

SERMON

Luke 1:67–79

A Song of Faith

Nunawading and Waverley, 22-11-20

Zechariah was an elderly priest who sang at the naming of his son, **John**, later to be known as John the Baptist. It was a song of faith but this faith did not come easily to him. He was visited by the angel Gabriel, in one of the inner chambers of the temple who told him his elderly wife Elizabeth would become pregnant. Zechariah scoffed at the idea and because of his unbelief, he was struck dumb. Yet, in the silence, God was at work. A composition was forming in his head and the old priest was waiting for his voice to return so that he could utter his song of faith.

In his song of faith, Zechariah did not focus on his son. How easy it would have been to boast about the circumstance of his birth and his son's future accomplishments and not to mention the special distinction given to the parents. Rather, he sang: **Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people and provided redemption for them and raised up a horn of salvation for us from within the house of his servant David.** This is all about faith in the promise of the coming **King of kings** who was from the royal line of David and would be born for all of Zechariah's fellow countrymen and women.

Resistance is the normal way most people react to the message of the gospel. People rarely come to faith immediately and so we should expect people to think it is myth. Zechariah's problem was that the promise that he would have a child and that this child would bring the country back to the Lord in preparation for the coming of the Messiah was too fantastic to believe. He would need proof of some kind. Yet the promises were there in Israel's history, made by a number of prophets. Finally, Zechariah grasped this truth and sang: **Just as he has spoken through his holy prophets from of old, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all those who hate us, to show mercy to our forebears and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to Abraham our father, to deliver us from the hand of our enemies, to enable us to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all of our days.**

If we are honest, we can be sceptical about the Lord. It is easy to doubt his almighty power. I am not saying that our faith should be based on the miraculous. Faith is a trust in the word, the message of salvation and the objective reality of Christ. With this trust, the Lord does not have to demonstrate through miraculous tricks that he will remain true to himself and bring about our deliverance from death, evil and our failures. However, in the day to day running of our lives, in the area of mission, the needs of people and so on, we need to believe that the Lord has power to intervene. If a couple were childless like Elizabeth and Zechariah, why shouldn't believers ask for a family? How our heavenly Father would answer that prayer should be left open but answer it, he will. Our Lord Jesus encourages us with these words: **No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine...apart from me you can do nothing.** The life of Christ is not far away, it is within us. We have been baptised into him and can believe his almighty power is at work in our lives.

It is funny in a way that faith comes down to a birth. For Zechariah and Elizabeth, it was faith in the birth of a son in their old age and then faith in a child to be born in David's house. Deliverance is not an act of God's power streaking across the universe and striking the earth. God is personal. The wonder of the good news that God has entered into humanity and taken on all the problems of war, relationship breakdown, cheating, lying and disease, and brought about a great act of salvation. Zechariah had to learn that the Lord would work in his own life as much as he would work in Israel's history. This, too, is our great challenge. It is not such a problem for us to believe that God has visited the world in Christ but we struggle that he will visit us each day, during a problem at work or if doors are being slammed in anger at home. His grace and his power are at work in our lives and the Spirit calls us to trust this promise.

Let us listen to the final verses of the song: **But you child, are called to be a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to make his way ready, to give to his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, through the heartfelt mercy of our God. With these things, the high rising sun will visit us to shine on those in darkness and those lying in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace.**

There is much to talk about in these tremendous words of redemption fulfilled by Christ but hear once again the last verse: **to guide our feet in the way of peace**. Faith leads to peace. When Christ frees us from guilt, when he shows us how he can change us, then we know peace with God, with ourselves and each other. This experience leads us in turn to sing a song of faith.