

Preaching notes for Hope – Luke 1: 67-80

This section of scripture is known by many as the “Benedictus”, a name that originates from the Latin translation of the first word in verse 68 which in the King James Version is “blessed be the Lord...” It is also sub-titled the “Song of Zechariah” and is frequently (often daily) used in many traditions, notably the Church of England, as a Canticle (a song, hymn which is said or sung with its words from a Biblical text). These traditions use this scripture in their worship services as often as the Lord’s Prayer, the reason being is that this exclamation of praise and thanksgiving, spoken as prophesy from God by Zechariah, contains the promise from God that is at the very heart of our salvation: “The oath He swore to Abraham” (see Genesis 12:3) as a holy covenant to provide “salvation from our enemies”, the enemy being the sin (pride, arrogance, the over-reliance on the law and its selective application) inside us.

Our scripture is in two distinct parts; following the introductory verse (67) which reminds us that these are God’s words spoken by Zechariah under the power of the Holy Spirit we read verses 68 -75 which are directed to all people, it is both a promise and an offer, salvation is being held out to the people. The second part (verses 76 to 79) are directed towards the baby John, who is to be the forerunner of Jesus. It is John who will be the prophet who will go before Him and prepare the way for Him -note the very strong link with Isaiah 40: 3-5 with exactly the same words “prepare the way”. Further forward in Luke (3:1-20) these links of John fulfilling the earlier prophecies of Isaiah become even more apparent, this is the reason why Luke writes in his opening words: “after investigating everything carefully from the very first” (1:3).

Verse 77 is particularly important for us today. We are reminded that salvation -to be rescued or saved- comes from the repentance and forgiveness of sins, that is “the knowledge of salvation”. We consider John’s words later in his ministry, “flee from the wrath to come” (Luke 3:7) -words used as a qualifying question by John Wesley to those who desired to join his early Methodist societies. Repentance, the answer given to “the people” at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) “repent and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven”.

These are beautiful yet very powerful words, “to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death” is a message that needs repeating over and over again to a world and a people who are fearful and lost. It is the will of God for all wrong relationships to be made right, the first being the relationship between man and Himself and that is why Jesus came - to restore that relationship and save humanity from its sins. **Amen**

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