

Zechariah's Prophecy: *A Redemptive Panoramic* Luke 1:67-80

Introduction: Its important in life to see the big picture, to see something in a panoramic view rather than in a narrow scope. When we look at anything in a narrow view, we see the truth, but we do not get the entire context to enjoy. If all you knew about a couple was their wedding day, you would get a real view of their marriage, but clearly a partial view, not knowing their back story nor how they played out their vows. If someone was given an iPhone 6 and had never used anything leading up to it, nor given the inevitable upgrade, they would have a hard time understanding how to use, why certain things were arranged, and the greatness of the design. Or if you were shown a normal picture of the Grand Canyon, it would be impressive, but if given a picture in panoramic view, the awe and wonder would be more easily grasped. This is what Zechariah's prophecy affords us: to see the gospel, to see Jesus' coming to earth, in panoramic.

Having his mouth loosed and being able to talk for the first time in 9 months, Zechariah unleashed a Spirit filled monologue that not only reached into the past, but prophesied about the future. He gave a view of salvation that brought a linear understanding into a well rounded view, a flat picture into panorama. It is interesting to note that Luke is the only author of the gospels to include this prophecy. This is especially notable because Luke was written for non-Jewish people, and this (much like Mary's before) is dripping with Old Testament allusion and quotes. Luke wanted to make sure that those without a firm grasp on the Old Testament would not only appreciate all that came before, but find assurance that what they held to be true about Jesus was not a recent development.

We come to this pivotal part of the book of Luke as it is the last background information before Jesus comes onto the scene. The action shifts from explanation and description of the anticipation of Jesus' coming, to his actual incarnation. This section is all important for us to see another perspective in the beautiful picture of redemptive history.

I. **The Big Picture of God's Redemption** (1:67)

Luke 1:67-68 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

For Zechariah, the news of his sons birth and the ushering in of Messiah were the culmination of a lifetime of prayer, hope, and waiting. There had been over 400 years since the voice of the Lord was heard, and centuries longer when Israel was a united monarchy with freedom to worship God with security from other nations. For centuries the hope was that Messiah would come and He would rule again in the power of David. This is he **visitation and redemption** Zechariah was waiting for, the fact that Messiah would come as king and buy back His people from slavery (or in this case, political oppression).

This was the type or redemption that Zechariah was waiting for, and we recognize that this is a (the) main theme of all the Bible. Often we treat the Bible as a segmented grouping of stories, quant sayings, and a self-help manual, and think that sometimes it has things to say about our situation in life, and sometimes it does not. However, the Bible is really one grand story, one overarching metanarrative. The Bible unfolds from Genesis to Revelation the story of God redeeming mankind to Himself, making it an account of redemptive history. Redemptive history is the story of the created Paradise in the garden, where mankind was created to work, love, and worship in light of God's rule, and do so in sinless perfection. Sin entered the world through mankind's disobedience, had to leave the garden under the wrath of God, and Paradise was lost. This ushered in the pre-planned activity of God working all the

events of history to have His Son die on a cross, through the choosing of a people called Israel. Jesus' death brought forgiveness of sin and His rule will culminate in Paradise regained when He comes a second time.

This makes all of the Bible not only important, but gives us the opportunity to see the great lengths God goes to bring to Himself those who hate Him. We are a part of this grand story, but we need to remember, we are only a part. **Why is it so important for Luke's readers (us included) to see redemption in panoramic instead of a flat picture?**

- **The gospel is simple, but not basic** - The beauty of God's redemptive work through the gospel is that it is a simple message that a child can understand: *we are sinful people because we fell short of God's glory, so Jesus died on the cross for my sin, taking my place, and bringing me back to God.* My daughters can quote back to me and pray through these realities, and they are true. Yet this truthful understanding of the gospel is also a narrow view, and when we only see the basics, we potentially lose the awe and wonder of all that God has done to bring the gospel to bear.
- **We must understand where we fit in the story** - How many of us have been frustrated, disappointed, and even nervous about the future of this country? How many are scared for our kids and grandkids future in this world, as we see things rapidly change before our eyes, and the changes are not leading toward truth and righteousness, but immorality and injustice. Without a larger view of redemptive history, hope would be hard to find. If we believed that God intended this world at this time was to get better and better, it would seem that God has failed in His plan. But if we understand that all of history is reached a pinnacle at the appearing of Jesus Christ, we are much more assured that He will return and make all things new in the future. This world as it stands today is not our home, but we long for a future redemption where Jesus will visibly reign and rule, bringing justice and righteousness to all.
- **Redemption is neither new nor reactive** - For the person living in the time of Zechariah or for us today, we understand that though *Christianity* only started after Christ's coming, the plan of redemption stretches out to eternity past (see Eph. 1:3-5). This was not a reaction by God because He did not see sin coming nor is He driven by changes in the cultural or governmental landscape. Everything in history past was willed by God to lead to Christ's death on the cross, at the exact moment and time that He planned. This means that everything that is going on today is leading to His return, and nothing takes Him by surprise. We can trust that God is working **one story** throughout time, to redeem sinful man to Himself through the death of His son, so that we can worship Him forever. This not only gives us hope, it fixes our gaze on the mission ahead of us.

II. **The Big Picture of Redemption's End Game** (1:74-75)

Luke 1:74-75 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.**

The second big picture of redemption that we gain from Zechariah's prophecy is what he sees as the end result, the ultimate hope for Israel when Messiah will reign. For him, deliverance was not about what he could gain in terms of comfort, wealth, or property rights. After so many years squeaking out an existence and being oppressed, one would not blame Zechariah if that is what he looked forward to, knowing it seemed imminent in his lifetime. But what he longed for was peace from his enemies oppression for the express purpose of worshipping God the way He intended. The temple was tainted. Corruption was high. The future was uncertain, and the people were resigned to the whims of the Romans. With Messiah ruling from His throne in Jerusalem, having put all enemies under His command,

the people could do all that God had commanded them in worship in **holiness and righteousness before Him all their days**. This could be done without fear of retribution, taxation, or persecution.

This is our ultimate purpose and goal. It is true that when Christ returns to rule, there will no longer be pain and sorrow, but that in and of itself is not ultimate. What we long for in death and eternity, and the point of our redemption is NOT a easier or better life, but the freedom to return to the Garden. The goal of eternal life is that we would know and worship Jesus (John 17:1-4), and serve Him in holiness and righteousness. The problem with our worship today is that there is constant tension between self-worship and selfless worship. We are so entangled with our sin that often we are not even sure who we are trying to glorify, ourselves or Him. In a glorified state, that tension will no longer be there, but we will see Jesus for who He is (1 John 3:2-3) and glorify Him forever (Rev. 21:22-27). If that is not our goal in redemption, we have a stunted view of God's redemptive plan, of Him buying back a people for His own possession, to worship Him forever.

III. **The Big Picture of Redemption's Covenant Promises** (1:69-79)

Finally, Zechariah leaned heavily on faith in God's covenant keeping nature when looking forward to the Messiah. Covenants are not something we think often about (although if you wear a wedding ring you have made a covenant), and they are parts of Scripture we are often not familiar with. But covenants are what made redemptive history move, what kept them going. Covenants don't seem glamorous, but without them, there would be no salvation.

What is a covenant?

Making a covenant, particularly in the Old Testament, was no small thing. We have covenants today in the form of contracts, but it is not often that the breaking of a contract illicit death on the side of one party. Covenants were not to be easily entered into, but once one did, the expectation was to keep it.

God made particular covenants with His people, and there are **6 main ones** that we see in the OT, and they can be divided into 2 categories.

Non-salvific

- **Noahic - Genesis 9:9-17** - God will never destroy the world with water again
- **Mosaic - Exodus 19:5; 24:7-8; 34:27-28; Deut. 4:13** - Law that was given at Sinai, yet even this could not justify a person but only inform their knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 5:4)
- **Priestly - Num. 25:10-13** - Promise of perpetual priesthood, promising that all legitimate high priests would come from the family line of Phinehas

The other 3 main covenants had to do with salvation, and were in view of Zechariah's prophecy, had to do with salvation. These covenants were **unconditional in their complete fulfillment** (although there were consequences for not keeping them along the way), they were **unilateral** (made by God and kept by God), and **everlasting**, meaning there was not an end date when they would end. In order to understand how these affect us today, we must understand (briefly) how they were made, what they meant for Zechariah, what the implications are for us, and what they will still be into the future.

A. The Davidic Covenant

Luke 1:69-71 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;

- **In the past – 2 Sam 7** - God made a covenant with David that was everlasting (2 Sam. 23:5). David wanted to build God a permanent residence after having wandered around the promised land for years. David wanted to build a house for God, but instead God promised to build one for David. The promise of a King that would rule the world would come from David's line, and though Solomon ruled the world for a short time, the ultimate fulfillment of this covenant would be in the future.
- **In Zechariah's day** - Zechariah recognized this, and knew God would raise up a horn of salvation. The horn was like that of a ram, that would literally show strength and drive out enemies by force (Ps. 18:2; 1 Sam. 2:10). Zechariah was looking, rightfully, for an earthly king that would take his rightful place on David's throne, rule with justice, and send Israel's enemies away.
- **In our present** - Jesus is reigning today, and after He died on the cross, rose from the grave, He then ascended into heaven. He then sat down at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:20-23), having put all authority and power under his feet. He reigns, but not in the way that He will. He is not seated on a throne in Jerusalem and the government is not on His shoulders. This means that we live today in light of Jesus fulfilling His role in David's line by coming and offering Himself as a king, being rejected, and going to the cross. But we are also looking for something still future.
- **Still to come** - As Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to die, He told a group of followers that they would not see Him in that city until they cried out, "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**" (Luke 13:35). This was fulfilled as Jesus came over the Mt. of Olives into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the shouts from the crowd. At the conclusion of His woes to the religious leaders on the Temple mount, after being rejected, He told them, "I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt. 23:39). This is what we are awaiting. When God's people Israel yields to Him in faith and cries out to Him, He will come again to rule and reign on His rightful throne. This is what we anticipate in God's personal, literal reign on this earth by Jesus, the rightful ruler who will bring peace and justice.

B. The Abrahamic Covenant

Luke 1:72-75 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 us⁷⁴ 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.

- **In the past – Genesis 15, 17, 22:15-19**

The second great covenant that Zechariah brought up was the one promised to Abraham. After leaving the garden the world's population multiplied, yet the intentions of men's hearts were continually wicked, so God destroyed the earth with a flood. However, He saved a remnant and promised to never destroy the world by water again (thus the Noahic covenant, and destroying the plot of "Waterworld"). Through that remnant came the seed of promise given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15, by the person of Abraham. Abraham was called out of pagan worship to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and go where God called him. He was promised a great nation, a land of promise, and that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. This becomes a promise to the people of Israel who are God's chosen people to be set apart to worship Him, and through whom the promised seed of Messiah would come.

- **In Zechariah's day**

this is what Zechariah banked on in his day, that Messiah would reign in the land that was promised, in the way that He promised, and would live up to His oath. God had made this covenant with Himself, so naturally He could not go back on it or get out of it. When Zechariah said these words, it would not even be fathomable that the people of Israel would reject their Messiah, though that is exactly what happened.

- **In our present**

We live each day in light of this covenant. Because God chose Israel and sent the Messiah through them, we have benefitted as "all the nations" of the world. We have been grafted into the promise given to Israel, not replacing Her. We in this age of the church are able to enjoy the benefits of Jesus life, death, and resurrection in a way that Zechariah would not have foreseen, because we come to Jesus not through the old covenant, but by something new.

- **Still to come**

This promise is why we believe that God will gather His people, national Israel, back into the land one day, and will be her King. The Abrahamic Covenant has not been nullified, but because of the sin and rebellion of Israel, the benefits have been forfeited for a time. That time is now, but the time of fully experiencing the covenant is to come (see Rom. 9-11 for what God has in store for national Israel). God will bring His people back, and we will be able to experience that blessing as those born again in Christ.

C. The New Covenant

Luke 1:76-79 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 high⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

- **In the past – Deut 30:1-10; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32**

These two great covenants are salvific in the sense that they require salvation by faith to realize their blessings, but nothing in these covenants provided the means of salvation. God had to provide something new, since the Law could never save. That is why He promised a New Covenant. Jeremiah, in the midst of sadness, hardness of heart, and loss of national independence on the part of Israel, gave this great prophecy of something new that God would do:

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, **my covenant that they broke**, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts**. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD, **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**"*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

- **In Zechariah's day**

This is what Zechariah anticipated, that based on the tender mercy, which meant heart-felt compassion from God, the light would break through the darkness and God would offer forgiveness of sins. He would not have His people yield only to an eternal Law, but would place His Law within them, written on

their hearts. This is what Zechariah believed, but the thing he could not foresee was how this covenant would be ratified.

- **In our present**

Why did Jesus die? First, because He was rejected by His own people and called to be placed on a cross. But the greater reason: **to ratify and initiate the NEW COVENANT.** This is the sunrise breaking through the darkness. This is the missing piece to the puzzle of how could God bring back His people after so much rebellion and sin and stay holy. This is the answer to how non-Jewish people are able to come to God without becoming a Jew. The answer is the New Covenant. This is what Jesus explained to His disciples when He celebrated Passover and applied the symbol to Himself, which we call communion (see Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

The New Covenant means that salvation is an act of God that He produces in us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

"The New Covenant provides the essential things that all the other covenants lacked --- A new heart, power to obey God, fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:27), and forgiveness of sin." John MacArthur

This is why Paul said that we have been given a New Covenant ministry (2 Cor. 3:6) being made sufficient by Christ to bring the knowledge of Christ to those whose hearts and eyes have been veiled. We get to enjoy the fruits of the NC, even though we are not the recipients of the final phase of the covenant itself.

- **Still to come**

Clearly, God made this covenant promise to Israel, and there will come a day in the future that God will bring His people to Himself like a mother hen with her chicks. Israel will confess her sin, will repent, and will be gathered together with their Messiah. That will be a day of great rejoicing, since that will be a day that we will all see Jesus Christ.

Some Questions to Ponder:

- How big of a panoramic view do you have of the gospel? Has your view of the gospel stayed at an elementary level, or have you tasted of the larger picture?
- Why is it important to have a better handle on the entirety of redemptive history? How does it help us worship? How does it help our assurance of things?
- What is the importance of understanding covenants? How does this help us understand communion? How about our part of gospel ministry in 2 Cor. 3?
- Why is it so important that God keeps His promises to Israel despite her sin? What does that tell you about His promises to us?