

That We Might Serve Him

Introduction

The Text

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (Luk 1:67–80)

From the Negative to the Positive

- A. Last week we came at this text largely from a negative perspective. We talked about the redeeming work of this Messiah, the “*horn of salvation*” raised up in the house of David, in light of the things conquered, overcome, defeated.
 - 1. Recognizing the horizon that lay beyond the nationalistic language of our text, we observed that this Messiah has come to deal with the 3 most basic, fundamental, ancient opponents of the people of God: namely, Satan, sin, and death.
 - a. And, as they are all inherently interconnected in one system of destruction, so Christ triumphs over each of them at one and the same moment at the cross. And that’s where we ended.
- B. I had every intention of moving on into [ch. 2](#) but, it just didn’t feel right. You see, He triumphs over all this negative stuff so that He can initiate something overwhelmingly positive.
 - 1. For this, let me direct our attention to [vv. 74-75](#): “⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”
- C. In [vv. 74-75](#) we are given our outline for this morning. The endgame of this redemption prepared for by John the Baptist and accomplished by Jesus the Christ...is that we might “*serve Him*” (heading 1).

1. And this service is then qualified in light of the Messiah's threefold victory over Satan, sin, and death. For we will serve Him: (1) "without fear" (because He's delivered us from Satan); (2) "in holiness and righteousness before Him" (because He's forgiven us of our sin); and (3) "all our days" (because He's put death to death).

(1) That We Might Serve Him

The Theological Current of Latreuo

- A. This word translated "serve" here in the Greek (latreuo) is much richer in the linguistic world of the Bible than our English word can convey. It is 1 of 3 words in the NT and Greek OT used to describe the worship of the covenant people of God.
 1. It first shows up in our Greek OTs in the context of the Exodus where God's goal of redeeming for Himself a people from the bondage of Egypt is that they might "serve" Him.
 - a. At God's commissioning of Moses He commands him: "²² You shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son,²³ and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve (latreuo) me...'" (Ex 4:22–23a). And this same phraseology shows up again and again and again in the book of Exodus (7:16; 8:1; 8:20; 9:1; 9:13; 10:3; and so on).
 2. And when God brings Israel out of Egypt to serve Him, this word then comes to be used primarily of the priesthood and the service that they would offer YHWH in the tabernacle and temple.
- B. It is quite possible that Zechariah, in our text, is expecting a redemption along similar lines to the Exodus of old—God would redeem them out from under the hand of Rome and they'd be free to serve Him in the temple, under this new Davidic King, as in the glory days gone by.
 1. But Jesus is after something so much broader, so much more expansive: "²¹ the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...²³ the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..." (John 4:21, 23a).
 - a. The Exodus that Christ will accomplish for His people in His death and resurrection is not merely physical but spiritual, not merely national but universal. It's not on this or that mountain but everywhere. It's not just for the Jews but for everyone.
- C. Here is the move towards the priesthood of all believers! Christ is the temple destroyed and raised up in 3 days, and we are living stones added to the Cornerstone. And all of life now is seen in the NT under the New Covenant by means of this New Exodus as priestly service in this cosmic temple!

1. This is why Paul in [Rom](#), having labored for 11 chs. to describe the glorious triumphs of Christ for us in the gospel, comes out into [ch. 12](#) with these words: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (or ‘reasonable’) worship (n. of latreuo)” (v. 1).

- a. All of life now comes under the banner of latreuo, worship, service.

- i. It’s latreuo at 3 AM when the baby is crying; it’s latreuo on the couch when you speak to your spouse with kindness even when hurt deeply; it’s latreuo on the freeway when you let that car pull in the lane ahead of you.

(1) Priests, offering our lives as sacrifices, in service and worship of our God, all because of Christ’s redemptive accomplishments on the cross!

- D. That’s the theological current we drop into when we come to this single word: “[that we...might serve him!](#) (v. 74). We have been set free to serve. Indeed it is in our serving of God that we finally find our freedom!

Who’s Serving Who?

- A. This brings up something that must be settled in our hearts before the Christian life can even begin: Does God exist for us, or do we exist for Him?
 1. If God exists for us, to serve us, then we will find ourselves bossy in our prayers, grumbling in our lives, and ultimately apostate in our faith. “He has not kept up His end of the deal. I commissioned Him to serve me and He has let me down. You’re fired!”
 2. But if we exist for Him, then we have raised the white flag of surrender. We have put ourselves into His holy hands and said: “You make me what you want me to be. You’re the potter, I’m the clay. You’re the Father, I’m the child. You’re the Creator and I’m the creation. You’re the Master, I’m the servant. You’re God, and I’m not.”
- B. The irony of course is that those who would enlist God to serve themselves find themselves utterly unsatisfied, while those who lower themselves to be servants of God find themselves filled to the fullness.
 1. There is a slavery that oppresses the soul of any who would make everything his servant. There are cuffs in the cookie jar. You reach in to make life your servant and, in the process, you find yourself enslaved!
 2. And there is a freedom that liberates the soul of any who would make himself the servant of God. Coming into the service of God is less like a slave taking on chains

and more like a bird taking flight. It is not degrading it is dignifying. It is not dehumanizing, it is rehumanizing. It is our return to what we were created for.

- C. I wonder if you know, that's why we call what we're doing here right now a "Service." The terminology comes from the Biblical background of latreuo that we just looked at!
 - 1. It's not called a service because the leaders are here to provide a service for you the consumer—like a restaurant, or a movie theater.
 - 2. It's called a service because we're all here together, offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices, bowing low, putting ourselves under His will and word, and at His service!
 - a. Now, of course that means that we are looking to serve one another, but it is serving one another as a means of serving our God. "Sunday Service." Knowing the derivation of such a term ought to change the way we come to church!

I Want to Serve Him...But I Can't

- A. So there is the one side that thinks God exists to serve them. But then there is another side that must be addressed, and will be the focus of the rest of this sermon. For there are some in this room who hear everything I've been saying and what rises up in your heart is: "Yes! I want to serve. I want to soar in the big blue sky of serving God! But I can't. Look at me. I'm not worthy of such a high calling."
 - 1. There are those whom God has given wings by His grace and yet because of their own sense of unworthiness—guilt and shame—they feel it more appropriate for them to shuffle around on the ground in the dirt.
- B. It's to you that the rest of these vv. are directed. Watch now as this service of God is described in breathtakingly positive terms in light of Christ's victory over Satan, sin, and death.

(2) Without Fear

- A. The first qualification comes at the end of v. 74: "that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear..." Here we see our serving of God qualified in light of Christ's triumph over Satan. Because the enemy of my soul has been overcome, I can serve God now unafraid, with unflinching boldness.
 - 1. " ¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb 2:14–15).
- B. We don't often think of ourselves as afraid of Satan or death. But we might say that other fears keep us from serving God, right?

1. "I'm afraid of people's opinions. If I try to share gospel at work or in the coffee shop they'll all just think I'm a fool." Or, "I'm afraid of running out of money. I would give to this or that cause in the church or person in need but if I start giving things away who's going to look out for me and my family?"
- C. We have fears and they do stop us from serving God. But underneath all of these, is still a fear of Satan—a fear that this world is still in his control, that God might not be there for me in the end.
1. But to these fears, Paul would respond: "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:15).
 - a. The Spirit of the risen and triumphant Christ is in us! And His chief job is to convince us that, because of Jesus, we are no longer orphaned and under the sway of the Devil, but we have been adopted into the family of God:
 - i. "I have a Father in heaven. This is His world! If people mock or bank accounts dry up, what's that to me?! My Daddy's got my back!"

(3) In Holiness and Righteousness Before Him

- A. We can serve God "without fear." But there is more. As we keep reading we find our service qualified in a 2nd way: "that we...might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him..." (vv. 74-75a). Here our service is qualified in light of Christ's triumph over sin. Sin does not define us anymore. We are holy and righteous, not in ourselves, but in Christ.

Joshua's Wardrobe Change

- A. Has anyone here ever been kept from serving God because they just felt too dirty. "I just don't belong here."
- B. I want to read you a vision given to Zechariah (not the priest in Luke, but the OT prophet): "¹³Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling. ¹Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ²And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?' ³Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. ⁴And the angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' And to him he said, 'Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.' ⁵And I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by" (Zech 2:13–3:5).

1. O what a nightmare this would have been for Joshua at the start. Consider, when you're going to see someone important—interviewing for a job, high school reunion, walking down the aisle on your wedding day, etc.—what do you do? You're laying clothes out the night before, you're dusting off the iron, you're getting your hair all done up, you break out that special mirror that magnifies every square inch of your face, "I want to see every detail; I want to get every hair in the right place!"
 - a. In this text, the "holy" God, the One before whom all flesh can only be "silent", and He calls Joshua, the high priest, to come stand before Him. Joshua's looking in the mirror, he's thinking, "I look ready."
 2. But as he approaches God, there's a light emanating from the throne that exposes what the natural eye could not see on its own. And as Joshua looks down, to his horror, he finds that the clothes he had so meticulously prepared are filthy, stained, soiled, torn, tattered. With Isaiah he would cry out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isa 6:5).
 3. But it gets worse. As if Joshua needed help seeing the stained garments he was wrapped in, Satan is "standing at his right hand to accuse him" (v. 1). Every wrinkle, every spot, "You see God, this man is unclean, unfit to serve you, get Him out of here!"
 - a. The picture is that of the heavenly courtroom, the heavenly tribunal. And Satan is the prosecuting attorney. But where is the defense attorney? Is Joshua representing himself? He's silent. He knows the accusations stick.
 4. Then a voice comes to his defense from the most unlikely source: from the Judge Himself! "And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?' (v. 2).
 - a. "Satan, you see rightly, this man is filthy. But you don't see fully. You're only telling half the story." We are sinners. This is true. But we have also been chosen, plucked from the fire, forgiven, washed, given new garments, and called to serve!
- B. We are called and equipped to serve our God not on the basis of our own deeds but on the basis of His grace—on the basis of another, a final, an eternal High Priest: " ¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:11-12). And this "blood of Christ... [purifies] our conscience from dead works to serve (latreuo) the living God" (v. 14).

Luther's Combat with the Devil

- A. I'm reminded of a story, ascribed to Martin Luther. (Whether all of this is historically accurate or not I cannot say, but, regardless, the illustration put forth is profoundly biblical): "In the conversations of Luther, which are in some measure a posthumous publication, we read, that...Satan, either in reality or in a dream, appeared in the depth of the night, and addressed him in the following terms: 'Luther, how dare you to pretend to be a reformer of the Church? Luther, let your memory do its duty - let your conscience do its duty: you have committed this sin - you have been guilty of that sin; you have omitted this duty, and you have neglected that duty: let your reform begin in your own bosom. How dare you attempt to be a reformer of the Church?'

Luther, with the self-possession and magnanimity by which he was characterized,...said to Satan – 'Take up the slate that lies on the table, and write down all the sins with which you have now charged me; and if there be any additional, append them, too.' Satan, rejoiced to have the opportunity of accusing, just as our blessed Lord is rejoiced to have the opportunity of advocating, took up a pencil, and wrote a long and painful roll of the real or imputed sins of Luther."

- B. Now pause. What is it for you? What is Satan scribbling down right now? "How could you do such a thing? You will never be used. You will always be riding the bench. Get out of here!"

1. So what do you do with this? You're with Joshua, you're with Luther, you're with me. Guilty. And the devil's coming at us. What do we do?

- C. Let's keep reading: "Luther said, 'Have you written the whole?' Satan answered, 'Yes, and a black and dark catalogue it is, and sufficient to deter you from making any attempt to reform others, till you have first purified and reformed yourself.' Luther said, 'Take up the slate and write as I shall dictate to you. My sins are many; my transgressions in the sight of an infinitely holy God, are countless as the hairs of my head: in me there dwells no good thing (he's agreeing with the Devil here); but, Satan, after the last sin you have recorded, write the announcement which I shall repeat from 1 John 1:7: 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.' Luther in that text had peace; and Satan, knowing the source of his peace, had no more advantage against him" (John Cumming).

1. "¹⁰...the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down... ¹¹ And they have conquered Him by the blood of Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:10-11a).

And Us

- A. Joshua, the high priest of Israel, sinner. Luther, the great Reformer of the church, sinner. You and I, sinners. But "[we] have washed [our] robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14)! We are holy and righteous before Him, called into the freedom and joy of His service! Spread out your wings. You can fly!

(4) All Our Days

- A. We end now with the 3rd and final way our service of God is qualified back in Luke: “that we...might serve Him without fear; in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.” Here our service is qualified in light of Christ’s triumph over the last enemy of all: namely, death.
- B. For this, all I want to do is take us to the end, which is really just the beginning: “²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.
- ¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship (latreuo) him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev 21:22–22:5).