

## Sermon – 22/08/2010 am

### Dawn of a New Age

Study Text: Luke 1:76-79

There is a Christian hospital in a town on the side of a mountain in the Himalayan range. People live in cottages around the side of the mountain. Narrow paths connect these cottages to the hospital and then to the bazaar. A nurse who lived in one of these cottages was coming home for duty late one night. It was a dark stormy night. She usually carried a torch but had forgotten to buy new batteries. The path was steep and narrow but she knew it well – where the steps were and where it was very narrow with a sheer drop over the side.

What she did not know was that with the heavy rain there had been a landslide at this narrow section of the path. As she neared this place on the path there was a flash of lightning and she saw the landslide had washed the path away. She stopped, trembling as she thought what might have happened to her. Do you ever stop to think of what might have happened to you without the light of the gospel? Do you know Jesus Christ as the light of your life?

Zacharias prophesied after the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Under the inspiration of the HS he spoke of the Lord God visiting and redeeming his people. He spoke of the mercy of God in fulfilling the promises he made through the holy prophets long ago. In the second part of his prophecy he spoke more directly to his infant son. He spoke of God's plan for him. His son was not the Messiah; he would prepare the way for Messiah. Zechariah spoke of the wonderful new age that Messiah would usher in for those who sit in darkness waiting to die, having no hope and without God in this world (Ephesians 2:12).

### Knowledge

The angel told Zacharias his son would be great in the sight of the Lord and that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit (1:15). Zacharias said he would be a prophet of the Lord Most High (1:76). Zacharias was himself prophesying regarding his son and regarding the Messiah but his son had the specific task of preparing the way of the Lord. The angel said John would go *before him in the spirit and power of Elijah*. Elijah was one of the great Old Testament prophets. He spoke the words of God boldly during dark days in Israel. Israel was again experiencing days of spiritual and moral darkness. John would speak into this darkness calling people to get ready for the coming of the Lord.

John would give the people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins (1:77). What is the opposite of knowledge? Ignorance! The people were ignorant of the truth about their souls. They had knowledge of many things; worldly things like how to get rich and become famous.

Men like Matthew and Zacchaeus sided with the Romans and became tax collectors. They knew how to get along in a corrupt society. John the Baptist had something to say to the tax collectors – maybe these two men were among them. Jesus had a word for these two men. When he called them they left their corrupt business and followed him.

People today take pride in their extensive knowledge. We like to be well informed about medicine, the stock market, politics, sport, music, and so many things. Many love the game Trivial Pursuit. People's knowledge is increasing at a rapid rate in everything except the Bible. Biblical illiteracy is on the increase. Even of those who know the Bible, knowledge of salvation is not always there.

The most important knowledge for any person to have is knowledge of salvation. *What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul* (Matthew 16:26). What is the point of having extensive knowledge about politics, or science or the football, without knowledge of the destiny of your own soul?

John would bring knowledge of salvation to people who were ignorant of the truth. Is this not the knowledge that needs to be imparted to people today? People are filling their minds with all sorts of trivia from the media, from magazines, radio, TV and the internet, but still they ask ‘what is truth?’ Where will they get knowledge of the truth? Jesus is the way, the truth, and life.

*Knowledge of salvation ... by the forgiveness of their sins* (1:77). There is nothing complicated about the truth. This is knowledge that children can take in. Jesus welcomed little children saying *of such is the kingdom of God* (Luke 18:16). Children understand when they do things that are wrong. They understand when you teach them about sin. Only the ignorant deny they have sinned.

Knowledge of salvation means knowledge of sin; knowledge that sin separates us from God. Death is the result of sin. Every human being comes face to face with death but for many it is the great unknown. Death is surrounded by fear and all sorts of myths even in our society with all its knowledge. Why do we die? Science has no answer. Philosophy has no answer.

The Bible does have an answer. God said to Adam ‘if you eat the forbidden fruit you will surely die’. *Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because all sinned* (Romans 5:12). What could be clearer? *The wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). Yet somehow Satan manages to confound this truth and blind the hearts and minds of millions.

This truth about sin and death is not a pleasant one of course. Maybe that is why people try to confound and deny it. But this was not the end of the knowledge that John would bring. He would preach forgiveness for sin (1:77). He preached the wrath of God upon sin, but he also warned people to flee from this wrath. He would declare that Jesus is the Saviour, the Lamb of God who takes away sin.

*Forgiveness of sins, through the tender mercy of our God* (1:78). What beautiful and comforting words these are. *The tender mercy of God*. Actually the word ‘tender’ means ‘bowels’ or ‘intestines’. This is mercy from deep within God’s being. Sin makes us enemies of God because he hates sin. But his grace is greater. In his mercy he sent his only begotten Son from heaven to be the propitiation for our sin. Sin brought death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only God who forgives sin. Man made gods do not forgive because it is not in the nature of man to forgive. Man made gods are capricious; they seek revenge. To appease them you must pay – literally or with good works. And still worshippers do not know if they are forgiven for these gods are dumb, as Elijah showed. Our God is merciful and he forgives our sins. This is what his Spirit said through Zacharias.

## **Light**

By which the Dayspring/Sunrise will come to us from on high (1:78). The word ‘Dayspring’ means ‘dawn’ or ‘sunrise’, but in the context it refers to a person. In Malachi we read *the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings* (Malachi 4:2). The Messiah was referred to by this title – the Dawn or Sunrise or Dayspring.

Do you look forward to the dawn of a new day? We do not appreciate the light of dawn because we can flick the switch and get light at any time. But if you are out in the forest at night and hear noises you might be afraid. You might lie there anxious for first light of day. You might sit in the darkness in fear if there is a robber or a killer on the loose.

The people of Israel were *sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death* (1:79). They lived in a society darkened by oppression, corruption and violence. They saw the disappearance of truth, justice and mercy. They lived under the tyranny of sin and death. They longed for the dawning of a new day. They longed for Messiah, the Sunrise to come and save them from this tyranny. John would give notice of this new day by announcing the arrival of Messiah, the Son of God incarnate.

Most people thought Messiah would bring a new day politically. He would throw off the Roman yoke and re-establish the nation of Israel. There are still people who believe such things – and not just the Jews. They took an earthly and material view of the Messianic redemption and had no conception of their own spiritual need.

John would have to change this distorted view of Messiah. He would call the people to repent for the forgiveness of their own sins, not the sins of others. The Sunrise, the Dawn, must come to individual hearts, hearts that recognize sin and repent of that sin. This Sunrise was not just for the nation of Israel – it was for all nations just as God promised to Abraham.

Jesus said *I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life* (John 8:12). Has the light come, dispelling the darkness in your heart? Do you have the light of the Lord Jesus Christ shining brightly in your heart? In that light do you clearly see life everlasting or does death still cast its shadow across your path?

## **Peace**

The final word in Zacharias' prophecy is the word 'peace' (1:79). People speak of death as being 'at peace'; 'he or she is finally at peace'. Nothing could be further from the truth if that person did not know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. There is no peace for the wicked, in this life or the next. There will be no peace in the lake of fire. The only place of peace is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sunrise brings light and peace. Messiah guides our feet into the way of peace and safety. The way is narrow and few find it, but it is the way of life. In the light of Christ, the light of his great works, sinless life and immeasurable love, we see our own sin and repent. *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!* (Luke 5:8). In his mercy God forgives us and calls us his children. In Jesus Christ we are reconciled to God. We are no longer his enemies. His wrath is turned away and we are at peace with him.

John had a wonderful message to proclaim as he prepared the way of the Lord. We have the same message to proclaim, the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sin, and of new life in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was upon John as he grew up. Maybe his elderly parents died or maybe he just left home but he went to live in the desert for some years. There the Lord prepared him for the day he would make himself known to Israel, warning the people to flee from the coming wrath – flee to the Lord seeking forgiveness of your sin.

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