

# REMOVING THE BLINDERS

LUKE 1:67-80

*It Takes A Great Deal Of Effort To See Through All The Lies We Have Come To Believe In Order To See God's Plan.*

## **I. God's Holy Spirit (Vs 67 & 80)**

Maturing In Our Faith And Becoming Part Of God's Plan Requires Us To Cooperate With God's Holy Spirit.

- A. Being Filled With The Holy Spirit (67)
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# Removing The Blinders

Luke 1:67-80

Last time we were together, we witnessed the miraculous birth of John the Baptist. We also learned that Jesus was his cousin and their ministries would be intertwined. In fact, John would prepare the way for Jesus' ministry. John was born first and his ministry would precede Jesus'.

Further, you remember that when the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that he would become a father, Zechariah was stunned and had a hard time believing that he and Elizabeth could even get pregnant since they were so old. Because he didn't believe, the angel rendered him unable to speak. When John was born, the family, friends, and neighbors tried to name him Zechariah after his father. But in obedience to God, Zechariah wrote down on a tablet that the baby's name would be John. Immediately God healed him and opened his mouth. Then Zechariah burst out into the praise song we are studying through this morning.

As we study through this morning's text, we will see that we have been blinded by what the world calls truth as opposed to what God calls truth. Part of becoming a Christian is coming out of the darkness into the light. In other words, we have been blinded to the truth by the things of this world. Perhaps the most dangerous type of blindness is that of people who are religious and know how to use religious language, yet remain blind. Since I'm a little naïve, let me give you an example.

One night I was going through an intersection when another driver blew a red light and crashed into me. Both our cars were totaled but miraculously, we were not even scratched. The driver of the other car noticed that I was a pastor since I had my collar on. Immediately he said, "It is a miracle pastor that neither one of us were scratched." I agreed. Then he pulled a bottle of whiskey out of his car and said, "Look pastor, the bottle survived the crash. It's also a miracle. We should celebrate this miracle also." He handed me the bottle and said, "Here, let's drink to this miracle." So I took a big swig and handed him the bottle. Immediately he screwed the top back on. I said, "Aren't you going to have a drink?" He responded, not until after the police get here and finish investigating the accident."

## I. GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

I think that most of us have become so accustomed to living in this world that we have unconsciously accepted the values of our society and world without giving them much thought. But the main idea of this morning's text is this. **IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF EFFORT TO SEE THROUGH ALL THE LIES WE HAVE COME TO BELIEVE IN ORDER TO SEE GOD'S PLAN.** I know that I have preached on this before, but it seems to me that we have come to accept the values that society and our culture have taught us as truth. It really does take some intentional thought to see how the worldly values we have come to accept as truth conflict with how God wants us to live our lives. It seems that Zechariah's eyes are opened in a dramatic way. In verse 67 and verse 80 we learn that God's Holy Spirit is the major player in this process. These two verses frame the song of Zechariah. **MATURING IN OUR FAITH AND**

## BECOMING PART OF GOD'S PLAN REQUIRES US TO COOPERATE WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.

We are reminded in verse 67 that our Christian journey starts with being filled with the Holy Spirit. Let's start this section by reminding ourselves how the Bible described both Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth:

*"Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations" (Luke 1:6 / NLT).*

This couple loved and served God faithfully. The Bible says they were righteous. Yet when it came time to give praise to God, the text says they were filled with the Holy Spirit when they started to praise God and prophesy. Luke has emphasized this concept dramatically in the first chapter. He has informed us that the unborn baby John was filled with the Holy Spirit at conception. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary, Jesus' mother. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. God would fill the hungry and now we see that Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit. For Luke, the Holy Spirit is a person who acts, inspires, empowers, and speaks through us. For Luke the Holy Spirit is God.

Here is something that we must understand if we are going to see life as God sees life. There is never a time that we will be so holy, so religious, or so good that we are not in need of God's Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit removed the blinders from our eyes, we would never have come to receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes this:

*"Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God" (II Corinthians 4:4 / NLT).*

That is a description of each one of us before we came to know Christ. The only way we were able to come to Christ is that the Holy Spirit removed the blinders from our eyes. Jesus promised us that the Holy Spirit would continue to lead us into all truth. We must constantly place ourselves under the authority and guidance of God's Holy Spirit. If we start to do things on our own, based on our own perceived power, intelligence and competence, we will be led astray. But the point is that we never have to depend on our own power, intelligence, or competence because when we came to Christ, God sent His Holy Spirit to live in us and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Jesus lives in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When we come to realize that and depend on that we find ourselves praising God. In fact, this prayer is called the Benedictus which is simply the first word of the prayer in verse 68. It means praise or blessedness. We'll talk more about that later. But for now, when we follow and submit to the leading of God's Holy Spirit, we will find ourselves praising God as well. Here is a nice little way of describing what it means to be filled with God's Holy Spirit. When we willingly surrender particular areas of our lives to God, the Holy Spirit controls those areas. The more areas of our lives we surrender to God, the more places are filled with God the Holy Spirit. And before we leave this verse, let me point out that this praise is going to contain prophecies which are given by God. Zechariah is going to give us God's message in this song.

And then, in the last verse of this section, verse 80 describes what it means to be shaped by the Holy Spirit. This baby John will grow up in the presence of God. Remember, he was

commissioned and filled with the Holy Spirit at conception. Nevertheless, he will have to grow and mature in his faith. He will have to be shaped, molded, and prepared by God to carry out his mission. And much of his time was spent in the lonely desert. Somewhere along the line, we have come to think that being a Christian is a passive thing. We park our fannies in the pews each Sunday, and something is supposed to magically happen to us. One preacher said that is as absurd as parking a bicycle in a garage and expecting it to turn into a car. John prepared himself by practicing spiritual disciplines. God empowered him and molded him but John had to cooperate with the process and submit to God's Holy Spirit.

Yes, God will prepare us to accomplish our missions in life. However, we must cooperate with Him in our preparation. We must learn to practice the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing. We must practice silence and solitude, prayer and fasting, giving and receiving, and other disciplines in order to allow God to shape us and mold us into who He wants us to be. Growing in the Christian faith takes as much work as it does to become competent in academics, sports, music, and other endeavors. Without practice, we will never grow. Zechariah and Elizabeth took their faith seriously and submitted to God. Their son John also took his faith seriously and allowed God to shape him and prepare him for ministry as well. John came from a priestly family and he would grow up to be a very special priest. Here's what we have to keep in mind. Living the Christian life is a joint effort between God and us. In other words, **MATURING IN OUR FAITH AND BECOMING PART OF GOD'S PLAN REQUIRES US TO COOPERATE WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.**

## II. GOD'S PLAN

And now we will get into Zechariah's prophetic song. In verses 68-75 he reveals God's plan to us. **GOD PLANS HIS WORK AND WORKS HIS PLAN.** It really is that simple. God has an objective to accomplish. He prepares His people to accomplish the mission and assures that each mission is accomplished.

Since God's plan is to reconcile each human being with Himself, it seems natural that the plan should be made public. Here in verses 68-70 Zechariah becomes God's publicity agent. Through Zechariah, God wants human beings that they no longer have to live as slaves to sin. Jesus came to set us free and to repair the damaged we have done in our relationships with God. There is no doubt in Zechariah's mind that these miracles are a prelude to the Messianic age. The very first word in the song is praise. In Greek it is the same word we get eulogize from. It is a good word from God. And make no mistake Who Zechariah is praising. He is praising the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is Yahweh. There is only one God. There are several clues that alert us that God is ushering in the Messianic Age. First of all, look at the second phrase in verse 68. In referring to God, Zechariah says that He has come and has redeemed His people. First of all, the word translated he has come in Greek is episkeptomai. It is the same root word that will later name the elders and overseers of the Christian Church.

The word visited can mean a home visit, a hospital visit, or a jail visit. The word here means that God visited His people. This is an eschatological visit. The mission of this visit is to set His people free. Here is where it may get complicated for the Jew. The Jews were looking for a political Messiah. After all, they had their experience in Egypt to make comparisons. When the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt, God approached Pharaoh through Moses and told him to let

His people go in order for them to worship. However, it's a little confusing here because the Jews were free to worship God. In fact temple worship was going on uninhibited. So we will have to keep this question in mind, "Who did they need to be set free from?" This brings us to the eschatological theme of redemption. The word redemption means to be set free from, to be liberated from enemies. It is clearly Messianic since it refers to an ancestor of David being the power by which they will be delivered. The prophets predicted that Israel would be rescued and redeemed by someone from the tribe of David. Zechariah clearly knew the prophecies did not refer to his son John since they were from the tribe of Levi, not from Judah which was the tribe of David. So with all this talk of a Messianic visit, power, and redemption, it is easy to understand why the Jews were looking for a political deliverer. However, they were thinking a lot like we think. They were looking for worldly power. They wanted to make Rome their servants and they wanted to rule the world. But the critical thought they had to keep in mind is the same critical thought we must keep in mind. Rome was not stopping them from worshipping God. Our government is not stopping us from worshipping God.

Zechariah in verse 70 makes it clear this is the Messianic prophecies that were predicted by prophets of the Old Testament. The entire history of Israel foretells the ministry and person of Jesus. Luke will pick up on these liberation prophecies but let me just summarize this section by quoting two Messianic prophecies given by the prophet Isaiah. One the Jews would clearly recognize, the second they perhaps overlooked:

*"6For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6 / NLT).*

*"6All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 / NLT).*

Yes the Messiah would come to rescue us and to set us free. However, we needed to be set free from our slavery to sin and lust. We needed to be set free from fear, from Satan, and from death. Jesus did come to redeem His people, but not from a human enemy, but from a spiritual enemy and from ourselves.

### III. GOD'S PEOPLE

And by the way, the group of people that is referred to here as God's people will be redefined and expanded by Jesus so that it goes back to match the Genesis prophecy given to Abraham.

And God's plan is revealed in verses 71-73. Let me start by going back to the original plan as given to Adam and to Abraham. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God and allowed sin and death into our existence God promised them that He would deal with the sin problem:

*"15From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*

We will see later in this Gospel that Satan gives Jesus his best shot. He tempts Jesus in the wilderness and Jesus wins the victory over him. At the cross, Satan did his best to defeat the plan of God by killing Jesus, but Jesus defeated him again by raising from the dead. And at His

second coming, Jesus promised to eternally cast Satan into the lake of fire where he will never be able to torment us again. So we should understand that we do not have a political Messiah.

Satan hates Christians because we are children of God. Listen to what the Apostle Peter warns us about Satan:

*“8Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. 9Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are” (1 Peter 5:8-9 / NLT).*

I think too many times we focus on the wrong things. We want political power and so we often find ourselves fighting the wrong enemy. Jesus and Paul told the church to pay our taxes and obey the law. Our fight is against Satan and our own lust. Governments and powers are neither to be our friends or our foes. We need to keep focused on our mission. And that mission was given to us with a promise:

*“1Then the LORD told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you. 2I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. 3I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3 / NLT).*

Our mission is to bring God’s message of salvation and reconciliation to the world. We have the potential to be a blessing to every man, woman, and child on earth. What a privilege and what a mission. The Jews seemed to have missed this and the more we get entangled in the things of this world, the more likely we will miss our calling as well.

Our calling is to complete the mission that Jesus started with His death and resurrection. We are to be witnesses of God’s work which is described in verses 74-75. Again, if we misidentify the enemy, we will be extremely confused and find ourselves fighting the wrong battles. Sure, the Jews could easily identify the Romans as their enemies since their country was occupied by Roman soldiers, politicians, and law. However, they were free to worship and serve God. No one was stopping them from this. Their own priests and religious leaders were more of a hindrance to true worship than the Romans were.

I wonder what would have happened if the Jews had chosen to follow Jesus in His direct assault on the sin in our lives? I am still waiting to see the day the church gets out of politics and starts to take seriously our mission to get rid of sin in our own personal lives and to care for one another like the Bible tells us to? Can you imagine what a revolution we would start if we learned to take care of other Christians? If equality, love, forgiveness, and salvation were truly found in the church, society would be left with their mouths open and their voices silenced. My challenge is to the Christian church in Western countries. Let’s start to take seriously our personal pursuit of holiness and our responsibility to other Christians in our local churches and around the world. We need to stop looking to Caesar to do the mission we have been tasked with. I want to read this passage for about the thousandth time:

*“42They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer. 43A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. 45They sold their*

*possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. 46They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47 / NLT).*

Can you even begin to imagine what it would be like if all Christian churches around the world took this seriously and started to live like this? That is the Messianic Age Jesus came to usher in. It's God's plan, not mine. **GOD PLANS HIS WORK AND WORKS HIS PLAN.** Oh, by the way, do you remember when I talked about the word for God visiting His people? It was truly a time for those seeking God to rejoice. But when we get off the track and start to operate according to the values of this world, we can also be sure that God will visit His people with judgment as well. Listen to what God says to His people after several warnings through the prophet Amos:

*“12“Therefore, I will bring upon you all these further disasters I have announced. Prepare to meet your God as he comes in judgment, you people of Israel!” (Amos 4:12 / NLT).*

I think it is very important that we submit in humility to God and pursue holiness. God's people are described in verses 76-79. **GOD WORKS HIS PLAN THROUGH PEOPLE WHO LOVE HIM.** This new born baby John will be the kind of person God is looking for to work His plans through. John described the relationship between him and Jesus like this:

*“30He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less” (John 3:30 / NLT).*

Because John submitted himself to the Holy Spirit, he clearly recognized the work God had prepared him for. His ministry was to prepare people to receive the person and ministry of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus referred to John as the greatest man that ever lived. John's mission was to teach people about their need for Christ. John explained to people what sin was, what the consequences of sin were, how sin enslaves us, and how sin separates us from God. John made clear our need for redemption and our need for a Savior. Through his words and actions, John made it clear that only people who are humble enough to recognize their sin and were willing to repent of their sin, could be ready to receive the healing ministry of Jesus.

This is something we must always keep in mind. If we think we are good in any way, then when we talk to people about their need for Jesus, all they will experience is our self-righteousness. On the other hand, if we are constantly aware of our utter dependence on the blood of Jesus for our moment by moment salvation, we will never come off as self-righteous. Through our words and actions, we too, like John will be a powerful witness to the wonderful love of Jesus.

Verse 78 illustrates God's love. The Bible is clear that if God took no action on our behalf, we would all spend eternity where justice demands, ... in hell. It is only because of God's tenderhearted love that we exist and that we have not been wiped off the face of the earth. Jesus is God coming down from heaven and taking on human flesh. The Gospel of John explains it like this:

*“14So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father” (John 1:14 / NLT).*

Luke has made it clear that because of God's incredible love, Jesus will come to earth, take on human flesh, suffer and die for our sins. That truly is an act of love.

The last line of this song, verse 79, describes God's destination for us. Let me point this out. Zechariah has already been described as a righteous man, yet he uses the pronoun our here. He doesn't assume that he is any different than any other sinful human being. God's desire is to lead us out of our bondage to our lust, our sin, our fears, and out of death. God's desire is to lead us into the light where we can enjoy peace. Keep in mind that peace for the Hebrew never meant the absence of trouble or conflict. Peace for the Hebrew and for us means to be in a right relationship with God. We remain in a right relationship because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. We need Jesus every moment of every day. God's desire is that we spend eternity in heaven with him. We have been given the mission of telling a lost and hurting world that God loves them and wants them to be reconciled with Him. If we want to claim to be Christians, then we must remember this. **GOD WORKS HIS PLAN THROUGH PEOPLE WHO LOVE HIM.**

Growing up in Christ doesn't just happen. It takes a courageous and brutally honest self-reflection of who we really are. It takes submission to God's Holy Spirit as He examines our hearts and points out our wicked ways. It takes humility to agree with Him and cooperate with Him as He shapes us into the people He wants us to be. **IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF EFFORT TO SEE THROUGH ALL THE LIES WE HAVE COME TO BELIEVE IN ORDER TO SEE GOD'S PLAN.**

But I am sad to say that many people would prefer to remain in the dark. They live their spiritual lives like this couple lived with substandard light.

“Back when electricity was first being introduced to a little Scottish village, almost everybody in a particular church switched from propane lanterns to electricity just as soon as it could be hooked up. However, the oldest couple in the congregation couldn't get their electricity because they were waiting for the poles to go up and the wire to be strung. So they continued to use their propane lanterns.

The day finally came when the electricity was brought into their home. Everyone came for the festive event. The old man waited for it to get extra dark; then he told his wife to go turn on the switch. When she did, the light filled the room, and everyone rejoiced. The old man grinned from ear to ear, picked up a propane lamp and said, ‘It sure makes lighting my lamps easier.’ And with that he lit a lamp, and his wife turned off the electricity.

Sometimes we're just like that. We can't see the light for need to hang on to the darkness of our past. As one person put it, we have ‘eyes that grope in a fog that never lifted.’”

I hope that we are not people who come here Sunday after Sunday, get a little glimpse of the light, but never quite give ourselves to God through submission and obedience.