Luke many years later so the world could know of the events of that day.
 - d) With that said, Zechariah is just getting warmed up in His praise to God. Let's read on:
17. Verse 71: salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us--
- a) As I stated a minute ago, I don't think Zechariah saw Jesus as someone who was going to die for his sins as much as he saw the Messiah as protecting Israel from those who don't want God to rule over them. In other words, he probably saw Jesus as someone who was going to overthrow the Romans from ruling over them. One has to imagine living a life where one is not in control of one's destiny. Most of the Roman world was slaves and I suspect that in effect the Israelites mostly fell into that category. There is a classical debate over whether or not the Jewish people would have accepted Jesus as their Messiah if he did successfully overthrow Rome from power. I'd guess the answer is probably yes, but they would still struggle with the idea of the Messiah being God Himself.
 - b) The point for you and me is that all of us have to deal with in one form or another of the injustice in our world. Having a world leader that rights the wrongs of our world is what the desire of having a Messiah is all about. In effect it is what we preach as Christians. It isn't just that Jesus died for our sins and God can eternally accept us. It is also that Jesus will return one day in effect to do what Verse 71 says He is going to do.

- c) Before I move on, let me ask the classic question, "It's now been 2,000 years. Why hasn't Jesus returned as He promised so long ago?" How can we Christians believe Jesus will return as it has been so long? The best answer is God wants as many people to be saved as possible before He returns. Let's put it this way: if Jesus had returned say 50 years ago, most of us would have the privilege of enjoying spending time with Him, praising Him for guiding our lives or even see from either earth or heaven the return when it happens. Still, just as the world had a beginning, it has to have an ending one-day, therefore there has to be a day of Jesus return. I suspect it is soon only because after 2,000 years Israel is now an independent country again. So, I too watch and see. Meanwhile, Zechariah's still praising God for what He is about to do with the Messiah coming.
18. Verse 72: to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,
- a) Notice that Zechariah is now about four verses into his prayer of praise, and yet not one word about either his voice coming back or even about John the Baptist. Zechariah has got his mind focused on what God is doing through the Promised Messiah and he's not going to stop preaching in effect about Jesus even though Jesus is not born yet.
- b) With that said, what does Zechariah mean by "showing mercy to our fathers?" After all, the ancestors of the Israelites are long dead. How is God showing them mercy here? The answer is the same way He's showing us mercy, by forgiving us of our sins. Think of it this way, the same way we look back at Jesus sacrifice as the payment of our sins, so the prophets in the Old Testament looked forward to that sacrifice for their sins. But didn't you just say Zechariah didn't comprehend that aspect of Jesus' role yet? Probably. The alternate view is when people care about the welfare of their children and grandchildren and want to see them have the opportunity to praise God as well. The point is God did show mercy to the Israelites despite their failure to keep God's laws and honor Him as God. To sum it up, God still sent the Messiah into the world as promised despite the sins of the Israelites.
- c) Consider this when we sin: How many of our sins did we commit after Jesus died on the cross? All of them. That's why I hold the view that as long as I'm trusting in Jesus for the complete payment of my sins, I can't lose my salvation by sinning too much. That's why the Gospel means "The Good News". Yes sin can cause us to lose our opportunities to be a good witness for God, but not our salvation. That alone is a reason to praise Him and in effect join Zechariah as he too is praising God here.
- d) That in effect is what Zechariah meant by the term "Holy covenant". It is that promise to King David a thousand years ago, that the Messiah would come in the world. That is why I also count on Jesus returning one day. God is 100% accurate in His predictions to date, and on His timing He will return again whenever that happens.
19. Verse 73: the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
- a) Speaking of God's unconditional promises, we not only got references to God's promise to David, we now get into the other unconditional promise, one made to Abraham roughly 2,000 years prior to Zechariah's time. The unconditional promise made to Abraham is the land of Israel will be given to Abraham's descendants. Abraham never saw that promise himself. It was roughly 500 years before the Israelites conquered that land and it became a homeland for the Jewish people. The point is that God promised Abraham that his descendants could live in a place where they could serve God without fear of being attacked by their enemies. In effect, the purpose of the land of Israel was to be a gathering place where anyone and everyone who trusted in God could gather to worship Him.
- i) That's why the Jewish people want a Messiah who would overthrow their enemies so they could peacefully worship God without fear of being attacked. That's why religious Jews to this day pray for the Messiah to come to live there in peace.

- b) OK John, all of this would be interesting if we were Jewish. How does any of this affect us as Christians? Does this mean we have to move to Israel to wait for Jesus' return? No. The main point for us is that God did make unconditional promises to the nation of Israel just as He makes unconditional promises to us about our salvation. If I can't trust in His unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel, then how I can I trust in Jesus complete sin payment for my own life? With that said, how does God's promise to Abraham affect us? In effect we too are being gathered together to be with God for all of eternity. Just as God desired for all Israelite to be united in their worship of Him, so effectively we are united with God when we do praise Him and seek Him with our lives. On that positive note, let's get back to Zechariah's praise to God.
 - c) Verse 75 of that prayer says that we can serve God "in holiness and righteousness". That means being forgiven of our sins. Did Zechariah ever get the idea that Jesus would pay the price for our sins? Don't know, and I'll have to ask him. I do get the impression that Zechariah saw himself as being right in God's eyes not because he was a sinless man, but just perfectly forgiven of his sins. With that said, now I can move on.
20. Verse 76: 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,⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."
- a) Here Zechariah finally gets around to focusing on his own child. Keep that in mind the next time we pray to God or sing praises to Him. Zechariah first focused on what God is doing and will do in our lives. Zechariah focuses on what God promised He would do. Then and only then did the focus now get personal. I should discuss for a moment the Jewish concept of a blessing. It's more than say, "Have a good day and be blessed". It is that a father has the privilege of predicting what will happen to their child based on God's promises for the future as well as the father's desire for that child's future. I admit that I truly enjoy giving blessings on my girls and hope life turns out well for them.
 - b) It is amazing to consider how much Zechariah knew about the future of John, given the fact that John is only eight days old at this point. Yes the Holy Spirit was guiding him as he talked here. Still a lot of it was based on what the angel said to him roughly 10 months ago. In other words, Zechariah in his silence had lots of time to reflect upon what that angel did say to him and how John's life would turn out. Did Zechariah know then that his son would be rejected by the Jewish leadership and be killed by Herod? Of course not.
 - c) What Zechariah did know what that God promised that his son would lead people to the coming Messiah. Therefore, based on the promises that the angel did make to Zechariah, he trusted in those promises just as much as he trusted in those ancient promises made to Abraham and David. My point is because Zechariah trusted in God's promises made to him personally and in the bible, Zechariah could bless his son knowing some of what his future would hold. With that said, let's discuss the specifics of those promises.
 - d) Zechariah understood that John the Baptist's role would be to lead people to Jesus. That's why the focus of these verses is on how John will focus on pointing people toward Jesus in John's ministry, That in effect, is what God is calling you and I to do: Point people to Jesus. I'm sure Zechariah got the idea that if there is no next life, ultimately this life has no purpose. People try to please God based on their works. Here is Zechariah saying in effect, "Look to Him to bring us joy and peace, and not try to please Him based on living a good life." Of course we should try to live a good life, but that's because it's the best way to live, not to earn any points with God based on living that way. Coming back to these verses, Zechariah is saying in a colorful way, that we need to look to God through the Messiah for the forgiveness of our sins. That's why he's predicting John's great purpose is to lead people to the Messiah.

21. Verse 80: And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.
 - a) Luke ends this section about John the Baptist to say that he became "strong in the spirit" which just means John trusted in God to guide his life. Then the text says he lived out in the desert until it was time for him to start his public witness for Israel.
 - b) What I suspect is that Mary didn't know more about John's early life as Mary was busy dealing with Jesus as a baby. All she knew about John (and related to Luke) was that after John grew up, he moved out in the wilderness until the time of Jesus' public appearance.
 - c) Remember that John's parents were older. I suspect the parents lived long enough to give John the Baptist a good Jewish education and teach him about life and what would be his future role based on the angel's statement about what John's life would be like.
 - d) The point here is that Luke in effect only gives a few verses about the early life of John, as the purpose of Luke's Gospel is to explain the history of Jesus. Speaking of which, as we start the next chapter in the next lesson, the focus will switch to the story surrounding the birth of Jesus. However, we'll wait until next time to continue that story.
22. To wrap up this lesson, most of the text focused on both parents of John the Baptist praising God for what He has done, is doing and will do in the lives of all people, the Israelites and their own lives. We also read of Mary praising God in effect for the same reasons. What's to be drawn from this lesson is not just the early history of Jesus and John the Baptist, but also how God wants us to focus our own prayers and praises of Him. If we can't think of anything in our own life to praise Him for, we can always start with praise for life itself, praise for the Messiah actually coming into this world, praise for any and all blessings we have received in life, and praise for what God will do in our future for our salvation and for the salvation of all who believe in Him. With that said, please join me for a quick closing prayer of praise for what He has done, is doing and will do in our own lives.
23. Let's pray: Father, like the characters in this chapter, we praise You for what You have done in our world, in our lives and more importantly what You will do in the future. Thank You for the salvation we all share based on our trust in Jesus' complete payment for our sins. Help us to use the most valuable thing we own, our time, in order to make a difference for You in this world. May our lives be one continuous effort to praise You and appreciate what You've done for us. Help us to draw closer to You so that our praise may continue not only in this life, but for all of eternity. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.