

CHRISTMAS EVE, “THE MULTIFACETED GIFT OF CHRISTMAS”

LUKE 1:67-79

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta.

Sorry I can't be with you in person today, since I unexpectedly got covid, but as today is Christmas Eve, I want to personally wish you an early Merry Christmas!

And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently taking a break from our sermon series called “Rediscover Jesus,” where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

But we'll still be staying in Luke's Gospel account as we go back to the *first* chapter for today's Christmas Eve sermon titled, “The Multifaceted Gift of Christmas.”

Let me pray for us again before we jump in.

<Prayer>

Sermon Introduction



Diamonds are almost universally treasured.

- Diamonds are prominently featured in advertisements and movies.
- Celebrities wear diamond earrings, necklaces, and rings to galas.
- People sacrifice several months' salary to purchase a diamond ring for their fiancée.
- And there are famous diamonds that are in museums that people travel the world to see. For example, the Hope Diamond, which is valued at \$250 million, is in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., where millions of visitors come to see it each year.

But what makes a diamond so special?

Most people prize diamonds because of their *beauty*.

Diamonds have the ability to bend light more than other substances, so that it flashes with different colors as it moves (high refractive index). They also have the ability to split white light into rainbow components, so that it shines with intense brightness (high optical dispersion).

That means that in order to *truly* appreciate a diamond, you cannot just look at it from *one* angle, but you have to look at it from *multiple* angles and see how the light bends and splits with different colors and intense brightness.

That's why diamonds are cut with many *facets* (or sides) because the more facets a diamond has, the more you can appreciate its complex and intricate beauty.

<pause>

So today, on Christmas Eve, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior and treasure the gift of our salvation, I want us to do something similar.

I don't want us to think of salvation as something that is just one-dimensional, but I want us to hold up this precious diamond of salvation and look at it from multiple angles. And I want us to see the complex and intricate beauty in this multifaceted gift of salvation that we have in Jesus.

The One Thing

Praise God for the multifaceted gift of salvation we have in Jesus.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 1:67-79.

We usually preach expositional sermons, where the point of the text is the point of the sermon, but today's sermon is not going to be like that.

Instead, I'll give some context for the passage, we'll read the passage, I'll briefly explain the gist of the passage, and then we'll go back and look at the passage thematically, highlighting how this passage describes the multifaceted gift of salvation that we have in Jesus.

So let me first begin by giving some context for this passage.

So far, an angel has appeared to an old priest named Zechariah to announce the birth of a son that he and his wife Elizabeth will have. They are to name him John, he will be *filled* with the Holy Spirit from the womb, and he will prepare the way for the Lord to come. But due to their old age, Zechariah does *not* believe God's Word, so he is temporarily struck with muteness (Luke 1:5-25).

Later, the baby John is born, and Zechariah and Elizabeth take him to be circumcised, which is when they also name him. Zechariah has not been able to speak all this time, but after he names the boy "John" in writing, he is immediately able to speak again, and the very first thing he does is *bless God*.

Zechariah has had many months to ponder what the angel told him about his son, and once John has been born and Zechariah is able to speak again, he finally pours out what could be described as a psalm of praise to God.

And that's where we are in today's passage, as we'll see the *content* of Zechariah's blessing of God.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 1:67-79.

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.”

This is God’s Word.

Brief Exposition

Now, there’s a *lot* that’s here in this passage.

In the original Greek text, verses 68 to 79 is actually a *single* sentence¹, and it is rich in Old Testament references with perhaps as many as 33 possible allusions and quotations.²

But this passage can be understood simply in two parts:

- I. Zechariah blesses God for saving his people through Jesus (vv. 67-75)
- II. Zechariah blesses his son John for preparing the way for Jesus (vv. 76-79)

It’s noteworthy that even as he’s holding his newborn son, Zechariah doesn’t start by blessing his son *John*, but he starts with blessing *God* for saving his people through *Jesus*.

So keep your Bibles open, and let’s start with that first part.

In verse 68, Zechariah gives two reasons for praising God: (1) because he has visited his people, and (2) because he has redeemed his people.

In verses 69-71, he then elaborates on *how* God has visited and redeemed them: he has raised up the Messianic King in the line of David (that is, *Jesus*) to deliver them from all their enemies as he said he would through all the Old Testament prophets.

In verses 72-75, Zechariah explains two reasons for *why* God has visited and redeemed his people: (1) to fulfill his covenant promises, particularly to Abraham, and (2) to enable his people to serve him without fear.

¹ Study note on Luke 1:67, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<pause>

So first, Zechariah blesses God for saving his people through Jesus, and then second, he blesses his son John for preparing the way for Jesus.

In verses 76-77, Zechariah rejoices in the fact that John is the first prophet that God has raised up in about four centuries. And he recognizes that John's special prophetic ministry will be all about preparing the way for the Lord by pointing people to their spiritual problem of sin and pointing them to the only Savior, Jesus Christ.

And in verses 78-79, Zechariah acknowledges that God's salvation for his people is all because of his "tender mercy," and then he goes back to praising Jesus for the effect of what he will do. In the midst of the darkness and shadow of death that his people are in, Jesus will be the sunrise that visits them from on high, giving them the light of salvation and guiding them into the way of peace.

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So that's what this passage says in a nutshell. It is the overflow of praise from a Spirit-filled man who recognizes and rejoices in the multifaceted gift of salvation that we have in Christ and in the particular privilege that his son gets to play in preparing the way for that promised Savior.

Overview

Now that we understand the gist of this passage, we'll go back and look at it again *thematically*, and we'll highlight seven *facets* (or aspects) of the gift of salvation that we have in Jesus.

- I. Visitation: God visits his people
- II. Compassion: God shows his "tender mercy" to his people
- III. Forgiveness: God forgives the sin of his people
- IV. Cost: God redeems his people
- V. Deliverance: God delivers his people from their enemies
- VI. Light: God gives light to his people
- VII. Fulfillment: God fulfills his promises to his people

I. Visitation: God visits his people

Before we talk about anything else, we have to recognize that the first and greatest facet of the gift of salvation is that we have *Jesus himself*.

In verses 68 and 78, Zechariah says that God "visits" his people, and this is in reference to the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messianic King in the line of King David.

God *visits* his people in the person of *Jesus*. Scripture gives repeated testimony to this fact.

- The apostle John says that Jesus is God incarnate, becoming flesh and dwelling among his people (John 1:14).
- The apostle Matthew says that Jesus is "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).
- The apostle Paul says Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15).
- And Jesus himself says that whoever has seen him has seen the Father (John 14:9)

In Jesus' first coming, God *visited* his people. He stepped down from the comforts of heaven to enter into the brokenness of our world, being born in an animal trough to poor parents, knowing that his whole life would be marked with suffering and ultimately death on a cross. That's what his whole "visit" was about.

Now, for us, that's probably not the kind of "visitation" that we would plan for ourselves. We usually want to visit nice places and experience nice things. We generally visit people and places to get refreshed, to enjoy ourselves, and to have a good time.

But the wonder of God's visitation is that he does the complete *opposite*. Now *why* would he do that?

That gets into the second facet.

II. Compassion: God shows his “tender mercy” to his people

In verse 78, Zechariah says that what drove God to visit and save his people is his “tender mercy.”

The word for “mercy” here refers to God's “covenant-loyalty” to his people,³ or “God's loyal, faithful, gracious love as he acts for his people.”⁴

And the word for “tender” here *literally* means “the inward parts” like the heart, liver, and lungs, as if God's affection for his people had a *physical* effect.⁵

So God's “tender mercy” is his deep *commitment* and deep *compassion* for his people.

In Luke 7, when Jesus saw the plight of the widow who had just lost her only son, it says that “he had *compassion* on her” (Luke 7:13), which comes from the same word here for “tender” or literally “the inward parts.”⁶ So Jesus *literally* felt for her in her pain. And it drove him to *act* by resurrecting her son back to life and giving him back to her.

And in John 11, we see the same deep compassion of Jesus for his friend Lazarus who had died. As he sees Lazarus's sisters—Mary and Martha—and all those who are grieving over Lazarus's death, in the shortest verse in the Bible, it says simply that “Jesus wept” (John 11:35), and it says twice that Jesus was “deeply moved” (John 11:33, 38). And it drove him again to *act* by resurrecting Lazarus back to life.

Jesus is *not* left unmoved when he sees our sorrows, but he is moved with deep commitment and deep compassion from the inside out.

Jesus, *as God*, manifests the same “tender mercy” that Zechariah speaks of here.

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For us, perhaps we may be driven by obligation, guilt, or expectations to be committed and to be compassionate towards others. In other words, our commitment and compassion are often *forced* on some level.

But none of that is what drove our God to visit and save us. God is completely free, guiltless, and answerable to no one. Nobody *forces* God to do anything. And yet, he freely chose to commit himself and show compassion to underserving sinners.

Just think about that: the birth of Jesus Christ was not something that God *had* to do, but it's what he freely chose to do *because* of his deep commitment and deep compassion for his people.

There is nobody else in the world who so completely and freely loves us like that—not your spouse, not your parents, not your best friend, not anyone.

³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 183, quoted in Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

⁵ Strong's Greek Lexicon, s.v. “4698. splanchnon,” accessed December 19, 2023, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4698.htm>.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

And what is so mind-blowing about this kind of compassion that God has for us is the fact that we are totally undeserving of it. And that leads us to our next facet.

III. Forgiveness: God forgives the sin of his people

In verse 77, Zechariah says that our salvation involves “the forgiveness of [our] sins.”

Why do we need forgiveness? Because we have sinned against God.

What is sin? Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created; sin is not being or doing what God requires in his law (NCC 16).

Even though God created us in *his* image and placed us in *his* world, we’re all sinfully prone to act as if we can define ourselves apart from God and as if we are the main character in God’s world. We constantly disobey God’s law in our thoughts, attitudes, actions, and inactions.

And that’s why Scripture says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). But this is not just a slap on the hand that we deserve, but “the wages of sin is *death*” (Rom. 6:23)—that is, both *physical* death and then *eternal* death in hell.

But perhaps for some of us, we don’t *really* believe that our sin against God deserves hell.

In fact, perhaps many of us don’t think that we’re *that* bad. We’re generally kind to others, we’re law-abiding citizens, we make an honest living, and we may even be involved in humanitarian work.

And this kind of thinking is only supplemented by the messages we constantly hear in the world...

- to believe in yourself,
- that we’re all good inside and it’s only because of our upbringing and other environmental factors that lead us to do bad things,
- that we need to learn to forgive ourselves,
- that our biggest problem is a lack of self-esteem and lack of affirmation,
- and so forth.

The world tells us that we’re generally all good people, and perhaps many of us have come to believe that. And because of that, perhaps we think that most people deserve heaven *by default* and hell is only reserved for the *really* wicked people.

Perhaps Hitler and Stalin, who were responsible for some of the most horrific evils in human history—perhaps *they* deserve hell. But for the rest of us, we’re not *that* bad.

We look for the worst examples of evil in our world, and then we say that *compared to them*, we’re not *that* bad.

But surely Hitler and Stalin are not the standard of holiness—that as long as we’re not *that* bad, then we’re good. We are not to look *horizontally*, but *vertically*. We aren’t to look around at other people, but at *God* himself.

Throughout Scripture, God repeated says, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord you God am holy” (Lev. 19:2; cf. Lev. 20:7, 26; 21:8; 1 Pet. 1:16) and “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

God *himself* is the standard of holiness. And when the prophet Isaiah stood before the holiness of God, he said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). And when the apostle Peter got a glimpse

of who Jesus was, “he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (Luke 5:8).

The standard you use *matters*. And when the standard is the holiness of God himself, the Bible says, “None is righteous, no, not one... no one does good, not even one” (Rom. 3:10, 12), and “the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live” (Eccles. 9:3).

When we stop comparing ourselves to one another, and we hold ourselves up to the true standard of *God* himself, we begin to see how we all fall short—that none of us can stand before a holy God with a clear conscience, and that all of us rightfully deserve hell for our sins against such a holy and infinite God.

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This is vitally important for us to understand if we are to truly understand the salvation that Christ came to offer us.

Our fundamental problem...

- is *not* that we’re miserable, and so we need God to satisfy us;
- it’s *not* that we lack meaning and significance, and so we need God to direct and affirm us;
- it’s *not* that we’re unloved, and so we need God to love us.

No, Jesus did not come into our world to be born as a man and to die on the cross and to resurrect from the grave *simply* to satisfy, direct, affirm, and love us—even though he absolutely does *all* those things.

No, Jesus came into our world to deal with our most fundamental problem—that we have all sinned against the infinite God and rightly deserve the infinite punishment of eternal death in hell.

If that most fundamental problem is not dealt with, then there is no gospel—there is no good news. In other words, forgiveness of sins is what we all most need. And praise God that in the birth, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, all who *repent* of their sins and *believe* in him can be fully assured that our sins have been forgiven.

Our end will not be eternal death in hell but eternal life in heaven, “for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever *believes* in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

And that leads us to our next facet.

IV. Cost: God redeems his people

In verse 68, Zechariah says that God has “redeemed his people.”

Now, the Greek word here for “redeem” can also be translated as “ransom,” and it always implies that a cost must be paid.⁷ To redeem someone is to release them from bondage through the payment of a price.⁸

That means that our salvation and the forgiveness of sins that we all most need was *not* free. But it *cost* something.

And what was that cost? What was that ransom price that needed to be paid for us?

⁷ Strong’s Greek Lexicon, s.v. “3085. lutrōsis,” accessed December 21, 2023, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3085.htm>.

⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

Scripture says that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who *gave* himself as a *ransom* for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6), and Jesus himself said that he came “to *give* his life as a *ransom* for many” (Mark 10:45).

The price was the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It was *his* life for *our* lives, “the *righteous* for the *unrighteous*” (1 Pet. 3:18). “*He* was pierced for *our* transgressions; *he* was crushed for *our* iniquities” (Isa. 53:5). “*He* himself bore *our* sins in *his* body on the tree, that *we* might *die* to sin and *live* to righteousness. By *his* wounds [*we*] have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The cost was God *himself*. “God gave *himself* in the person of his Son to suffer *instead of us* the death, punishment and curse due to fallen humanity *as the penalty for sin*.”⁹ This is known as “penal substitution.” God the Son was the *substitute* for sinners, taking on the *penalty* for sin that we deserved.

In other words, our salvation was not *cheap*, but it was a *costly* gift. Yet, for many of us, we often take the *cost* of our salvation for granted.

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When I first moved to Indonesia, someone poured me a cup of kopi luwak. I just thought it was another cup of coffee, so I drank it and didn’t think much of it. Later on, I realized that kopi luwak is actually one of the *costliest* coffees *globally*.

Outside of Indonesia, the cost of wild kopi luwak fluctuates between \$20 and \$100 *per cup*.¹⁰ And yet, I got to drink a cup *for free* without realizing how expensive of a cup I was drinking.

Perhaps for many of us, we enjoy the benefits of our salvation without realizing how expensive it *really* is. Just think about all the implications of salvation that you have in Christ...

- experience of God’s love;
- forgiveness of sins;
- a secure identity that does not rest in your performance, emotions, or the opinions of others;
- adoption into God’s universal and multi-racial family;
- slow but radical change in your character;
- strength and meaning in the face of suffering;
- relationships that go on forever;
- hope of a perfectly restored physical world;
- and personal fellowship with God himself now and forever.¹¹

These are all benefits of salvation that we enjoy in Christ, and yet we often take them all for granted. We think that just because it was *free* for *us*, that it cost *God* nothing. No, it cost him *everything* to grant us this salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

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This Christmas, just ponder the *cost* of our salvation.

When something is imported from outside its country of origin, it is generally more costly. So just think about how costly the Son of God must be when he literally came from outside of our world; he came from heaven to earth to be our substitute and to pay our ransom price.

⁹ Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 21, 103.

¹⁰ “Understanding The Price Of Kopi Luwak,” accessed December 21, 2023, <https://www.purekopiluwak.com/kopi-luwak-price/>.

¹¹ Timothy Keller, “Pascal’s Method for Presenting the Christian Faith,” *Redeemer Report* (January 2014): 5, <https://www.redeemer.com/uploads/RedeemerNewsletter-2014-01.pdf>.

When something is rare and in short support, it is generally more costly. So just think about how costly the Son of God must be when there is only *one* of him; he is the one and only God the Son in perfect union and communion with God the Father since before the beginning of time.

And as we ponder how great a cost our God was willing to pay for our redemption, let's not take it for granted but let's *treasure* this gift we get to enjoy each day and let's consciously praise our God all the more this Christmas.

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The next facet of the gift of salvation we have in Jesus that we'll look at is...

V. Deliverance: God delivers his people from their enemies

In verses 71 and 74, Zechariah says that God has "saved" or "delivered" his people from the hand of our enemies.

Who are the enemies of God's people? Ultimately, our enemies are not *people* (Eph. 6:12), but rather sin, death, and Satan, which are all related as we'll see.

First, our enemy is *sin*. "Sin is the deadly evil which we pray against."¹² Sin brought suffering and death into the world. God's Word says that "sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7).

It's been famously said, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you" (John Owen).

We must never diminish, excuse, justify, cover, or tolerate our sin. But we must do everything we can to flee, fight, and kill our sin.

And if our faith is in Christ, then God has delivered us from the *penalty* of sin, he is delivering us from the *power* of sin, and he will one day fully deliver us from the *presence* of sin.

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Second, our enemy is also *death*. In the beginning, death was not present in God's good creation. But because of our sin, death and all its devastating consequences have entered our world.

And now, death takes away *everything* from us. Because of death, "everything you have—your healthy body, your marketable skills, your sharp mind, your treasured possessions, your loving relationships—will one day be everything you lost."¹³

But as Christ reigns over all and has all his enemies put under his feet, God's Word says that "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).

And so, this is what the apostle Paul writes in...

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 = "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹² Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer* (West Linn, OR: Monergism, 2016), 424.

¹³ Matthew McCullough, *Remember Death* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 123.

If Jesus has perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf, and if he's paid the penalty of death that we deserve for our sins, and if he's resurrected to be our living Savior, then what can death *really* do to us now?

Death no longer steals everything we have from us, but death is now the *door* to the fullness of every blessing we have in Christ.

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Third, our enemy is also *Satan*. God's Word says that Satan has been "sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8) and that he is a "murderer from the beginning" and "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He's also called "a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8), and that he comes "to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

Satan and his demons are doing and using *everything* they can—lies, deceit, accusations, temptations, our own temperaments, our physical ailments and tiredness, our difficult situations, *everything* they possibly can—to *steal* our joy, *kill* our faith in Christ, and *destroy* us eternally. And he rarely does this in obvious ways, but often in slow, subtle ways that begin to chip away at our confidence in God.

But in Colossians 2, we're told that, on the cross, God "*disarmed* the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ]" (Col. 2:13-15).

So now, when Satan tries to lead us astray, we need only to look at the cross to *disarm* him of his lies and to rest in God and his gospel truths.

- If Satan says that God does not love us, the cross says that he loves us with an everlasting love and that he gave his life for us.
- If Satan says that God could never forgive what we've done, the cross says that he has *already* forgiven us of all our sins through the blood of his Son.
- If Satan says that God has abandoned us, the cross says that God has adopted us as his child and he will never leave us nor forsake us.

So in the birth, death, and resurrection of our Savior, we who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior have been delivered from our greatest enemies of sin, death, and Satan. And if he has delivered us from our *greatest* enemies, will he not also deliver us from all the *smaller* challenges that we face each day?

<pause>

Let's turn now to our next facet of the gift of salvation.

VI. Light: God gives light to his people

In verses 78-79, Zechariah says that Jesus is the "sunrise... from on high" who "[gives] light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Jesus himself said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Imagine being in the midst of a group of pilgrims traveling through the wilderness. Darkness completely envelops you, and you are now exposed to the cold terror of night. You hear the howls of vicious animals, and you fear the malice of violent enemies. You "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

But then after many long hours of waiting, you see the first glimmer of morning light—the sunrise of your salvation. The cold of night fades away as you feel the warmth of the sun shining on your face. The darkness

flees and the shadow of death has gone. And with the coming of light, you can finally see the way forward as you continue on your journey with your fellow pilgrims.¹⁴

Now *that* was the situation of the Israelites during the dark days before the birth of Christ. God had not sent a prophet in four centuries. They were sitting in darkness and feeling the shadow of death. But when Christ was born, it was the end of the dark ages (so to speak). The sunrise of their salvation had finally arrived, they could feel his warmth, and they could see the path forward—the way of peace—that is, peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with others, and peace with all creation. This peace is not the absence of problems, but a much more profound peace. It is *shalom*—or the fullness of well-being, the way that things are supposed to be.

All of us were once sitting in darkness, feeling the cold night of our sin, fearing the shadow of death, and unable to see the way forward. Yet, in the coming of Christ, we now have the “true light” (John 1:9), “the light of the world” (John 8:12). He is the sunrise of our salvation who has delivered us from sin and death, and who has enabled us to see everything as we ought.

Salvation is not just being made *right* before God but it’s also about having true *sight* in his world. We no longer sit in darkness, but we have the illumination of Christ, who enables us see *rightly* who God is, who we are, who others are, how God designed his good creation, how it has been marred by sin, how he has purposed his church to be a glimpse of his kingdom on earth, and how he has called us to live in light of the new creation where he will one day restore all things.

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The final facet that we’ll look at now is...

VII. Fulfillment: God fulfills his promises to his people

Zechariah emphasizes this point in verses 69, 70, 72, and 73. The raising up of the Messianic King in the line of David and the salvation that he would accomplish was all in accordance with God’s Word.

In particular, Zechariah refers to the “holy covenant” that God made with Abraham.

Covenants were usually made between *people*—typically between a lord and his servants, or a suzerain and his vassals (that is, those who lived in his land). The lord would commit to protect and provide for his servants, and the servants would commit to submit and align themselves to the lord.

But in Genesis 15, *God* enters into a covenant with Abraham. He asks Abraham to bring five animals and to cut them in half. And usually, the *servants* would walk between the two halves of the animals, which was essentially declaring, “May what has happened to these animals happen to me if I break this covenant with you.”

But what is amazing in the covenant that *God* makes with Abraham is that instead of having *Abraham* walk through the slaughtered animals, *God himself* passes through the pieces, which was essentially *God* declaring, “If I do not fulfill my promises to you, may I be slaughtered like these animals.”

In other words, God put *himself* on the line to fulfill his promises to Abraham. And through the birth of Jesus, we see that our God became a man, so that he could literally *die* to fulfill his promises to Abraham.

But these promises go even further back than Abraham, all the way back to the Garden in Genesis 3, where God promised that the offspring of Eve would crush the head of the serpent and end the curse of sin (Gen. 3:15).

¹⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

And ever since that original promise, God has been working it out through history. The Savior would not only be the offspring of Eve but the descendant of Noah, the offspring of Abraham, from the nation of Israel, from the tribe of Judah, from the kingly line of David, born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem, and ultimately he would be God himself in the flesh.

It is in *Christ* that God fulfills all his promises to his people, “for all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20).

<pause>

Now, for us, do we live with confidence that *God* fulfills his promises? Or do we feel like it’s all up to *us*?

And do we live with the *long view* in mind, knowing that many of the past saints lived by faith their entire lives without seeing the fulfillment of God’s promises (Heb. 11; cf. John the Baptist)? Or do we live for instant gratification as if that’s all that matters?

As believers in Jesus Christ, we may plow, sow seeds, and water—and yet never see the fruit of our labors in this life. But we continue to faithfully do so, knowing that Christ *will* bring a harvest, even if it only springs up after we’re planted in the ground.

The gift of salvation that we now have in Christ, God has been orchestrating ever since the Garden and even before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and he will continue to ensure that it will bear fruit all over the world even after our time here is done (Col. 1:6).

<pause>

So now, in light of these seven facets of the gift of salvation, how can we celebrate Christmas this year? Let me just offer three possible applications.

First, treasure the complex and intricate beauty in this multifaceted gift of salvation that we have in Christ: God’s visitation, compassion, forgiveness, cost, deliverance, light, and fulfillment. Think about and praise God for each facet, and remember that Christmas is all about *Christ*, who was born to die, so that we might enjoy every spiritual blessing in him.

Second, as you spend time with family and friends who may not be believers, share genuinely and boldly what Christmas means to you. As those who have “the light of the world” in our lives, Jesus now says that *we* are “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). We may not be as radiant as a sunrise, but even a candle or small flicker of light is bright in a dark room. And as we meditate on this multifaceted gift of salvation for *ourselves*, should we not want *others* to receive this wonderful gift as well?

Third, reflect on this past year and how your awe and worship of God have been. For many of us, this has been a particularly difficult year. But the wonder of Christmas is that our God enters *into* our difficulty, and he does what is impossible for any of us to do on our own—he saves us. It’s easy to allow our afflictions to define our year, but as we meditate on our God and the multifaceted gift of salvation that we have in Christ, may this Christmas be the beginning of greater awe and deeper worship of our God in the coming year.

Conclusion

As we close, I want us grow in the habit of thinking *longer* and *harder* about the multifaceted gift of our salvation that we have in Christ.

Zechariah said that Christ was given “to guide our feet into the way of *peace*.”

Now if what the atheist says is true—that life is meaningless, hopeless, and is built on the foundation of “unyielding despair” (as one atheist puts it)¹⁵—then the only comfort and peace you can find is by thinking *less* about it.

But for the Christian, the way of peace is not by thinking *less* but by thinking *more* about our salvation and its implications.¹⁶

Therefore, Christians who think long and hard about the multifaceted gift of salvation that we have in Christ are not only acting more *rationally* but we also have all the more *reasons* to praise our glorious and gracious God.

The One Thing

Praise God for the multifaceted gift of salvation we have in Jesus.

<pause>

As we remain seated, let’s respond to God’s Word.

Keep your Bibles open to the passage, and we’ll spend a few moments now in quiet reflection and prayer. Let’s pray.

¹⁵ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Why I Am Not a Christian*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 107, quoted in John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 35, Kindle.

¹⁶ Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 69, Kindle.