

A Sure Salvation - Luke 1:67-75
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION

It was the summer of 1994. What were you up to at that point in your life? A few of you weren't even born yet! Well, in the summer of 1994, I had recently completed my junior year of college at Moody Bible Institute and had just finished up a week as assistant counselor at Tanalian Bible Camp in Port Alsworth, Alaska. Now I was on a flight alone to London, England, and then on to Cairo, Egypt for a 6-week mission trip doing friendship evangelism by myself. Did I mention that I was alone? I would meet up with some missionaries there in Egypt and see what they were doing, but primarily I was a free agent and my task would be to make friends and share the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

Joe Davis...you may have heard of him...a young man known by his family and friends as painfully shy and introverted, even called a hermit by his own sister, was now tasked with traveling by himself to a foreign country to be outgoing, initiate friendships and boldly share the good news about salvation through Jesus Christ with Muslims and anyone else who would listen. Talk about stretching my comfort zone! I don't think I could have stretched it any further. And as I looked out the window of my final flight from London to Cairo, I was starting to wonder what in the world I was doing. Who was I kidding to think I could actually do this?!

I don't think I'd ever prayed so hard up to that point in my life. My desperate need for God was never so clear as it was on that flight from London to Cairo. Over and over I sang in my head that song we just sang together this morning: "I Trust in You;" and it became my theme song for the summer. You see, I had a lot of enemies that I needed to trust God to save me from: my own fear, of course; my poor social skills; Satan's constant whispering that I was kidding myself to think I could ever be a missionary; my doubt that God could really work through little old me; and on and on. You may have some of these same enemies.

But do you know what happened that summer as I touched down on the tarmac in Cairo, Egypt? God's Spirit filled me up, gave me courage, gave me words to say, gave me boldness in sharing the truth of his gospel, made it easy to make friends, and even caused others to repeatedly bring up the topic of God and make it easy to share the hope I had in Christ. My own brother Jason, a non-believer in Christ, who was working in Cairo at that time, even wrote to my uncle that he was surprised at how I was able to interact with his non-believing friends about Christ and share what I believed in a natural way that made them think and didn't blow up into a heated argument. While he had been very skeptical that his shy brother could ever be a missionary, he could now see it was a real possibility.

And I can tell you confidently today, that this didn't happen because I somehow summoned up the willpower and found within myself the courage to finally conquer my fears. It wasn't because I followed a 5-step process to defeat fear in my life and raise up the inner leader within me. Instead, it was, plain and simple, God filling me up with his Spirit as I timidly put one foot in front of the other and started walking out the call he had on my life, calling out to him continually for the strength, courage and words I needed...as I fearfully put my sailboat in the water, untied it from the dock, and allowed him to fill my sails and take me where he wanted me to go. And as I was filled with the Spirit, he made me a bold proclaimer and literally created opportunity after opportunity to share with others the hope I have in Christ.

My experience that summer has some very real similarities with what we've seen happening recently in our study of the gospels in the lives of Mary and Elizabeth and now Zacharias. As ordinary people in humility look to God and learn trust in him, he fills them up with his Spirit and makes them bold proclaimers. Suddenly, normal people like you and me are unashamedly speaking boldly about how great God is and about the hope and salvation he offers to everyone who will look to him.

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Luke chapter 1, where we'll be zeroing in today on verses 67 to 75, the first part of the prophecy Zacharias boldly proclaimed after more than 9 months of being unable to speak at all. Let's begin by reading the full prophecy and then we'll focus today on verses 67 through 75.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant — 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old — 71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US [Psalm 106:10]; 72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, 74 To grant us that we, being rescued 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 on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; 77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, 78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, 79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and empower each of us here today with the ability to understand it and apply it to our lives. May he fill us with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding!

II. THE FILLING OF ZACHARIAS AND PART 1 OF HIS PROPHECY:

Here again in these verses, similar to what we've seen in recent weeks with Elizabeth and Mary, we see the bold and powerful praising and magnifying of God that results when the Holy Spirit fills a person. When the Holy Spirit fills, God is glorified and his message is boldly proclaimed. And here we're told that in this case Zacharias was actually speaking a direct message from God...a prophecy that contained trustworthy truths about our God and provided deep insights into what he was doing and why.

Perhaps some of the things Zacharias says in this prophecy were shown to him by God during his long period of being unable to speak. He probably had a lot of time to think and pray and study Scripture and seek God in trying to understand what was about to happen through the miraculous pregnancies of his elderly wife and his relative Mary. The angel he had met in the temple had given him lots of food for thought, study and prayer. Other truths about what God was doing may

have been revealed to Zacharias as the words of the prophecy came out of his mouth, kind of like Peter when he suddenly proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Jesus told him that God the Father had revealed that to him. In other words, Peter didn't just figure it out because he was so smart and observant. But whatever the case, we're told in verse 67 that the words of Zacharias that we're about to study today contain an important message from God. So let's spend some time today listening to what God tells us about himself and what he's up to.

A. An offering of praise to God (v. 68a)

Well, Zacharias begins the prophecy with his most important point and the reason he's even speaking at all, and that is for the purpose of blessing the name of the Lord God of Israel. He says, "**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel...**" Now that word, "blessed," means praised. In other words, Zacharias is proclaiming this: May all people praise the one true God who is the Lord God of Israel. Zacharias heart and purpose in what he's about to say is to glorify God and magnify his name...always, by the way, an appropriate, beneficial, good, and perfect thing to do. Anytime, anyplace, may the God of Israel be praised! He's the only One truly worthy of praise and, considering that everything and everyone in the world was created by him and belongs to him, it's only right that he should be praised and honored and glorified at all times.

B. What God has done that deserves immediate praise (vs. 68b-71)

Zacharias then goes on in his prophecy to share 4 reasons why it was especially appropriate right then to praise God.

1. He has visited us

The first reason Zacharias gives us for praising God is that God himself has visited us. The Greek word translated, "visit," here means **to visit with help**...not just to visit and check things out, but to visit and do something. In other words, God has carried out his kind and good intentions toward us through practical actions he's taken on our behalf. Sound familiar?

It sounds like mercy, doesn't it?...God taking action to touch our real lives and demonstrate in personal ways the reality of his deep lovingkindness toward us.

And remember, the Spirit was speaking through Zacharias here and proclaiming truths that Zacharias probably didn't even fully understand yet. The full extent of God's visitation that would unfold through the coming birth of the Son of God himself was probably not clear to Zacharias yet. But what he did know is that God himself had personally visited he and Elizabeth and Mary with personal and practical help flowing out of his kind and good intentions toward them. And this was his first reason for praising God. It's a pretty good one, isn't it?

Can you think of times in your life when God clearly visited you with help? Did you praise him for it and share it with other people? Did you write it down so you'll always remember it? That might be a good idea next time since we seem to be so good at forgetting things.

2. He has accomplished redemption for His people

Well, the second reason Zacharias gives through the Spirit for praising God is that God has accomplished redemption for his people. This word, "redemption," is not commonly used in the English language today in the same way that it was used in a culture where real human slavery was an everyday part of life. When we think of redemption today we probably think of redeeming a coupon or a gift card. But in the culture of Zacharias and Elizabeth redemption had much more of a life and death significance. To be redeemed from a life of slavery was a vivid and significant word picture for those who were surrounded with real people in literal bondage and chains every day.

The Greek word translated, "redemption," is *lytrosis*, and it means a ransoming or a deliverance. It's the idea of someone paying the ransom for a person who's been kidnapped...or paying the price of a slave to his or her owner so that they can be set free. And in biblical thought, the word is most often used in connection with slavery to sin. Since that day when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden every human being has been born into

slavery to sin and is desperately in need of a ransoming or redemption. And the Hebrew Scriptures are very clear that this ransoming or redemption from a person's slavery to sin required a price that is infinitely beyond what any of us could come up with on our own.

For those of you that were here last week, you may remember those verses we looked at in Psalm 49, verses 7 to 8. If you haven't memorized them yet, they say this:

7 No man can by any means redeem his brother
Or give to God a ransom for him —
8 For the redemption of his soul is costly,
And he should cease trying forever — [emphasis mine]

These verses make it crystal clear that it's completely beyond the realm of possibility for any of us to pay the infinitely high cost of redeeming the soul of even one other human being. We should cease trying forever, we're told. Don't ever deceive yourself into thinking it's even a slight possibility for you to redeem your own soul or the soul of another person. No amount of good works or penance or punishment you inflict on yourself or endure at the hands of others can do it. It's simply not possible!

Well, fortunately, God doesn't leave us there in complete despair and hopelessness. Listen to the hope he gives in Psalm 130, verses 7 and 8:

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord;
For with the Lord there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption.
8 And He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.

The message is clear: don't look to human strength or human wisdom or human efforts to redeem your soul or the souls of others. Don't think you can ever be good enough. Look to the Lord only. Hope in him alone. For with the Lord there is lovingkindness and abundant redemption and He will redeem his people from slavery to sin! There's only One who can do the job and that's God himself.

And the Jewish people, through many Old Testament prophecies, understood that there was One coming who would be called Immanuel, meaning *God with Us*, who would bring about this redemption...the long anticipated Messiah! In fact, their only hope of salvation and forgiveness was dependent on the redemption this coming One would bring. And now, through the Spirit, Zacharias is speaking, and learning as he speaks, that this redemption that the Jewish people had been waiting for so long is accomplished. In God's perspective, who lives above and beyond time, it was already a done deal. He had accomplished redemption and Zacharias and Elizabeth now have a front row seat to watch how he's going to bring it about within the confines of human time...another great reason to praise God!

3. He has raised up a horn of salvation

Well, the third reason Zacharias gives for praising God is that he “...***has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant.***” Now in the past when I've heard that phrase, a “horn of salvation,” I've tended to think of it in terms of a Jewish ram's horn trumpet called a *shofar*. I've imagined a trumpet blast of victory indicating the arrival of salvation from God. However, the Greek word here is *keras* and it's a word used for the horn of animals, especially bulls, and symbolizes strength and courage. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* describes the word as “the symbol of strength,” and as the same word used for the horns on the altar in the Jewish tabernacle and temple, which were of one piece with altar and symbolically represented “the efficacy of the ministry associated with it.”

In other words, when the word, “horn,” was used in this sense, it indicated that perfect power and effectiveness and victory were guaranteed. For Zacharias to say that God has raised up a horn of salvation, is to say that the salvation God has raised up is certain. Nothing can stop it! God has raised up and provided a perfect salvation that will not fail. And he's brought about this salvation, as he promised, through the house of David his servant.

Remember that passage we read from Psalm 89 a couple weeks ago, verses 20-29, where we learn about some amazing promises God made to King David. This is what God said:

20 "I have found David My servant; With My holy oil I have anointed him, 21 With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him. 22 "The enemy will not deceive him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 23 "But I shall crush his adversaries before him, And strike those who hate him. 24 "My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, And in My name his horn will be exalted. 25 "I shall also set his hand on the sea And his right hand on the rivers. 26 "He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' 27 "I also shall make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth. 28 "My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, And My covenant shall be confirmed to him. 29 "So I will establish his descendants forever And his throne as the days of heaven.

God's thousand-year-old promises to David were being fulfilled in the lifetime of Zacharias. In God's name, David's horn was now really being exalted and his throne was being established forever. The long-promised salvation through Messiah, coming through the line of David had arrived and this salvation was perfect and secure and brought about by God himself. May the Lord God of Israel be praised! As King David had written more than a thousand years prior:

"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; 3 My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence. 4 "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies... (2 Samuel 22:2-4)

This same God is the God of all those who have trusted Jesus Christ today and he still saves people from their enemies and fills us with his power as we call on him and trust him. He is the horn of our salvation, our shield, our stronghold, our refuge, our fortress, our deliverer, our rock! Are you moment-by-moment looking to him to provide these things in your life or are you mostly looking elsewhere? Are you calling out to him continually?

He responds to those who fear him and call out to him. And are you giving him praise when he faithfully provides you what you need each day and responds to your requests?

4. He has fulfilled his prophecies [Psalm 106:10]

Well, if you don't have enough reasons to praise God yet, Zacharias has a fourth reason, and that reason is that God has demonstrated again that he is a faithful promise-keeper. In visiting us with help, accomplishing redemption for his people and raising up a horn of salvation, God had fulfilled the promises he made through the prophets so long ago. Zacharias in verses 70 and 71 says:

70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets of old – 71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US.

Some of you may see in your Bibles words written in all capitals in verse 71. The words capitalized are Old Testament passages that are being quoted. This one in verse 71 is likely a reference to Psalm 106, verse 10, which described the salvation from 400 years of slavery in Egypt that God provided to the Israelites in fulfillment of a promise he'd made to Abraham...a salvation he brought about not because the Israelites deserved it, but because of his abundant kindness, for the sake of his name, and to make his power known. Listen to how this salvation is described in Psalm 106, verses 6 through 10:

***6 We have sinned like our fathers,
We have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly.***

***7 Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders;
They did not remember Your abundant kindnesses,
But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.***

***8 Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name,
That He might make His power known.***

***9 Thus He rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up,
And He led them through the deeps, as through the wilderness.***

10 So He saved them from the hand of the one who hated them, And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.

Just as God did in rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt as they called out to him, now in the days of Zacharias he was providing an even better salvation for his people...a salvation from slavery to Satan himself...a salvation that had been promised all the way back in Genesis 3, verse 15, when God spoke of the day when Satan's head would finally be crushed. God was proving himself again to be a faithful promise-keeper who provides perfect salvation to all who fear him and call out to him. Another great reason to praise God!

C. **Why God has done these things (vs. 72-75)**

So, after giving us 4 reasons to praise God, in verses 72 to 75 Zacharias now moves on to the reasons why God has done these praise-worthy things for us...why he has visited us with help, accomplished redemption for his people, and raised up a horn of salvation. Zacharias, through the Spirit, now provides us with 3 reasons why God did what he did:

1. To carry out his mercy toward our fathers

The first reason is ***“to show mercy toward our fathers.”*** After the past few weeks I hope you now have a firm grasp on what mercy is, since we've been talking about it a lot. For those of you that missed it or fell asleep: God's mercy is *his kindness and goodwill toward us in our struggles, joined with a desire to do something to help us.*

Notice for a moment that word, “show,” in verse 72...to SHOW mercy. Interestingly, the Greek word translated, “show,” means “to make or to do.” So the phrase could be expressed as “to do mercy.” I get the picture of God actually carrying out the mercy he feels, taking practical action on our behalf. So the first reason God has done these amazing things for us is to actually carry out his mercy toward the Jewish fathers...people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and King David.

2. To remember his holy covenant with Abraham [Genesis 22:16-18]

The second reason Zacharias provides for why God has done these things is to remember his holy covenant with Abraham, the oath he had sworn to

him. This speaks again of God being a faithful promise-keeper. That's simply who he is and if he makes a promise he will fulfill it in his timing. There's nothing more sure in the universe than that God will keep his promises.

If you'll remember from Old Testament history, the living God had appeared to Abraham when he was 99 years old and made an everlasting covenant with him, telling him that he would multiply his descendants to the point that they would one day be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that he would give his descendants the promised land, the land of Canaan. And Abraham believed God and God credited it to him as righteousness.

Later, when Abraham finally had the promised son, Isaac, who would make possible the multiplying of Abraham's descendants and the fulfilling of God's promises, God seriously tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his own son as a burnt offering. Knowing that the one true living God had spoken, that Isaac himself was a miracle child that God himself had provided, and knowing that God could even raise the dead, Abraham chose to trust him and obey. He painfully took his precious son up to the mountains, built an altar, strapped his son to it and prepared to offer him as a sacrifice to God. In Genesis 22, verses 13 to 18, we read what happened as Abraham picked up a knife to slay his son, and it's another beautiful display of the very real mercy of God:

13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided." 15 Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

The Lord will Provide. If there's one thing you need to get straight in your daily walk with the Lord, it's this: The Lord will provide. That's what he did for Abraham and that's what he does daily for us as we look to him and learn to depend on him instead of ourselves. As Abraham did this, as he trusted in God and walked out that trust in obedience, God swore an oath to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

There was a coming descendant of Abraham who would bring blessing not just to Jewish people, but to people from all nations of the earth, including you and me. In this seed, God would provide the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for sin forever and free from slavery to sin those who would look to him. And now, in the time of Zacharias, God was keeping this oath he had sworn to Abraham by bringing that promised seed, as well as the prophet who would prepare the way for him, Zacharias' son, John the Baptist. The full extent of how the Lord would provide was now beginning to unfold. God is a faithful promise-keeper and this is the second reason why God has visited us, accomplished redemption for his people, and raised up a sure salvation.

3. To grant us the ability to serve him boldly and without fear

And this brings us to our final two verses for the day, and the third amazing reason why God has done these things for us. The third reason is so that he can give us the ability to serve him in righteousness and holiness without fear. Look at verses 74-75 and listen carefully:

74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Notice first the pre-requisite for being able to serve God in holiness and righteousness without fear: *we need to be rescued from the hand of our enemies*. We need to be freed from slavery. We need to be redeemed. We need the horn of salvation that only God can provide through his Son, Jesus Christ.

I know most of you here have already been rescued from slavery by repenting of your sin and trusting in Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. But if you're here today and you haven't done that or if you're just not sure that it took root in your heart, I don't want to go any further without inviting you to make sure you've personally been rescued from your enemies today. Talk to me afterwards and I'll help you walk you through that very simple process. The redemption, freedom, salvation, forgiveness, and power God provides is only for his people...those who call out to him by repenting and believing in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Make sure you've done that and that you see his fruit beginning to grow in your life.

Do want to see for just a minute what will happen in the spiritual realm when you do this and come to new life in Christ. Listen to how Paul describes in Colossians chapter 2 the sure salvation and freedom from slavery that God brings about through Immanuel, *God with Us*, our Savior Jesus Christ. Paul says:

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Your sins forgiven and nailed forever to the cross. Your slave master, the devil, defeated and publicly humiliated. You yourself brought from death to life. These are just a few of the things that will happen at that moment when you repent of your sin and invite Jesus Christ to be your Savior and Lord. And having been rescued from the hand of your enemies, get ready for the transformation that God's going to bring about in your life as his Holy Spirit takes up residence within you and you learn to be filled with his power.

But let's finish up these final 2 verses today by reflecting on what they tell us about where God is leading those of us who have trusted him, and the transformed and power-filled life he intends to bring about within us. These verses tell us that, having been rescued from the hand of our enemies through faith in Christ, God has granted each of us the ability to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

The Greek word translated, "without fear," is *aphobos*, meaning boldly or without fear. Maybe we all need a "NO FEAR" t-shirt! This means that God has provided each true believer with what we need, right now, to walk in his ways and proclaim him boldly and without fear. What are the things keeping you from living this way right now? If you believe God's Word, we can do this right now through the power and filling of the Holy Spirit. What I experienced so vividly during my time in Egypt is available for each us right here, right now in Union, Oregon. We don't need to go to a foreign country to be able to serve God boldly and experience the power of his Spirit filling us up. Amen?!

Are you walking in that power today? Are you aware of your desperate need for God and calling out to him continually? Are you sharing your life with him and seeking his wisdom and direction in everything you do? Do you believe God's Spirit really is in you and ready to fill you as you untie your sailboat from the dock and let his wind fill your sails?...as you start stepping out in faith and taking risks?

God's also calling us into righteousness and holiness in our daily lives. He's set us apart for him, given us the righteousness of Christ, and provided us with Spirit-power to walk out of darkness and into light. He's called us to not only believe in Jesus, but to also believe Jesus and how he teaches us to live our lives on this earth...to believe that the way he teaches us to live in His Word can actually be carried out by his power within us. Do you believe Jesus today?

III. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Churches are so often full of people who say they believe in Jesus, but often contain very few people who really believe Jesus and what he says about practical daily living. We're not slaves anymore, my friends. We've been freed from the power of sin! We don't have to give in to it. Do we believe the words of Romans 8, verses 12 through 17?

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Let's take hold today of the sure salvation the Lord has provided to those of us who have trusted in Jesus Christ. It's real and it's powerful and our ultimate victory is guaranteed! It's a salvation that grants us the power through the Holy Spirit to serve and proclaim God boldly without fear and experience real, practical life transformation as we believe Jesus and, by the Spirit, walk in his ways!

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant.

Let's walk in that sure salvation and step into the true freedom he's purchased for us! Amen?!