

“Geriatric Maternity & A Mute Speech”

Luke 1:57-80

Intro

On February 2nd there was a segment on the radio news program *On the Media* called “An Apocalyptic Tick-Tock” that caught my attention. With all the instability in the world the Doomsday clock has ticked forward. I was unaware that the clock still existed after the end of the Cold War. *On the Media* host Bob Garfield explains:

“On January 25th [2018], the Doomsday Clock, so named because it represents humankind's ebb and flow towards and away from apocalypse, ticked 30 seconds closer to our own proverbial midnight... Since its 1947 introduction, it has merely been a vivid metaphor expressing the collective alarm of atomic scientists...

With climate change and cyber warfare added into the mix of threats, they now judge civilization to be at 11:58 pm, *the closest* to the end of humanity we have ever reached.”

Bob Garfield is actually wrong, we were this close to annihilation according to the Doomsday Clock 65 years ago. The clock was set at two minutes to midnight when the Soviets followed our lead and tested their own Hydrogen bomb in 1953. In 1991 with the end of the Cold War the clock moved the furthest back to 17 minutes till midnight. Optimism was running high after the fall of the Soviet Union but over the following decades the clock has ticked closer and closer to midnight. Now, 18 years into our brave new millennium, the clock is set at 2 minutes to midnight. Two minutes until the end of human civilization.

Official Doomsday Clocks aside, some of us have our own personal Doomsday clocks ticking as we struggle through life. Finances, health, depression, anxiety, strained and broken relationships all weigh on us, trying to push our clocks forward to midnight.

While the Doomsday clock may be at 2 minutes to midnight and our own clocks may be even closer, we have to remember that God doesn't set His watch by that time standard, they are irrelevant to Him. As our passage will make clear, it doesn't matter what time the Doomsday clock or our own clock is at – God makes paths out of the bleakest situations, saving His people regardless of what the clock says.

Read Text

Blue ESV Pew Bible P.948

Text

Three Sections

v.57-66 The birth, circumcision, and naming

v.67-79 Zechariah's Prophetic Song

v.80 Epilogue

The Birth, Circumcision and Naming of John

v.57 Elizabeth, an elderly woman, has been blessed with the miracle of conception. Not only does she conceive in her old age, but she brings the child to term and both mother and child survive the birth, fulfilling God's word to Zechariah

v.58 There is great rejoicing at John's birth, just as Gabriel said

v.59-66 Per the command God handed down from Abraham through the centuries, John is to be circumcised on the eighth day. The custom at the time is to bundle the naming with the circumcision. The rite of circumcision was the physical sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his children.

Elizabeth and Zechariah are joined by a crowd of people; neighbors, friends and family. The crowd is eager to name the child after his father Zechariah, but Elizabeth won't let that happen. Gabriel told her that his name would be John and so it will be John. God has chosen the name of Elizabeth's son and she doesn't want to interfere with His plan.

The crowd pushes back. No one in their family is named John. Not using a family name would appear to be disrespectful to Zechariah's family lineage. John was not an uncommon name, but it wasn't a family name.

This has nothing to do with cultural issues about a mother naming the child:

“...in the Old Testament twenty-eight children are explicitly named by their mothers and only fourteen by their fathers.”

Justo Gonzalez

The crowd goes to Zechariah and uses sign language to communicate which is odd. Gabriel said that Zechariah would be struck mute and not mute and deaf. The crowd asks for Zechariah's input on the matter. Zechariah requests a tablet and shocks everyone with his response.

Unlike Elizabeth who said that the child's name “*shall*” be John, Zechariah is emphatic and states that the child's name *is* John. During his time of muteness Zechariah has deepened his faith in God and he is completely on board with God's plan. For Zechariah, as well as Elizabeth, total obedience to God's chosen name is more important than family heritage.

Zechariah's mouth is freed from muteness after his declaration of obedience. The first thing he does with his renewed vocal ability is bless God. God has proven Himself faithful. God said

Elizabeth would get pregnant and she did. God said that their son would prepare the way for the Messiah and Zechariah has no doubts this will happen.

“Fear fell upon [those gathered] as they realized that God was in their midst.”

Darrell Bock

They wondered what God was going to do with this child. Something special was happening.

Luke adds an editorial note at the end of v.66 – “For the hand of the Lord was with him [John]” It was clear that God was moving in the life of John.

Zechariah’s Prophetic Song

Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit, similar to his wife Elizabeth in verse 41, and he launches out into a prophetic song. This the spiritual gift of prophecy, speaking forth words from God. Prophecy in the New Testament is not like what movies, books, and cults think prophecy is. Prophecy is not about declaring dates for the end of the world or discovering new doctrines not contained in Scripture.

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation... the one who prophesies builds up the church.”

1 Cor. 14:1-4

Prophecy in the New Testament is for the building up of the church. Zechariah’s prophecy operated in this way as it built up, encouraged, and consoled those faithful to God.

This song has traditionally been called the *Benedictus* from the Latin for “Blessed.” Zechariah’s song interprets the events that have just happened, giving their significance.

Remember, as will Mary’s song of Revolution last week, this is not just about spiritual salvation. Zechariah is praising God for holistic salvation; both spiritual and physical.

v.68-69 Zechariah blesses God for visiting and redeeming His people Israel.

Zechariah says that God has raised up a horn of salvation – horns represented power, strength, think of an ox or ram’s horns.

The horn of salvation belongs to the Messiah, the anointed “*Christos*”, the son of Mary, who is of the house of David.

v.70 God has spoken of the coming Messiah and His salvation through the prophets of old. God is fulfilling the words He has spoken through the centuries.

For example:

¹⁴“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Blue ESV Pew Bible P.739

v.71 Part of the promise of the Davidic Messiah is deliverance, salvation from Israel’s enemies. This is not just spiritual darkness and spiritual enemies but physical ones. God has promised to save His people from all of their enemies and all of those that hate them.

This is what Zechariah and his people are waiting for; total deliverance from the Romans and all those that hate the Jews. What many missed was that the total salvation was to come in two phases.

Phase one is the Messiah paying the debt of sin, restoring a relationship with God for sinners, and giving new life – this came through the cross of Christ

Phase two is the destruction of sin, sickness, evil, and death. This is when all those that hate the people of God are punished. This phase comes when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom fully on the earth.

We’re living between phase one and phase two – Already/Not Yet

Zechariah is prophesying what will happen but he is doesn’t fully understand how it will play out.

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”

1 Cor.13:9

v.72 God has promised His people Israel mercy. He has promised to faithfully love and care for them.

He has remembered His covenant and the oath that He swore to Abraham and is acting on it.

v.73-75 What did God swear? He swore to deliver Abraham and His seed from their enemies.

His deliverance is for a purpose, not just freedom for freedom sake but freedom to worship and serve Him, the True God, in holiness and righteousness with no fear of oppression or persecution.

This is the language that God used in Exodus:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Let my people go, that they may serve me.”’

Exodus 8:1

In this we see Jesus is the second Moses, bringing a fuller liberation not just from physical slavery but spiritual slavery as well. He frees us to worship and serve God in holiness and righteousness with no fear.

v.76 Zechariah changes His focus now to his son John.

John will be the prophet of Most High – in contrast to Christ who is the Son of the Most High

Most High – Completely transcendent, above our thoughts and imaginations, the highest point of reality

John will go before God’s Messiah, preparing the path for Him

“John will proclaim salvation, but [only] Jesus can take them into it.”

Bock

v.77 explains how John prepares the way: He will preach and impart the knowledge of salvation through his message and his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. John will preach a message of repentance, calling men and women to turn from sin and return to God. He will get the fire of spiritual renewal started.

v.78-79 Salvation is rooted in the mercy of God, the “tender mercy” of God

The Messiah will rise like the Sun at dawn and He will bring light to the dark places

The Messiah will bring light and life where the shadow of death has reigned

The Messiah will bring light that will guide the feet of men and women into the way of peace

1. Where the poor are hungry, the Messiah will feed them
2. Where the naked shiver, the Messiah will clothe them
3. Where the demonically possessed are tormented, the Messiah will free them
4. Where the sick suffer, the Messiah will heal them
5. Where sinners are lost in darkness, the Messiah will lead them into the light of salvation

And this is exactly what Christ did in His ministry and He continues to do through His church

Epilogue

v.80 John grew in physical and spiritual strength. He hung out in the wilderness until the time came for him to start his ministry.

Conclusion

*68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people*

Do you need redemption? God is offering it to you through faith in Christ. He will take you in.

*69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,*

Do you need a warrior king to save you? There is no mightier warrior than Jesus. He came as a lamb, but He reigns as a Lion and a Lion that has no problem defending and fighting for His own. Jesus is no pacifist when it comes to His people.

*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;*

Do you need to be rescued from your enemies? Are you in the grip of those that hate you? God can and will break the hands of those that hold you captive.

*72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,*

Do you need mercy? God has a limitless supply for you.

*73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 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.*

What is keeping you from serving God in holiness and righteousness with no fear? Is it your past? Sin? Addictions? Doubts? God will deliver you from them as well. Just as He crushed the power of Egypt to bring His people out of slavery, He will crush whatever is hindering you from truly worshipping and serving Him.

*⁷⁶ 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,*

Do you need the knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sins? Christ has them. John pointed to Him and He is right here, right now, offering you forgiveness and reconciliation.

*⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Are you in darkness? Are you walking through the shadow of death? Christ will be your light. Reach out to Him. He will guide you through whatever you are facing. He will take you through the storm into the way of peace.

Let the Doomsday Clock tick on, God is in control and He is working everything out. God is faithful to keep His Word, you can trust Him on it.

Communion

Call Worship Team

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

John 6

Caveat – in context Jesus was not speaking of communion but this applies as communion symbolizes the body and blood

Call Congregants