

## The Tender Mercies of God

*Luke 1:76-80 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*

Zacharias now turns his attention to his son born to him in his old age. And no doubt it is with great joy that he proclaims, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways." But his message is not really about John but it is about his ministry for he will be the prophet of the Most High God. Jesus spoke of his office thus, "For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." (Luke 7:28) But that greatness is not in the person but in the purpose for which he had been called; to go before the very presence of the Lord and prepare His way. It is the proclamation of what Christ will do for His people that makes John the greatest of prophets. Without question Zacharias spoke in reference to Isaiah 40 verse 3, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The Jews of that day would have understood this perfectly for it was common for a herald to go before a king to prepare a way for his travel, bringing down high places filling in valleys, building a roadway where none existed, and then as the herald to announce his arrival. It was to be John's privilege to announce the arrival of the King of kings, of the Lord Himself and proclaim His purpose in coming, indeed no greater prophetic message and therefore no greater prophet of God. The highest of honors was his. He would introduce the Lord's Messiah, he would point to the very person, to that one who is Emanuel, God with us, he would point to the Messiah and proclaim, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. John was going to prepare the way for a King. He will be the last prophet of the Old Covenant age it has been 400 years since Malachi During this time there had been no prophet sent from heaven to God's people. 400 silent years are now being broken.

There is something else that should catch our attention this morning as we look closely at the text for there is something that really stands out, as happy as Zacharias must have been over this little one born to him in his old age, this prophecy is not really about his new born baby. Rather it is about the one of whom this baby will be the herald. I'm sure that in the reading of Scripture there have been times that you came across a key word or phrase that seemed to stand out, and I think that one such key phrase stands out in this passage this morning, and it is this, "through the tender mercies of our God". Again, Zacharias' subject matter is not about John, but it's about the "tender mercies of God." We shall see the reason the Christ came into the world, the purpose and its fulfillment, that is, what He did and what He has provided for His elect are all because of the *tender mercies of our God*. Thus as we considered this text we shall note the following: that it is *through the tender mercies of our God* that God Himself has visited us; that He has visited us as the Dayspring from on high; He has visited us in our lowest estate; and finally He has visited us with the most joyful and glorious results.

- A. It is through the tender mercies of our God that God Himself has visited us for we read, *through the tender mercy of our God - God visited us*
1. First I want us to look more closely at the words, "tender mercies"
    - a. Although the New Testament is written in the Greek language it was written by Jews who were influenced by and familiar with the Hebrew language. In the Hebrew this was really "bowels of mercy"
    - b. In other words the ancient Jews did not think of mercy as being some outward feeling, but as that which originated deep within, within ones very heart
    - c. Jesus did not simply feel compassion, He acted on that compassion
    - d. He saw our desperate sinful condition and He moved with compassion, with tender mercies to save us
    - e. How important it is that we as God's people learn to respond with "bowels of mercy" with deep care and love for the lost around us and with deep love and concern for one another
  2. It was with tender mercies that God Himself visited us
    - a. Kings may visit their people but they do not take upon themselves their poverty, sickness or sorrow
    - b. But God's tender mercy beyond our comprehension caused the High King of heaven to leave His heavenly throne above and become man that He might suffer the wrath of God in our place
- B. *Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us*
1. 400 silent years of darkness in the land without a prophet
  2. Greek word here speaks of the rising of the sun in the eastern sky
  3. Beauty in a sunrise
    - a. Christ here is called that sun rising in brightness
    - b. The softness of new light without the burning heat of the day
    - c. The darkness of night is past

4. There is a certain softness in a sunrise and from that softness we can learn the following:
  - a. It is important that we understand that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh
  - b. It was God who came down to us yet it was thru God's tender mercy that He came as an infant, as a baby lying in a manger

Martin Luther speaking on the humanity of Christ wrote: See how God invites you in many ways. He places before you a Babe with whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear him, for nothing is more appealing to man than a babe.

- c. Look upon that one in the manger and think upon this, the angels of heaven gathered that night to worship Him, yet He came in such humility
  - d. See Christ upon the cross, God who became flesh that He might in tender mercy suffer the wrath of God in your place Christian
5. The whole world lies in darkness
  - a. Eastern light gives the promise of a new day
  - b. A new covenant will now be established
  - c. Night will be passed away forever for God's elect
  - d. The darkness of God's wrath will be forever removed
6. Entrance into God's heaven where there will be no night for God Himself will be the light of that city - Rev. 21:3,4, 22
  - a. There will be no night there
  - b. Every tear, no more sorry, pain or suffering, death itself will be forever removed
  - c. Our future is certain it cannot be altered, our hope is secure
- C. In tender mercy God has visited us in our lowest estate - *to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death*
  1. He would be announcing God's provision for man's greatest need, salvation and forgiveness of sins.
  2. We who were dwelling in the pig pen of sin, feeding on the husks
  3. We who were dead in trespasses and sin and could not help our selves

*Rom 5:4-6 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*

4. We were subject to God's wrath (Eph. 2:3)
5. We were without God and without hope
6. We were in great darkness, we were in great ignorance
  - a. We could see nothing
  - b. We could believe nothing
  - c. We could hope for nothing
  - d. In tender mercy he came *to give knowledge of salvation to His people*
7. In tender mercy God provided for our greatest need, salvation and forgiveness
8. Here is what God's tender mercies has granted us - when we were *without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* Eph 2:12-13

CONCLUSION: In tender mercy God has visited us with the most joyful and glorious results. - *to guide our feet into the way of peace; to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins thru the tender mercies of God*

In tender mercy having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ Rom 5:1

In tender mercy God has wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Col 2:14-15

It is in the tender mercies of God we the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace - Eph 1:7

Spurgeon on this passage wrote - Observe how Zacharias, in this his joyful song, extolled the remission of sins, as one of the most extraordinary proofs of the tender mercy of our God.

God does not provide forgiveness on the basis of justice, but of mercy - *to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God*