

Prepare Ye The Way (Luke 1:67-80)

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[0 : 00] Every time I think, what am I going to preach this year about Christmas? Every time, you know, the story, the essence of Christmas surprises, impresses me.

And not just having, like, you know, having something to say. Not just, I mean, saying something, but do have some message to share.

And I think for you guys, I mean, if some, I mean, you've grown up in church, right? The last 20-something years, I've heard enough Christmas stories, Sunday schools, children's times, sermons, you know.

But if we actually want to open our ears to listen, I'm sure every year the Lord will bring home the message of Christmas in a kind of a renewed sense to us.

Yeah, this year is quite a bit of a challenge, I mean, as Pastor William has shared. And as I was worshipping you guys, you know, the songs, it really, really helps me to really, once again, be assured of whom we believe.

[1 : 18] Whatever that will come our ways, I believe. I believe Jesus. He's the answer. He is the Lord, and he's the Savior. And Christmas is not just Christmas, right?

But when we sing Christmas, when we celebrate Christmas, we remember Easter. We remember one day he will come back again.

And that's the whole, I mean, the integrated message, the gospel message. But Christmas, I'm sure this year is quite different.

I mean, it's okay for us. I mean, we could still see each other. I mean, we have plans. We have road trips, okay? We're going to have parties. We're going to invite friends, okay?

Yeah, but just across the ditch, they can't. It's pretty difficult. Quite hard to imagine. And for us in New Zealand, this year, I'll tell you what, it's going to be the busiest summer holidays for me.

[2 : 19] I've been in PCBC for the last 20 years. Because nobody goes away. Nobody go away. Right? I mean, the longest you could go, the furthest you could go is Queenstown, South Island, okay?

But you can't stay in Queenstown for four weeks, right? You stay there for a week or two. Am I? Who can? Can you? No? No? It's going to be expensive, unless you have an apartment there, right?

But in a way, it's good. It really reminds me, God is in control. I mean, we couldn't do anything during the year through those two lockdowns, right?

And God has given us opportunities. We can still work for him. We can serve him in different ways. Yeah, so let's come and let's just open our hearts to hear what God wants to say to us this season. Not just these few days, but this summer season. What is God for us? Okay, let's open up to Luke 1, 67 to 80.

[3 : 32] We have read the Bible of the verse of the month, but let's read that bigger passage. Actually, start from 1, 67 to 80.

That's the prophecy by Zechariah, a high priest, after his son was born. I was quite impressed with this passage, actually.

I never preached this passage before in the last 30 years, all right? I've preached many, many others, you know, the birth of Jesus and everything. Now, in fact, this one actually doesn't even say anything about there's no, nothing, no name of Jesus mentioned.

But it's about Christmas, all right? Let's open up Luke 1, verses 67 to 80. Okay, 1, 67.

And you, my child.

[5 : 21] We call a prophet of the Most High. For you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because

of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven, to shine on those living in the darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

And the child grew and became strong in the spirit. And he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Now, this prophecy, the prophecy that was inspired by the Holy Spirit from Zechariah, it described, this passage described that, yeah, he was prophesying about the coming redemption as he was seeing his son born.

And I'm sure he knew that his relative, Elizabeth, I mean, Mary, was with child as well. And this child was going to be born.

I'm sure the Holy Spirit would have talked to him that this child was going to be something. And he could see the redemption coming with his son and with his relative son, all right?

[6 : 49] And it was God that threw his baby to prepare for the saviour that was to come. I think this passage, as it speaks to us here, though we are 2,000 years away from that original story, I'm sure God has a place for us in this gospel.

We are to make way for the gospel of Jesus known to those who are in desperation. This passage here, for those who are sitting in the darkness, in the shadow of death.

I'm sure there are many, many people who are living in desperation. You know, we chat with others. You know, I was quite, when I was hearing, when I heard that Pastor William was read out that prayer request, you know, it's among us.

But we don't talk to one another like that. But hearts are bleeding. Do we know? Do we realize there are those around us?

Maybe here. Maybe our friends, our colleagues. You know, they are crying inside in desperation.

I'm sure we can help.

[8 : 11] Yes, we can listen. But the ultimate deliverance is from Jesus. Do they know the gospel? Do they know the story of Christmas?

What part do we play in sharing Jesus and giving them hope in this season? Now, the story behind, I mean, the background behind that, Zechariah, as I said, he was a high priest.

Okay? Chapter 1, it described that he was actually, had once a lifetime, had a chance. Not every high priest. Not every high priest could have that opportunity.

But it was kind of, it drew the lot. And, oh, yes, I was able to go inside the holy, you know, inside the temple, into the holy place.

And he was able to burn incense. All right? I mean, I'm sure a lot of other high priests could have either envy or jealous, you know.

[9 : 15] Oh, this guy, Zechariah, could go in. And when he went in, Gabriel appeared to him and said, I mean, you're going to have a son. And he was going in there, and when he was in there, he heard that message.

All right? Now, for ordinary, no ordinary person, not even priests could go in there. Only the high priests, they cast a lot, and they were able to go.

Well, I'm sure that that's the only chance he could go in there. And, in fact, for that's the costume of the high priest, okay?

And that's the ephod, and that's the, you see, there are a lot of bells, you know, was hanging there. The reason they had the bells, the Bible didn't say it, but they, you know, the Jewish custom, there was some tradition that says that, you know, the reason they had the bells, because they went into the holy place, you know, you went into the, you go into the holy place, you see God.

What happens? You know, Isaiah said, oh, holy, holy, holy. Oh, I've seen, I've seen the king of almighty God. I'm, I'm, I'm dead.

[10 : 41] You know, they, the Jews believe that when they see God face to face, they could have died. And the reason having those bells there, you know, when I, the high priest gone inside there, are there, are the bells still ringing?

If he was, if it was ringing, he's still alive. If it's not, he could have been dead. And actually, some, some, some, um, tradition says that actually there was a rope that was tied onto the high priest foot. So if there's no, nothing in there, there is, and it could have died. So it just used the rope to pull him out. And that is the kind of a, you know, the, the kind of a mentality, you know, for someone to go into the holy place to see God.

So I think it reminds us here when we come to worship, you know, on Sunday morning, our church sing, holy, holy, holy. And you think that, oh, that's pretty old tradition.

No, that's not for us. But it does serve a purpose to remind us that we are coming to the holy presence of our Lord. Surely, I mean, our English service, we're young people, we sing different songs.

[11:52] Okay, it's good. But it does remember, you know, remind us that this holy God is an awesome, it's an, you know, it's, we come to him.

It's not just whether we like it or not. We come to the holy God. Let's not, let's not take for granted. All right. And, and this guy went in there and he saw the, he saw the vision.

And then Gabriel said to him, and you're going to, you're going to have a son. And because of his unbelief, he, he was dumb or he couldn't speak until his son was born.

Okay. So that's the background of the story. And after the birth of his son, that the, the Holy Spirit was on him and, and he was prophesying.

And, and then this prophecy is, it was two things that were said. One is the salvation of God. Okay. The salvation of God, it says the initiator of the salvation was God himself.

[12:47] And, and, and the method, God was going to raise a, raise up a horn in a, in a line of David. And, and, and the significance of the salvation was to bring his people from the enemies back to God and from darkness to light.

Let's look at it. Look at the, each one of them individually. First one is, you know, is the initiator of the salvation was God himself.

In verse 72, he remembered his holy covenant. Christmas is a long time making.

Christmas is not, did not happen just, oh, Jesus was born. Christmas, it was a long, long time ago when God has planned and he had, he had his idea about saving mankind.

As old as in the garden of Eden. When man has sinned. And then in Genesis 3, 15, salvation was pronounced.

[14:01] The judgment was on, on the serpent, right? And in 3, 15, it says that I will put enmity between you and the descendant of the woman.

And, and you will crush, I mean, you will hurt, you will hurt, you will hurt his feet, but he will crush your head. So, from that time, it was the, the, the, the salvation has, has been planned.

And in, in, in, in the course of time, God has chosen Israel. Chosen the family of Abraham. And through them, the line, the salvation is going to come out from this family.

And through down the century, down the history, it was David. And, and here, uh, uh, Zechariah prophesied it was, this, this, this, God was, uh, going to bring this salvation through the line of David.

So, it was, it was a long time making. The initiator of salvation was God himself. Chosen, uh, through, chosen the, the, the Abraham family to Israel.

[15:10] And he made his covenant with him, but not just to bless Israel or, or the family of, of Abraham. But through them, the whole world was going to be blessed.

Okay. And in, in 69, in verse 69, it says, they raise up the horn from the line of David. And what was, what did it mean? The horn was a symbol of, of power.

It's a powerful king. King. And in the line of David, David was a powerful king. A king was very, very significant. But that greater king, the savior, the Messiah, the horn, was going to raise from the line of David.

And he was mighty to save. And then another meaning for this, for the, the horn, it was actually, at the time, it was the four corners of the altar and the, in the temple.

And, and, and the Jews always believed that, that the, the horn, the four corners of the altar was somewhere they could actually take refuge.

[16:17] They, you know, whenever they have any, any dangers, they would come to, to grab one corner of, of the altar. And there actually was two incidents in, in the book of Kings.

There was two, two guys actually went, and it was running away and was going to get, it was going to, it was afraid it was going to get killed by, by Solomon. And they, they went and grabbed a corner, but eventually they died.

All right. But, but, Zechariah was prophesying that Jesus, the savior, was going to be the new altar. He is mighty to save.

And he's from the line of David. Okay. And the salvation, significance of this salvation is, in, in 79, in 74 and 79, in 74 and 75, it says that to rescue the people of Israel from the enemies and to, so that they could serve before him.

And, and, now this prophecy, I'm sure when, when Zechariah was, was speaking that, he, he had the, the nation of Israel in mind.

[17 : 39] Because they were under, I mean, they were under, taken control by other nations. It was, initially, it was Babylon, and then it was Persia.

And then there were Greece, and then the Romans. Right. And, and, all these years, all these centuries, they've been kind of, uh, taking control, uh, ruled by the foreign enemies.

Okay. And Israel always had that hope that this Messiah was going, it was a political, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, mighty king to take them away from the yoke of these, these enemies.

I'm sure when he was prophesying that, he had that in mind. But God had something else, was even greater. All right.

And this, this king, this Messiah, raised up in the line of David, was going to bring all the people from the enemies of death and sin and back to God.

[18 : 54] People living in the darkness, uh, crushed and, and the bondage of sin will be, will be, will be, the light will shine upon them.

And so that they could see, and they could come and walk in the peace, in the path of peace. And the path of peace is, is, is, shalom with God.

Okay. With, with, uh, uh, coming to God, uh, as, as a kind of a peace, uh, making peace with God is, is, is, is because this salvation come upon them.

So that was, that was the message that, um, Zachariah has, has, um, uh, prophesied.

And that's the essence of this salvation. Two thousand years down to us, we still believe, we still preach, we still share to other people.

[19 : 55] So, this Christmas, what do we, what, how do we celebrate? What God has shed upon us, what, this, this meaning and this, this, um, yeah, salvation, how does it impact me?

This year has been difficult. But God's salvation never changed. Circumstances happen to us.

But the birth of Jesus, that is the, that's God's salvation from, of old, through the line of David.

Jesus, David, and bring us from the darkness into his wonderful light. So we can, we can have this peace with him.

What does it mean to you? For those who've, for those who've grown up in church, we all know about this story.

[21 : 17] Does it sink in our hearts? Or is it something, oh, yeah, we can, we know, I think, I agree with that. But am I being saved?

Do I need him? and the next message from this prophecy is God has given us a mandate the mandate was for his son and you my child John the Baptist will be called the prophet of the most high for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him and that is the charge to John the Baptist and the goal of that is to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins now we are all we are charged with this mandate to be a prophet that is a spokesperson for God okay the Greek the the the

Aramaic the Hebrew for prophet is Nabi that is like speaking on behalf of somebody in Chinese you know we translated prophet as something sin ti okay it's translated it's quite misleading you know you know beforehand okay but it's nothing much about knowing beforehand it's actually it's actually what God has talked to me and I just talk I just talk what what God has talked to me and I just let you know so that is that is meaning of prophet this is nothing nothing about in Chinese nothing nothing about knowing all these things beforehand and and then and I and then I will predict what happens so there's nothing nothing about that being the prophet of the most high is what God has talked what God has shown me I'm going to let you know so the story about the gospel about Jesus what God has shared in the Bible we share to others and this is this is our our responsibility and to prepare to go before the Lord to prepare the way for him and you know and you see in chapter 3 John the Baptist when he came out and when he was 30 years old he was able to come and start his ministry yeah and he quoted Isaiah you know he I I am the one that will come out and prepare the way for the Lord so that in English we have a translation one of the translations is the herald you know he's one of the who is being the herald you know is somebody who goes before an important person and he gives out and let to let the people know someone is coming after me the most

important one so I think for John the Baptist and for us and this Christmas do we speak about Jesus as a prophet of God and do we prepare people's heart to hear the Saviour's message the church has many opportunities for us we can participate we can join in and but

I think most importantly that we can in a very natural way you know to share Jesus as we sit with others and even we you know with a party at home or we go to road trips you know just talk to him about Jesus in a very natural way you know somebody find it very hard to come to a strange place called church how you come to church Christmas come to church let's come to church it's fine it's good no I don't want to come to church it's something weird I don't want to come it's okay I mean if they don't want to come to church let the church go to them you are the church I'm the church and let the church go to them and talk about Jesus let us be the prophet let us be the herald in this season to prepare the way of the Lord and the goal is to give them the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins that is the most important thing let them know that sins can be forgiven let them know because of the forgiveness of their sins they can have salvation in Jesus and that is the most important thing in Christmas we give a lot we prepare a lot of gifts and during the week

[26 : 32] I came to church and I saw the whole table was full of groceries and I wonder whose that was and I asked Isaac oh as you guys were preparing the families you know the Christmas gifts were given to families to the salvation army for the people right it was a lot I was quite impressed yeah I hope you just didn't take anything from home and the next day mom yelled who's taking my spaghetti I hope that was you from your own money and your own pocket to give sure Christmas is a good time to share to give but let us not neglect the most precious most important gifts we can give to our friends and those in desolation is Jesus and in verse 80 and the child grew and became strong in spirit and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel

I wonder you know baby John until he was 30 years old he could come out and call the people and come and repent and be baptized and people was talking to him are you talking to him are you the Christ and he said no I am not I am not even worthy to take his shoes his sandals I wonder all these years how could they have kind of known and affirmed of his calling I am sure his parents could have taught him but this verse I think it says a very important thing he grew and became strong in spirit and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel saying in the wilderness actually

John was not the only one that actually lived in the desert there were many other people with different reasons withdrew from the cities okay there were political reasons there were some religious reasons the city was just too sinful I just wanted to retreat to the deserts to keep myself holy I think there are different reasons but I believe that John was called and he knew that he has to know right about God's calling for him what the Old Testament has said about this Messiah he need to be away from all these things and spend time with God I think it says something to us too if we want to be a good prophet for God at times we do need these kind of wilderness or desert experiences not saying that we need to move away going to

South Island somewhere and stay there so that we keep ourselves holy no I'm not saying that but I think at times we need to have some sort of these retreat and these wilderness experiences just be still before God with our Bibles and our prayers and switch off our phones and just be still and maybe this is a good time you know if we have some plans some road trips good maybe there's good time just at time with our friends one morning we just be still right and listen what God has is going to say to us how I'm going to spend this year this coming year what's God's idea for me for the coming year so that we can fulfill this mandate to be his prophets to be his herald and we are to let the people to know the salvation of God and one more thing

I want to share it was quite impressive now when Zechariah okay he was old he never expected to have a son okay but a year a year ago I mean ten months ago when prophet Gabriel I mean the angel Gabriel said to him you're going to have a son and now ten months later his son was born how would you have felt you know you may not be old enough to feel that but you know you have something you really desired and somehow you never knew you never knew you could have it but now God has given you this gift wow you're so you know you're so joyful you know much expectations wow yes finally it's here you will be you know you'll be filled with awe thankfulness joy but but the prophecy it's it kind of shown something that he was speaking not about his son how joyful he was but about his son was going to serve some babies yet to be born and and he was going to be his prophet and he was going to be his herald and these that that hope was greater than

the joy and the awe that he's experiencing at the moment can you get what I mean

[33 : 07] I believe that nothing is nothing in this in this what we are having what we are facing is greater than the hope of the mankind the gospel and that that is the message of christmas may god help us as we come into this season the real salvation of Jesus.

You and I, by the grace of God, we have been enlightened. Let us be affirmed to hold on to that. But not just for ourselves, but to share, to be his prophet, to be his herald, to prepare the way.

Maybe just ask God for one person that I can bring him to Christ during this Christmas season. Let us pray.

Father God, I just want to thank you for that message of salvation. No matter what happens, it never changes. There's only one way.

The way of Jesus. Thank you, Lord, that even though we could not fully comprehend, but yet, in your word, it's ever true, ever so true.

[34 : 56] And Lord, thank you for giving us the opportunity that we can play a part in it, and making known your salvation to those who do not yet know you.

So open our hearts. As your Holy Spirit inspired Zechariah to prophesy the passage that we just read, may the Holy Spirit inspire us to be that person that we can share the good news to those who sit in darkness.

So thank you, Jesus. Thank you for your word, and thank you that we can, your Holy Spirit is in us, reminding us, inspiring us.

Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.