

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 1- Luke 1:56-66** 16- The Birth of John the Baptist

February 1, 2009

Luke 1:56-66

Now that last comment by Luke right there in verse 66-

... For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

... sets the stage for what I want you to see in this account. It is a very simple narrative on the surface. Nobody gets confused when they read it-

... For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

This is very easy to understand what happened here. A real child was really born. People were there. And those people felt that it was appropriate to name the child after his father. That isn't unusual, is it? But, his parents indicated very strongly and strangely that the name of this child was to be John. And the reason that the parents were so adamant about this is because an angel had come and a miracle had occurred that had restored to Zacharias his hearing and his speech, and wonder filled everyone about what this child would become.

So while this is a very simple story- nevertheless- there's something here that jolts us in the final statement:

... For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

Now as much as the story appears to be about Zacharias and the miracle that loosed his tongue, as much as the story might appear to be about Elizabeth giving birth in her old age, and as much as the story

might appear to be a story about this child named John- the great significance of his life and ministry- the story is really a story about God. God is the main player in this drama. God is the main actor. It is the Hand of the Lord that is on John that Luke wants us to see here. And that is not just true of *this* story; it's true of *everything* in Scripture. **Psalm 19:7** calls the Bible “**the testimony of the LORD**”. So we see that Scripture is God's only Self-disclosure.

Now, first and foremost- the Bible is the Revelation of God. It is His Own Word about Himself. And more than anything else- Scripture is God's Story. So behind Zacharias and behind Elizabeth and behind Mary and behind John and even behind the coming of Jesus is the great and mighty Revelation of God. His Nature, His Character, His Works, His Purpose, His Will- all throughout the pages of Scripture- God is being Revealed.

In fact, at every point in the Bible- God is teaching us the Truth about Himself. He is the one dominating Figure in Biblical Revelation. So the Holy Bible is simply a Book about God. It starts with God and it ends with God, and everything in between is about God.

And if we are to rightly worship God, if we are to properly give to God that which he so richly deserves- our love and devotion and service and obedience- we must know God. We have to come to the realization, dear friends, that we cannot love a God Whom we do not know, and we certainly will not give Him the Glory that He deserves if He remains unknown to us.

So the study of Scripture is what leads to Spirit and Truth Worship. Now I am not so silly that I do not know that there are those who study Scripture so they can feed their own pride, so they can win the argument, so they can beat people up with their information- and that is probably the most hideous thing we could ever do with God's Word. But, I am not doing that through my effort here. I love God, I love Jesus, I love the Holy Spirit, and I want to adore this one God Who is in three Persons; I want to obey Him and I want to follow Him and I want to please Him and serve Him and be faithful to Him and worship Him.

You see, the more than I understand about God- the more I respect Him, the more I admire Him, the more I value Him, the more I am in awe of Him, and that knowledge translates into more love- and that love translates into more obedience.

It is far easier for me to forsake the world when I am in such awe of God. It is much easier for me to resist temptation as my respect and fear of God grows. It is much easier for me to not love money and to not seek after power and to not desire recognition as I stand trembling in God's Presence.

When I study God's Word, and through that study, I comprehend the magnificence of Grace and the majesty of Mercy- it is so much easier for me then to love my enemies and to forgive those who have wronged me and to pray for those who spitefully use me and persecute me.

When my face is in this Book and my knees are on the carpet and I am wearing out the knees of my pants way before I wear out the seat of my pants- the temptation for me to love and follow after the lusts of my flesh and the lusts of my eyes and the pride of life is reduced. When I set aside dedicated and consistent and consecrated time to let my eyes fall on the only inspired Words that exist on the face of the earth- my desire to love this present evil world system is diminished.

So I have learned that if I ever hope to be faithful and to love my wife as Christ loved the Church, and to love my children enough to raise them in the fear and nurture of the Lord, if I ever hope to love my mother as a good son, and if I ever hope to love my brothers and sisters with a pure heart fervently- if I ever hope to resist the pull of this world that is upon me, if I ever hope to walk this world in white- my eyes need to look at these Words and my mind needs to think about these things and my heart needs to be enraptured by God's Glory.

So if that is my goal- then a systematic approach to Scripture- the line upon line, precept upon precept examination of Scripture, the verse by verse analysis of the Bible is as important to me as breathing, it is as natural to me as blinking my eyes, it is as close to me as my own flesh, and it is as important for life as eating. And it is all about worship, all about love, and all about obedience.

And so I have learned long ago- that no matter what passage I'm studying- to be looking for the Revelation of God in that given passage- because every passage reveals something about God that God wanted me to know so that my love for Him would increase and my love for myself would decrease.

Pursuing the Knowledge of God in every portion of Scripture is a very rich and rewarding enterprise. And how could it be avoided here

when Luke makes a comment at the end of the passage in verse 66 and says,

... For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

Everything in the story of John the Baptist evidences the mighty intervention of God.

And you see that intervention of God- through His Word- through His angel, and through the miracle of conception that happened when Zacharias went home to Elizabeth and in their sixties, seventies, or even their eighties- those old simple, insignificant barren people were able to have the first child in their life.

You see the intervention of God as He comes to Mary again through the angel Gabriel. We saw that starting in verse 26 of the first chapter, and unfolded to Mary this incredible reality that she would conceive a child without knowing a man. And God would literally and miraculously plant a fetus in her womb, and bring it to full size and to birth, and that child would be God incarnate, the Son of God- the Savior of the world.

God's great Hand is in all of this. And certainly His Hand was in the miraculous striking of Zacharias deaf and mute, which He did as a judgment on his unbelief. And God's Hand was also evidenced when Zacharias was loosed from that Divine chastening and spoke. The Hand of God is everywhere here. And Luke wants us to be sure we're seeing God's Hand- so he reminds us at the end of verse 66 when he says:

... For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

In fact, Luke as a historian is writing Divine history, inspired in his mind by the Self-Revealing God. And so Luke's concern for his friend, Theophilus, and for us today, is that we understand that this is Divine history.

As the Gospel of Luke begins, Luke is especially concerned that we see the Movement of God, the Purpose of God, the Plan of God for eternal Redemption unfolding before us. And Luke focuses on several staggering supernatural events:

- ✓ Two angelic visitations after 400 years of silence
- ✓ Two miracle conceptions- one with an old barren and the other with a young virgin
- ✓ Two miracle births- both boys
- ✓ Divine Judgment to silence unbelief
- ✓ Various other attendant miracles that go along with them.

And then the coming of John and the coming of Jesus and a plethora of miracles explodes on the world through the Power of Jesus and the Apostles to whom He delegated that power.

The reality here, beloved, is that God is inserting Himself into human history. God- Who has been silent for 400 years, God Who hasn't done a miracle in over 400 years or a series of miracles in perhaps 500 years, God Who hasn't sent a visible angel to earth in that same amount of time is now moving among men. And Luke wants his readers to see God being revealed here- he wants his readers to understand that God is launching the greatest era of Redemptive History that the world has ever known- the coming of the Savior of the world. And Luke reminds us as we are amazed and as we stagger at all of this- to look for God.

Now it is important for us to remember that in Israel during this time- a birth was the cause for great joy and celebration- especially if the child was a boy. You see, before Christianity gave dignity to women and marriage- women were always treated as second class citizens- and the birth of a baby girl was not as celebrated as the birth of a son.

The tradition of that day was that when the birth came- the friends would come, the neighbors would come, and the family would come even from afar, and they would be ready to celebrate, and they would hire the local musicians to come to accompany the music of celebration after the child was born.

Some Jewish writers tell us when a son was born- the gathered crowd would break into music and song. And some writers tell us that if the child was a girl- the musicians went silently away as it was a birth of sadness.

And the New Testament overturned that as the Apostle Paul in his wonderful way said in Christ there is neither male nor female, and did everything he could to exalt women to the place where they deserve

in the economy of God, and not where the Pharisaical, legalistic, Judaistic tradition had placed them.

Well, this birth was of John the Baptist. And so we can assume that the celebration went on in the common tradition. But, even more so because this was an old man and an old woman who had barren for many years- so the celebration must have been enormous.

And everyone knew that this child was a unique child cause it had been told by an angel that this child would be the forerunner of the Messiah, that he would be great in the sight of God, that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, that he would turn many of the hearts of the children of Israel toward righteousness, and that he would make the way prepared for the Messiah to come.

This child, John was not just any child- but this child was to be the last great pre-Messianic prophet. And so there was a great, great celebration. And there was a lot to celebrate- the character of the child, the amazing miracle of the conception, the joy of these barren people finally having a child and a son at that- and a prophet at that, and the forerunner of Messiah at that.

But as great as their joy was- I believe that our joy can be even greater. Because, for the most part- the Jews are still asking the same question found in **Luke 1:66**:

... What then will this child *turn out to be*?

But because we believe- we already know the answer to that question, don't we? You see, we know what John was like. We know about his life. We know about his preaching. We know about his impact. We know that all of Jerusalem and Judea was pouring out to hear him preach when he grew older and preached in the wilderness. We know that the population was getting baptized with the baptism of repentance- confessing their sins- getting ready for the Messiah.

We know what a preacher of righteousness John was, don't we. We know what a preacher against sin he was. We know that he confronted sinners in high places and it cost him his life- John was beheaded for his faithful preaching of repentance. We know that it was John who announced,

... Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

We know that John was, in fact, the forerunner of Messiah. And by John's announcement- we also know that the Messiah did come. And we know that the Messiah lived. And we know He died. And we know that He rose again. And we know that He ascended up on High. And we know that He sent His Holy Spirit to establish His Church of which we are a part.

And we know that right now- that very same Messiah intercedes for us now. And we also know that this very same Messiah will come back to this earth in Glory to take us to be with Himself and to establish His Kingdom- which is eternal. We know all of that. So if their joy was great- our joy ought to be even greater.

Now Luke mingles the narratives of both conceptions and births wonderfully. First he gives us the wonderful story of Gabriel coming to Zacharias and the miracle conception between Zacharias and Elizabeth. And then he moves to the miracle conception that occurred by God in the virgin womb of Mary and tells us that story.

Now, in this passage, Luke returns back to the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth to tell the birth narrative of John the Baptist. And as soon as this one is over- Luke will then tell the birth narrative of Jesus- which starts in chapter 2.

Two conception miracles, two birth miracles, two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, two fathers, Zacharias and God... Luke weaves these narratives together and there's always the stamp of Supernatural Power on them. God is putting Himself on display here. And Luke in a very precise and a very sequential way tells both stories- mingling them together while paralleling them. In each case it's the story of a birth and a circumcision and a naming and praise. That's what we'll see in the birth of John, and that's exactly the sequence we'll see in chapter 2 in the birth of Jesus.

Now as we look at the narrative before us- God puts Himself on display in three ways here. In three ways we can see the Hand of God. First, number one, the Promise of God is True. The Promise of God is True- it is trustworthy; it is reliable and that's what the story shows us here. We see the Hand of the Lord here fulfilling His Promise. Please look again at Luke 1:56-58:

56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and *then* returned to her home.

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.

58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.

Now you may remember that Mary had gone down to see Elizabeth after she had received word from the angel Gabriel that she would become with child that had been miraculously placed there by God. Now remember that Mary as probably not older than 15 and was a virgin. She was betrothed or engaged to Joseph- but they had not consummated that relationship. The wedding had not yet occurred.

And when she was told by the angel that she would be pregnant and she would be bearing the Son of God- she realized most people were going to have hard time believing that.

But Mary knew in her heart that if there was one woman who would believe- it would be Elizabeth- because the angel had told Mary that Elizabeth was also with child by a miracle.

So when Mary was informed by the angel that Elizabeth, her cousin, was also pregnant by the Power of God- Mary went immediately to the one woman on earth who would understand her situation and could vouch for the reality of it. And the Bible says Mary stayed with her three months.

Now apparently from the flow of the text- Mary left in the ninth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy and went, it says, in verse 56, back to her home. Still not yet wed to Joseph- Mary went back to the home of her mother and father. And after her returning- the story goes back to pick it up from verse 25, back to Elizabeth. And it says, in verse 57:

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.

58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.

Now we must remember that Luke's words are very carefully chosen here so as to prove to Theophilus, and to us, that God's Promise is True. And we really shouldn't question that because in **Numbers 23:19** the Bible says:

God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Joshua 23:14 says,

... you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.

1 Kings 8:56

Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant.

Psalms 89:14

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You.

Psalms 146:6b

[God] keeps faith forever;

In **Isaiah 65:16**, the prophet called the Lord- "**The God of truth.**" In **Titus 1:2** Paul says, "**God who cannot lie.**" The writer of Hebrews said in **Hebrews 6:18**, "**it is impossible for God to lie.**" And Jesus Himself gave the greatest affirmation that God's Promises are true in **John 17:17** when He said, "**Your word is truth.**"

Every single time that God speaks- He speaks the truth. And God had spoken in a prophecy, and God had said in **Luke 1:13**, through the angel to Zacharias,

13 ... Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

And that is exactly what Luke says happened.

- **Luke 1:57-** Elizabeth gave birth to a son
- **Luke 1:58-** "**And they were rejoicing with her.**"

The angel from God had said, you'll have a son and many will rejoice, and that is precisely what happened. And Luke records it with great precision to make the point that God's Promise is True. So Luke is putting God on display here.

And all of this tells us what we need to know about Zacharias, and it tells us what we need to know about Elizabeth, and it tells us what we need to know about John. But more than any of that- what Luke writes here tells us what we need to know about God- that when God speaks- it's the truth. And that is the important issue here.

Verse 57 says, "**The time had come.**" The great epoch had arrived, the monumental moment of the birth of John, the prophet who was the forerunner to Jesus Christ. So here is the launch event of the coming of the Savior of the world. And this event triggers everything else. The forerunner comes, then the Messiah comes, then the Work of Redemption is accomplished.

So the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth. Nine months of pregnancy was completed, she was now ready to give birth. And indeed she did, "**And she brought forth a son.**" Exactly as God through the angel Gabriel had promised. The Word of God, as always, is true. And she rejoiced- and I'm sure that Elizabeth rejoiced more than most mothers because of her life-long barrenness and the stigma that she had endured through that, she was even called "*the barren one*," as you remember- which is a terrible stigma for a Jewish lady to bear.

And so Elizabeth rejoiced beyond anything imaginable because the child that she had been given was not just any child- he was great in the sight of the Lord and filled with the Spirit. He was the forerunner to the Messiah and he would turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And John would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient would take up the attitude of the righteous, and the net result of John's ministry was that people would be made ready for the coming of the Messiah.

So God was not giving her just any child. So Elizabeth's rejoicing must have been very precious to her and very satisfying. She may have been like Sarah. You will remember that back in **Genesis**- Sarah was so happy when she had Isaac. I mean, she was in her nineties then. And she had been barren all her life, and she finally got a son from God and she couldn't stop laughing. **Genesis 21:6** says she just laughed and

laughed and laughed and named the child Isaac- which meant "laughter". And I'm sure Elizabeth had a similar joyous experience.

Now **Luke 1:58** indicates that the prophecy regarding others rejoicing over Elizabeth's son also came to pass. Her neighbors who would come from near, and her relatives, probably coming from even further distances- living in various places- heard that the Lord had displayed His great Mercy toward her and they were rejoicing with her- exactly as Gabriel had told her they would when they heard the Lord had displayed His mercy toward her.

Now remember that this was Mercy. And what is Mercy? God's favor...God's kindness...God's goodness. Mercy is God's loving action to undeserving people. You see, along with being Omnipotent and Powerful- the Bible reveals that God is good. And we read that in **Psalm 73**. God is Good by Nature. God shows favor and kindness to people who do not deserve it.

And this is a fundamental Truth about God that we need to remember lest we assign human qualities to God and wrongly understand Him. We must understand, dear friends, that *everybody* who is judged by God *deserves* to be judged by God. There is not one single soul who is judged by God who didn't deserve that Righteous Judgment. They earned it; they worked hard to get it- and they got what they deserved.

But we also have to remember that everybody who receives Mercy from God- they too deserved to be judged. They too are guilty; they too sinned before a holy God over and over again. They too worked hard to earn God's Wrath, they too rebelled against God all day long- maybe even more so than the one who was judged- but God- in His Sovereignty- gives Mercy- **Romans 9:15** says- on whom He will give Mercy.

So the net result of this is that Mercy and Grace become magnificent in our eyes because *nobody* deserves Mercy, *nobody* earns Grace, *nobody* is entitled to receive anything at all from God except eternal damnation for all the continual wickedness that we have done against God- but instead of giving us what we deserve- instead of being fair with us- God gives Mercy to undeserving sinners which brings fullness of joy to us and brings Glory to God.

Now the Hebrew word is *chesed*- which means: *loving kindness*. And this is a part of God's Own Personal Character and Nature. And so

God was good to this old couple. He acted toward them with kindness-even though they were completely undeserving.

And Mary knew that. She celebrated God's Mercy, too. In the wonderful praise of Mary in verse 50, she says,

AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

Further in her praise in verse 54 she mentions the fact that God has given help to Israel, His servant, in remembrance of His Mercy. And later on, Zachariah will praise God, and in verse 72 he celebrates the fact that God chose Mercy. So Mercy is somewhat of a theme here as sinners being so profoundly blessed by God recognize their unworthiness and God's loving Action toward undeserving people.

You see, when the people realized that God had been merciful, and God had showed this great favor, and God had demonstrated His great goodness to this old couple who were saved and who had all their lifelong wanted so much to have a child, when they knew that it had happened, the people came and they shared in this joy.

And the act that they rejoiced was another fulfillment of the Word of God. You see- God who Promised, according to **Hebrews 10:23** is faithful. And that's important for us to know because God also promises Salvation to those who call upon Him. God Promises that whoever comes to Him- He will receive them. God Promises that when we confess our sins- He will forgive them. God Promises forgiveness to those who ask. He Promises Heaven to those who cry for it. He Promises strength to the weak. He Promises wisdom to the ignorant. He Promises riches to the poor. He Promises answered prayer to those who cry to Him. And He Promises blessing to those who ask. He Promises heaven to those who seek it.

Don't you want to know that God keeps His Promises? He does. And so we learn in the outset of this Story of Salvation that the Promise of God is True.

Now secondly- the Purpose of God is Gracious...the Promise of God is True, and the Purpose of God is Gracious- please look at **Luke 1:59:**

59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.

60 But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.”

61 And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.”

62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.

63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished.

The second thing we learn about God here in this Story of Salvation is that God's unfolding Purpose is Gracious. And this is a wonderful part of the story.

But we really shouldn't be shocked that God is Gracious- because the fact that God is Gracious is mentioned all throughout the Scriptures. And this Story here illustrates it in a wonderful, wonderful way. God, we know, is a God of Grace, and His Purpose toward sinners is to be Gracious. His Purpose in Salvation is to put His Grace on display before all the Universe- including the angels who otherwise would never see His Grace unless there were some sinners to whom He could be Gracious. Thus God allowed sin in order that He might display Grace, and, thereby, be glorified for His Grace- which is an attribute which can only be displayed in the forgiveness of sins.

You see, God delights in being Gracious. He delights in giving sinners what they don't deserve. He delights in saving them from sin and death and hell. **Ephesians 1:9** describes God in this way, and I think it's a great praise. It says,

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

So God- Who is infinitely holy, Who hates sin, and Who hates unrepentant sinners still has kind intentions toward us. That's why in

1Peter 5:10 Peter calls Him, "**The God of all grace.**" **Psalm 84:11** says, "**The LORD gives grace.**"

God's Grace is described in the Bible as great, sovereign, rich, exceeding, manifold, all-sufficient, abundant and glorious. And we're going to be exposed to His Grace not just now but also throughout all Eternity because it says in **Ephesians 2** that in Eternity God is going to pour out the riches of His Grace and His kindness toward us. And that's why **1Peter 3:7** says we are the "fellow heir of the grace of life". We will inherit an eternal Grace. **Romans 6:14** says, "**for you are not under law but under grace.**" And where sin abounds...what happens when sin abounds?...Grace does much more abound! And the Grace of God came by Jesus Christ- Grace came by Christ.

And we can see this through this little conflict that ensues. Let me give you the story. The eighth day arrived, and on the eighth day it was necessary to circumcise this little Jewish baby. That was by God's law...that was by God's law. **Genesis 17:9-14** introduces circumcision and **Leviticus 12** gives us a very simple straightforward definition of circumcision.

On the eighth day, it says in verse 3, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised, cut off. That's circumcision. And it's kind of a strange thing in some way. The question might be asked...why is that done? If God felt that it was better for that to be done, why did He create people without doing that...why did He allow a foreskin to be there if it was something to be removed? He is the Creator, He made man as man. Why did He do that?

Well, the answer is threefold and it is quite unique. If you understand this you understand circumcision in all its various dimensions. So there are three reasons why circumcision is important:

1. A Physical Purpose
2. A Distinctional Purpose
3. A Spiritual Symbol

First of all, there was a *physical* reason for this physical circumcision. It was to perpetuate the nation Israel so they would live so that Messiah could be born.

In history, you can read ancient medical records and Jewish men have had the lowest rates of testicular cancer and other infections of

any group on earth because there is a physical cleansing that occurs with circumcision. Not so much in our modern world of hygiene and antibiotics- but back in ancient times. So this had a physical benefit- and it was part of God's Plan to perpetuate the people of Israel in order to achieve His Messianic purposes, and, thus, He allowed them to have this special protection.

And God gave the Jew many medical formulas and many dietary laws that perpetuated them as well- protecting them from unnecessary infections and illnesses- so that they could survive as a people so that Messiah could be born. So there was first a *physical* significance to circumcision.

But secondly, God wanted the Jew to have a special mark that nobody else had that identified them with the Abrahamic Covenant- that made them unique and distinct and separated from every other nation on earth. And so there was a distinctional purpose for circumcision as well as a physical one, and that was that they would bear a unique sign and symbol that they belonged to Abraham's seed. They were, therefore, part of the Abrahamic Covenant- the people of God. So there was a physical protection and there was a national identification.

And thirdly, there was a spiritual symbol in circumcision. And I think this is very important for us to understand. God was showing them by circumcision- their own inherent sinfulness.

For example- if I wanted to define how profound Man's sin is, if I wanted to define for you how systemic or how endemic, or how deep-seeded and pervasive the sin of Man is- how would I prove that to you? Somebody might say, *"Well you can tell it by what people say."* But some people can't talk, and some people can guard their words very well, and I might not hear them say anything that would reveal the depth of their depravity. And even people who do occasionally say things that indicate their sin, by periodically saying something wrong doesn't necessarily show me how profound that depravity is.

Others might say, *"Well, if you just watch what they do."* Well, I can't necessarily see how profound their depravity is by what they do because some people guard carefully what they do when I'm around and when you're around or when anybody's around. Most people don't sin in a crowd- they wait until they are alone or in the dark.

So how do I really know how profoundly sinful Man is? The best way to know how deep seated sin is in man is through procreation. What? Oh yes- if you want to know how wicked and how sinful a person is- you know it best by what they produce- because sinners will always produce more sinners. The totally depraved will always produce more totally depraved sinners, right? We know just how deep seated our own sin is by looking and observing our children.

Look, nobody has to teach children how to rebel, do they? Nobody has to teach your children to look you right in the eye and disobey you, do they? No, children rebel because it is their nature to do so; it is in them- how? By birth. You put that into them. You rebel and they do too- proving without any doubt that sin is inherent in the human heart.

Listen, I'm a born again Christian and I love the Lord with all my heart and I endeavor to serve Christ with every fiber of my being. And I married my wife in the Lord over 30 years ago and we were both virgins when we married and we dedicated our marriage to Jesus and we gave our children to God and we raised every one of our children to love and serve Jesus. And we didn't fail to live the life before them. We didn't turn to booze and we didn't get high and we didn't run around on each other and we didn't break apart. My wife and I prayed together and read God's Word together and repented together and cried together and rejoiced together.

And you know what? Every single one of my children were all born totally depraved and sinful and lost. Because I am saved does not make them saved. Because I am a Pastor does not qualify them for Heaven. Every single one of my children loved their sin and they wanted to sin and they enjoyed their sin and they were all children of satan until they were saved. And each one of my own children had to come to the realization that sin was real and they too were powerless to stop sinning and they had to each one come to the realization that they were spiritually bankrupt and they needed a Savior and they needed Grace, and they needed Mercy and they too had to cry out to God for undeserved Mercy- just like I did- and God would be merciful to them- just like He was merciful to me.

And if they are saved- they will serve God, and if they do not serve God- it is because they are not saved, and if they die unsaved- they will go to hell, and if they die saved- they will go to Heaven- just like everybody else.

So the essential element of Human lostness, of human sinfulness, of Human depravity is the component of our own nature which is passed on in procreation to our children, and that proves just how deep our wickedness is. And so through circumcision- God was there- giving Israel a lesson- an object lesson- a picture- a sign that they needed cleansing at a profound level of perpetual sin. So in circumcision there was that spiritual symbol.

So it was the eighth day and it was time to do this. To do this which protected them physically, which identified them uniquely with the Abrahamic promise, and that which represented to everybody around, and would to them their whole life, the desperate need for spiritual cleansing because sin was so endemic.

A little child would be taken- an eight day old baby boy would be taken and usually the father did this. Sometimes women did it, in the case of Zipporah, the wife of Moses, who circumcised their children. And other times an appointed person did it. There's no necessary prescription in the Old Testament about who performs the circumcision.

And the tradition developed among the Jews that there needed to be a witnessing group. Later on- the tradition developed that there needed to be at least ten witnesses. But, for the sake of modesty, there would need to be witnesses who could affirm that a circumcision actually did occur to that boy- so that later on he would not have to uncover or reveal himself as being an heir of the Abrahamic Covenant as Joseph did with his brothers in **Genesis 45:1**. So the tradition developed there had to be ten witnesses of the circumcision of a boy.

And so, there was the crowd there at John's circumcision, and appropriately so. No doubt ready to witness this as was the tradition. And in the process of this they circumcised the child and the group that was there decided that they should all participate in the naming of the child and they were going to call him Zacharias- after his father.

So they had a little discussion among themselves and they all decided, I guess, uniformly that the child should be named after his father. And that was a nice gesture- in honor of Zacharias- I mean after all- he is a priest and he's served this little community faithfully for years. A couple of weeks a year- twice during the year- Zacharias goes down to the temple to serve- but the other eleven months of the year he's up here and he's caring for us and he's teaching us and he's serving

us as a local priest in a little town in the hill country of Judea, a few miles out of Jerusalem. And he was beloved to them and he's gone through a life of sorrow and pain, and he's never been able to have a child. And, after all, for nine months he's been unable to hear, unable to speak, and we kind of feel sorry for the old guy. Why not give him a little joy at the end of his life and name the boy after him?

I mean, that's a nice gesture. And just as a footnote to this-naming the child eight days after birth on the day of circumcision has some OT precedent to it. Moses was named on the eighth day- the day he was circumcised. And Abraham's name went from Abram to Abraham on the day that he was circumcised. So there was some Old Testament precedent for this.

And what may have sort of aided that custom was that both the Romans and Egyptians tended to name their children on the ninth day. And the Greeks did it on the seventh to the tenth day. So the Jews may have done it prior to that to show that they were chosen.

And while we don't know that this was a widespread thing where children were not named until the eighth day- we *do* know that this is what happened on *this* occasion and it must have been a custom at least in this case. So universal custom or not- this is what they did. So when all the folks gathered on the eighth day- the baby boy was circumcised and they made the name official.

Now it wasn't unusual for other people besides the mother and father to participate in naming the child. Go back and read **Ruth 4:7** when Naomi and Boaz had a baby boy- the Bible says that the people gathered around and the people all together collectively named him Obed. And Obed became the father of Jesse- who was the father of David. So sometimes- naming the child was a kind of a group decision.

And also in Israel, names were very, very descriptive. The names meant something- even more so than names mean something today- even though we do name our children names that mean something- don't we?

And naming this child, Zacharias, would be such an honor to his father, and it was a family name, although infrequently boys were named after their father. More frequently they would be named after their grandfather. And sometimes names were chosen to describe physical features. For example, if you go back and read **Genesis 25**, you read about the birth of Jacob and Esau. Jacob was named Jacob

because Jacob means "one who grabs the heel". And Esau was named Esau because Esau means "hairy." And you remember the birth? Esau came out and the first remark was, "Boy, he's hairy." And he was hairy from then on. And Jacob came out and he had a hold of Esau's heel and Jacob means "one who holds the heel." And the idea is that of being a "supplanter", you know, trying to pull him back in there and get out first. So the conflict between those two men was life-long and it started in the womb when they were fighting about who was going to come out of the shoot first.

Sometimes names were tied to physical features. Some Jewish names were designed to express the parents' joy, such as Saul or Samuel which means "asked for." And in the case of Samuel when Hannah was given her child which she had asked for, she named him "asked for." Some children were named to express the parent's faith. Elijah was one. His parents named him Elijah because Elijah means "Jehovah is my God." And his parents named him as a testimony to their faith in God.

Well it just seemed right to this group to name this baby Zacharias. Watch what happened. Look at **Luke 1:60**:

But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John.

His mother answered and said, **"Not so!"** Now this is, "ou kai alla" in the Greek- which is a strong, emphatic, *"Absolutely not!"* *"No, indeed- he shall be called John."* "This baby is named John." There's no discussion on this- this isn't a group decision.

But why did she say that? Well, back in **Luke 1:13** when the angel came and appeared to Zacharias- he said- "Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son and you will give him the name, John". Now why does all this matter? What difference does it make what the boy was named? Why was this an issue with God? There were many prophets named many different names and God never got involved with their parents- so what's this all about?

I mean, by any other name he was the same guy, wasn't he? I mean it was what John did- not what his name was that is important- right? God doesn't get involved in naming everybody. God got involved in naming Jesus, and God also got involved in naming John. What about this? What is the significance of this?

John is a great name. It's a short form of a longer name, Jehohanan...Jehohanan. And it gets contracted into John. The first part of Jehohanan is Jeho...what's that? God...Jehovah. The latter part means Grace. John means "God is Gracious", and God wanted that child named "God is Gracious" because God's Purpose through that child and the Messiah was His Gracious Salvation. So what you see here in this Story of Salvation is that God is telling us that His Promise is True and His Purpose is Gracious. And He'll fight for that name, John- because it identifies with the very Purpose of God.

So here we are. And I would ask you this morning- Do you know that the Promise of God is true? Do you fully trust in God's Promise? Do you align yourself with the Purpose of God or are you fighting against Him? Are you named among the believers or among those who love sin and the pleasures of this world? Do you have the mark of God in your flesh or in your heart? Has your heart been circumcised by Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Master or is He your Judge?

Let's come and pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.