

Sermon: To Be at Peace with God

Text: Luke 1:67-80

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Introduction: Our nation started in revolution over 200 years ago and nothing has changed. In some history books, the years 1776-1850 are described as: **THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS**. The Civil War in the US destroyed the public peace midway through the 19th century.

WWI took the lives of over ten million people in Europe alone. Three million of them were civilians. More died of diseases or hardship as a direct result of war. Twenty million people had been wounded. And then there was what some called peace in 1919. Later there was a madman named Adolph responsible for the Holocaust and the death of 6 million Jews, – the Korean conflict – Vietnam. From the so-called “peace movement” of the 60’s came drug-induced euphoria with its chemical sense of well-being, tranquilized peace, Flower Power, and records like “Give Peace a Chance.” Just as we were buying up pieces of the demolished Berlin Wall and making plans for global peace, madmen like Saddam, Bin Laden and others came along. The world is still plagued with civil unrest.

Peace is a rare commodity today. With upside down world markets, record foreclosures, once-stable companies either gone or on the brink of bankruptcy, regional wars, nuclear threats, and even interpersonal wreckage, it is hard to find peace. We have never been a world of peace. Even the church is not unaffected!

Out of the same backdrop of wars and revolution about 2000 years ago came an offer of peace that is still available TODAY. And it is independent of world conditions. It has to do with our relationship with God, and Luke lets us listen in on this hinge of history as we hear what is called in the Latin text: *Benedictus*, or more commonly in our tradition “Zechariah’s Song.”

Luke 1:67-80 (NIV) ⁶⁷His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ⁶⁸“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. ⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— ⁷²to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶And

you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

To be at peace with God one must:

I. Be Open to the Holy Spirit (v. 67).

People who ignore or disobey God, do so at their own peril. Luke speaks often of the Holy Spirit especially in his second volume - Acts. Also, though, here in the birth-narrative section of Luke (chapters 1-2), the “Holy Spirit” is mentioned 4 times in the first chapter. The first two chapters contain nearly half the references of the Holy Spirit for the entire Gospel (6/13).

A. God is always working.

God is always working by way of His covenants (vv. 67-72). The new and last covenant was as old as Abraham, but still new in the sense of His preparing the way for Messiah (Dayspring, v. 78) even then.

Look at how busy God was in **Luke 1**:

Luke 1:15 - Zechariah is told by Gabriel, who was an angel of the Lord, that Zechariah’s son who was soon to be born, will have the Holy Spirit from birth.

Luke 1:35 - Mary is informed by the Holy Spirit of Jesus’ birth.

Luke 1:41 - Elizabeth (Zechariah’s wife) pronounced a blessing on Mary as she was being influenced by the Holy Spirit.

B. God is always speaking.

God is always speaking through the praises of His people. In **Luke 1** Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, breaks out in a blessing of Mary; Mary blesses the Lord; as does Zechariah for all the Lord will accomplish through him and his wife.

Zechariah’s Song may be an example of early Jewish-Christian liturgy and is after the pattern of many of the books within the Psalter where God is blessed at the end.

Psalms 106:48 (NIV) ⁴⁸ Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, “Amen!” Praise the LORD.

Wouldn't it be great, like Zechariah, to know upon the birth of your child that he would grow up to serve the Lord? Look at all the things for which the Spirit-filled Zechariah praises God (vv. 68-75, 78-79):

The Messiah is coming (he actually says, "has come"). Visits from God were not always welcome, but this one was, because it was associated with salvation.

The Messiah is going to redeem his people (he actually says, "has redeemed").

The Messiah is going to raise up a horn of salvation.

The Messiah will enable His people to serve Him.

The Messiah will create a holy and righteous people.

God is going to use Zechariah's son, John the Baptist, to prepare the people.

Can you imagine the pent up emotion for Zechariah. He saw God's faithfulness and gift of a son, and he could not even speak about it during the entire pregnancy (1:24, 64). And then his first words were praise to God!

God is always speaking through the praises of His prophets (v. 70). God is always going to make good on all the prophecies of His holy prophets and His own promises.

Jacob: Genesis 49:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

Moses: Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

Isaiah: Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV) ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

To be at peace with God one must:

II. Be Redeemed (vv. 68, 77).

But before a person can be redeemed, they must recognize their sinful condition and:
Accept God's ransom price.

The price was Jesus' blood on Calvary given freely on our behalf to provide redemption. No longer would we be slaves to our old master, but servants of the Most High. In a spiritual sense, it is like our own exodus from Egyptian bondage.

John recognized that Jesus was the means by which people could be released/freed from their sins, brought out of darkness, and put right with God.

John 1:29 (NIV) ²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Hebrews 9:22 (NIV) ²²In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Our love for God is the result of being forgiven much (**Luke 7:40ff.**).
As we recognize God's love for us, we are willing then to:

Repent

There must be a change of mind. Our change of mind will result in a change in behavior. You do not have to be free from fault or sin to come to Jesus, you should only want to be.

Repentance based on faith leads to forgiveness of sin and that produces peace with God. In Luke's gospel, peace is first mentioned in **1:79**. Peace is a relational gift that produces calmness in the storms of life and assurance of God's gift of salvation. The angels understand as they later say:

Luke 2:14 (NIV) ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

John the Baptist fully understood the connection of repentance to forgiveness leading to admittance into the Kingdom.

Matthew 3:1-2 (NIV) ¹In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Jesus took over the same message as did his disciples: **Matthew 4:17 (NIV)** ¹⁷From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

This message was preached knowing that failure to repent held dire consequences. In a teaching in **Luke 13**, Jesus says:

Luke 13:3 (NIV) ³... But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

And then a positive word about repentance:

Acts 3:19 (NIV) ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

To be at peace with God one must:

III. Be Prepared to Serve (v. 74).

What a privilege to serve the Lord Jesus Christ!

Our text talks about three men who were God's servants: Zechariah (1:67), John the Baptist, Zechariah's son (1:76-77), and the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth (1:78-79), born of the Virgin Mary by means of the Holy Spirit. It is really at the end of Luke's first chapter that we no longer see Zechariah unless he is the same person that is martyred for his faith in **Matthew 23:35**. If that is true, Herod the Great murdered him -- and the king's son, Antipas, then beheads Zechariah's son - John the Baptist (**Matthew 14:1ff.**). *-When Jesus Came by Handel H. Brown, p. 68*

A. Sometimes there is a wilderness involved (v. 80).

John the Baptist was prepared for ministry and tested in the wilderness. Moses prepared for his ministry in the wilderness and even Jesus before his public ministry was tested in the wilderness. We will be tested to see if we are willing and fit to serve.

“In God's Kingdom the wilderness is often more important than the universities.”
(The Layman's Bible Commentary, Luke, p. 34)

And **“peace is not the absence of trouble. Peace is the presence of God.”** - Unknown

B. By sharing our testimony - (Malachi 7:19-20).

Luke, in his writings, frequently uses the words “witness” or “testimony” in their various forms. Here he does not use those words exactly, but describes one of the finest witnesses of all times.

Jesus even later says: **Matthew 11:11 (NIV)** ¹¹I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

If we are Christians, we have a testimony about how we have been forgiven and received God's Holy Spirit at our baptism.

The oath God swore to Abraham was made good in us as we accepted Jesus as our personal Savior.

Here in the final three verses of the OT book of Micah, we hear:

Micah 7:18-20 (NIV) ¹⁸ Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.

These verses in Micah are read with the book of Jonah (a book about repentance) for the afternoon reading in the synagogue on *Yom Kippur*, the “Day of Atonement.” Once every year, on *RosHashanah*, the Jewish New Year, the orthodox Jew goes to a stream or river with a collection of rocks in his pockets and symbolically empties his sins from his pockets by casting the stones into the water as he recites the Micah passage (see Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible Commentary*).

In this Micah passage we have a testimony to God’s grace. We have evidence of what God will do.

1. He will love us.
2. He will do away with all of our sin.
3. He will be true to us and show us mercy and grace.

- also see *Communicator’s Commentary*, Walter Kaiser, p. 86

Conclusion: “To be at peace with God” - I hope that is our desire, today!

“One of the titles by which Jesus is known is “Prince of Peace,” and he used the word, peace, himself in what seem(s) at first glance to be two radically contradictory utterances. One one occasion he said to the disciples,

Matthew 10:34 (NIV) ³⁴“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

And later on, the last time they ate together, Jesus said to them, **John 14:27 (NIV)** ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

The contradiction is resolved when you realize, that for Jesus, peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle, but the presence of love.”

- *Wishful Thinking* by Frederick Buechner, p. 83

Peace is that bit of satisfaction you have when you lie down at night knowing that you have not squandered the opportunities of the day.

Peace is knowing you are right with God. Peace is knowing you have done what God has asked.

Numbers 6:24-26 (NIV) ²⁴ ““The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.””