

**1) INTRO**

- One of the many things I’ve learned and encountered as a parent over the past four years as a parent already’s that discipline’s a difficult thing to do
  - It’s tough to look into the sweet eyes of this child you’d willingly give your life for and discipline them and correct them and talk with them about how they were wrong and living in sin
  - It’s hard to faithfully and consistently and gently and lovingly and properly follow God’s commands to parents to discipline their children
- And, I know that you’ve felt or are feeling the same thing as a parent
  - I’ve talked with a few of you who’re on the other side of parenting – you’re children are grown now – and we’ve talked of the same sense of clinging to God and following God and seeking to faithfully discipline so that our children would ultimately live in submission to God and honor God and walk in obedience/faithful living for God
  - To the few of you I’ve talked with about this...thank you again for the encouragement
- One of the greatest things Jordan and I have learned in this parenting privilege is that discipline’s for the spiritual condition of our children
  - It’s not for our convenience of simply having well-behaved children
  - It’s not so that people will look at our children and praise us for how well we’re doing
  - It’s so that ultimately our children would know authority and respect and honor and obedience so *that* one day, Lord willing, they’d know that God’s their authority and that God’s the one they’re to honor with their lives and so that they’d walk in obedience to God’s Word in living lives that love Jesus and live for him in all that they say, think, and do
  - Ultimately, discipline’s so that God would be glorified in the hearts and lives of our children
    - And, we pray that God would do that in our children’s lives...knowing there’s no guarantee they’re gonna love God
      - But, we pray that God would do his miraculous work of making them *his* children
      - So, while discipline’s difficult...it’s also necessary
- The same’s true for us and our spiritual condition too
- God does the same work of disciplining us too...he disciplines his children
  - Hebrews 12:6-7 shows us that “God disciplines the one he loves....God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”
  - And, God disciplines us so that we’d live lives of submission to his authority, walking in obedience to his rules of how to love him and live for him
    - Hebrews 10:8 – “he disciplines us for our good”
  - And, if we’re honest, we don’t like to think of God’s discipline to us as being for our good
    - But it is
    - God disciplines helps us to live for him rather for ourselves...it works in our hearts in a way that softens us to the HS so that we live lives of worship to God
- And, this is what we see going on in our text today
- We walk into our passage today in the midst of a moment of discipline
  - Actually, in the midst of a 9-month period of discipline
- Our text today finishes the narrative that began in vv5-25 (which we looked at two weeks ago)
  - If we remember...the angel Gabriel came to the elderly priest Zechariah and told him that he and his elderly wife Elizabeth would have a son who they were to name John

- Even though v6 shows us that Zechariah and Elizabeth “were both righteous before God”, Zechariah still sins and doesn’t believe the message from God that the angel Gabriel has for him
  - And, b/c of his sin, God disciplines Zechariah by making him mute until his son’s born
- Now, how many of you have ever said to your children, “you know better”...“you know better than to do that”?
  - How true that is of us too...which is one of the things you learn even more as a parent (our own sinfulness)
    - Regardless of our age...whether we’re 8 or 88, we know better, don’t we?
  - That was also true of Zechariah
  - Remember, Zechariah and Elizabeth were both born of priestly families
    - So, they had a deep and rich Christian heritage
      - In our day, we’d say they were both “raised in the church”
  - As such, they knew God’s Holy Scripture
    - The knew the words of the OT...Zechariah was a priest and he would’ve known the story of Abraham and God’s faithfulness in making an old couple like Abraham and Sarah parents in the book of Genesis
    - But, Zechariah doubted God words that the messenger Gabriel was giving him that he was going to be a father
    - And, so through the angel Gabriel, God rebuked Zechariah for his unbelief and made him unable to speak until John was born
  - So, even though Zechariah knew better, he was disciplined for 9 months...being unable to speak
  - And, it’s here that we continue in the narrative today in vv57-80

## **2) THE BIRTH OF JOHN (vv57-58)**

- We continue by seeing that Elizabeth now gives birth to their son...just as God said would happen...just as he promised
  - Zechariah and Elizabeth are now parents...even though they’re an older couple
    - We don’t know their exact age – or even their approximate age – we just know that Zechariah says he’s “an old man” and his “wife is advanced in years” (v18)
  - And, the birth of her son brings great joy to Elizabeth's friends and family
    - They rejoice in God’s mercy toward her in allowing her to finally be a mother
    - For her to be childless was seen as a punishment to her
      - But, now that she’s given birth to a son, there’s rejoicing in God’s mercy to her – that he’s no longer punishing her...that she no longer seen as disgraceful
    - And, so joy in God and in his mercy runs throughout our passage today...just as it will when Jesus is born
  - So, this promised son’s born to Zechariah and Elizabeth and our passage moves now to the customary naming of their son

## **3) THE NAMING OF JOHN (vv59-66)**

- Custom and tradition dictated that the child be circumcised and named on the 8<sup>th</sup> day
  - Tradition would be for this son to be named after a family member to honor a parent, grandparent, or another relative
  - And, the friends and family who’re gathered there suggest that his name be Zechariah after his father

- Which makes sense given the tradition...and especially given the circumstances of Zechariah being from a priestly family and having a son at an old age
- But, Elizabeth corrects them
  - She's not gonna call him Junior...she doesn't want him to be Zechariah Jr.
  - And, it's not b/c of any personal preference
    - Instead it's b/c of Gabriel's message to Zechariah that his name be John
  - But, when Elizabeth says that he name'll be John, everyone's shocked
    - They're shocked b/c it's not a family name
    - This wouldn't be following the customary norm
- So, the crowd here communicates with Zechariah asking him what his child's name should be
  - They're rejecting Elizabeth's announcement that his name'll be John
  - They think that surely Zechariah will follow normal convention overturn his wife's decision
- But, Zechariah obediently follows God's command and writes on a tablet that his name's to be John
  - In doing so, Zechariah abandons the tradition and he proper protocol for naming his son
  - He also avoids the suggestion and persuasion of his friends and family
    - He instead follows God's command...even though it doesn't make sense and it doesn't follow tradition and it doesn't appease the crowd
      - He's to be called John – “the Lord has shown favor”
- As a righteous man, Zechariah's learned from his sin of not trusting God...he's learned from his mistake
  - Darrel Bock – “Through the pain of the discipline, he emerges a stronger man of God. Those who are arrogant, thinking they know it all, have no need for God or for instruction. Zechariah is not an arrogant man.”
  - He's learned and grown from his 9 months of discipline
  - He trusts God and follows him
  - He's reflected much in his 9 months of silence
  - He's learned that righteous men also have much to learn from God
  - He's learned that saints who still sin need correction when they don't obediently follow God or trust him or believe his words
    - He's given a second chance by God...and he obey
- He obeys God and names his son John
- And, *immediately* Zechariah's mouth opens and he's able to speak
  - Which brings a healthy fear to everyone there
    - They've just seen something otherworldly take place and touch them in a great way
    - They've just seen a supernatural work of God in Zechariah's obedience to the Lord
  - And, news of this miracle spreads through all the hill country of Judea and people ask “what then will this child be?”
    - They know that God's got something great in store for John
    - They've heard the news that after 9 months of silence, Zechariah can now speak
      - He can finally talk
      - And talk he does!
  - Zechariah responds in praise and worship and exaltation of God

#### **4) HYMN OF PRAISE (vv67-79)**

- As we saw Mary do last week, we see Zechariah respond with a song of praise
  - Mary's song is known as the Magnificat

- And, Zechariah's song here's known as the Benedictus (Latin for "blessing/blessed) b/c he begins his song of praise by blessing God
- And, he launches into his song of praise after being filled with the HS (v67)
- He's given HS-power to open his mouth and proclaim worship to God
  - And, the HS gives Zechariah words that declare what John's birth shows us about God's faithfulness to the promises he's made in the OT
    - Which includes the coming of the Messiah – JC to deliver Gods' people sin and darkness and death
- So, Zechariah launches into a prophecy that's peppered w/ OT imagery and references and promises pointing to JC
  - Which we see's the one Zechariah speaks of the most here
  - He spends vv68-75 speaking of JC and only vv76-79 speaking of his son, John
  - "The gift of John to the aged couple is a sign of the certainty of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the figure in view in most of the Benedictus is not John but Jesus the Messiah."
- So, Zechariah starts by blessing God for the certainty of Jesus, the Messiah, who's visited and redeemed his people
  - So, he's worshiping God for what's to come (the coming of Jesus) as though it's already been completed (b/c Jesus hasn't been born yet)
    - Isn't that interesting?
    - He's so certain of the coming Messiah, that he's already calling it a past event
  - So, he worships God who's visited and redeemed his people by raising up a horn of salvation for us from the line of David
  - The "visiting" here points to God's action in saving or helping his people
  - This is what we focus on in a particular way during Advent...or during Christmas
    - We focus in a particular way on the fact that God come to earth with the purpose of saving sinful people
    - God's come to earth to atone for our sins and save us from our sinful, corrupted state
    - He acted on our behalf by sending Jesus to come with the purpose of dying in our place and defeating death
    - So, Christ has visited us with the purpose of helping us and giving us the salvation that we can't give ourselves...he's redeemed us
      - B/c we're spiritually dead without Christ and dead people can't give themselves life
      - We can't do anything to make ourselves right before God b/c we're tainted by sin
      - But, praise God that he's come to us/that he's descended to the earth
  - And, praise him that he's worked and acted with such great power in saving us
  - He's our horn of salvation
    - This is a picture of power as it refers to the horns on an animal...it's an animal horn; not a trumpet or a trombone
    - So, the picture here's that Jesus is the one who fights for us/the one who does battle for us
    - He did that when we went to the cross
    - He took our sin upon himself when he went to the cross and he crushed it...he squashed it/ he obliterated it/he did away with all our sin
      - And he did so by bursting from the tomb
      - As the God over all, our horn of salvation couldn't be kept down by death

- He defeated death, he destroyed its grip on us, and dealt the enemy an irreversible blow
- Jesus, our horn of salvation, can't be brought down
- So, let's worship him and live for him!
- We don't have certainty in anything else in this life
- We're not guaranteed...
  - Our jobs
  - Our retirement
  - Our home
  - Our family, tomorrow
- We're only guaranteed salvation and eternal life when we trust in JC and believe that he died in our place for our sin...and that it's his work that gives us right standing before holy God
  - He and he alone's our certainty
  - JC's our only certainty
- Zechariah spoke with certainty as though the birth of Christ and his fulfillment of Scripture had already taken place even though it hadn't yet
  - But, we know it has!
  - We know that Jesus came to earth to redeem us and defeat sin's crippling grip on our lives of keeping us from God
  - Jesus is our certainty!
- This is what we're show in Zechariah's prophecy here
  - We're shown that the OT promises of forgiveness of sin and salvation and mercy are all ushered him with the promised Messiah, JC
  - We see here some of the ways the OT points to Jesus
- And, we also see that John's role is gonna be to point to Jesus as well
  - vv76-79 show us that John will go before Christ to prepare the way by telling them about salvation and forgiveness of sins
  - And, John'll be pointing to Jesus as the one who saves us from death and the punishment we deserve for our sin
  - And, JC will "visit us from on high" (v78) to be light in the darkness and shadow of death that we'd be living in without him
    - But, Jesus came into our dark world to grant us peace with God so that we'd not walk in darkness, but that we'd be able now to walk with him and be in his presence for all eternity
      - All b/c of what Jesus did on the cross in washing our sin away
- And, John's gonna point people to Jesus – the light, our salvation
  - And, he gonna do so in a way that's not been done before
  - He's gonna be able to physically point to Jesus
  - He's gonna actually be able to say to people, "Do you see him? He's the one! He's the Messiah! He's the one who forgives and washes our sin away! The Age of Salvation's here! It's him!"

##### **5) THE GROWTH OF JOHN IN SPIRIT (vv 66b & 80)**

- And, so our text today ends by showing us that John grew strong in spirit
  - We saw earlier that God's hand was with him (v66b)
  - So, God spends the next few decades shaping and molding John to be the one to prepare the way for Christ...just as Zechariah prophesied

## 6) CONCLUSION

- We see throughout these verses that Zechariah's heart's been softened by the HS which leads him to worship Jesus
  - Just as the HS does in our hearts as well
- As followers of JC – as people who look to JC as our Lord and Savior – we're also filled w/ the HS
  - And, the HS helps us to live lives of worship and praise and adoration to God
  - As people who're now filled w/ the HS, we're able to talk and act and think in a way that's honoring to God and obedient to his desires for us
    - The core of who we are's different when we've surrendered our lives to the Lordship of Christ
    - We're different when we acknowledge that we're sinful people in need of God's salvation and redemption
    - We're changed when we believe in JC's saving power of dying in our place and defeating death and grave
  - And, when we place our faith and trust in Jesus and his work on the cross, we're filled with the HS who gives us new hearts that're able to finally worship God
  - B/c of the Spirit we're able to exalt Jesus as the one who's come to earth to save us from the death and punishment that we're deserving of
    - If you're here today and you don't yet know Jesus as your Lord and Savior – as the one who saves you from eternal punishment for sin and as the one who guides your every step – I pray that the HS would work in your heart and help you to surrender your life to Christ
      - Without Jesus, we're each one of us destined to a sad and frightening eternity
      - Jesus saves us from that...each one of us
- Brothers and sisters – those of us who've surrendered our lives to Jesus, may we continuously cry out to God that he'd help us to follow him and obey him and trust him and believe his words and live them out
  - And, as sinful people – by nature and by choice – we need help in this don't we?
    - Just as Zechariah did...a priest and one who "grew up in the church"
  - We're unable to do live for God and follow him on our own, but thankfully, as people who trust in JC and cling to him, we're able to
  - Our hardened hearts are opposed to God until the HS breaks through and changes and transforms us
  - Ezekiel 36:26-27 – "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rule."
  - 1 John 4:13 – "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."
- Further, may we also be people who receive God's correction
  - Zechariah received God's discipline and learned from his sin
  - May we be sensitive and soft to God's correction
  - No matter where we're at in our journey with the Lord, we're still in need of his discipline
    - We're not perfect until we go home to heaven