

Christmas: A Redemptive Panoramic

Luke 1:67-80

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed His people”

Introduction: In 1889, the Eiffel Tower was unveiled to the people of Paris and the rest of the world as the centerpiece of the Paris World’s Fair. Towering almost a thousand feet in the air, it stood as the tallest building in the world for more than four decades. Originally designed to be shown for 20 years, plans to dismantle it were canceled in 1909 when they discovered it made an excellent telegraph transmitter, could communicate with ships in the Atlantic, and a few years later to intercept German communications during WW1.

But there was another unexpected feature to the Tower. Only wealthy visitors or Parisians could afford to see Paris from the air, renting the experience in a hot air balloon, meaning most native to Paris had never seen their beloved city in panorama, to take in the size, scope, and extent of it. The Tower *democratized* the view, meaning common citizens could pay a reasonable amount to climb the stairs and locate their neighborhoods in the broad panorama of metropolitan Paris. The Tower became such an important symbol and centerpiece that during WW2, Parisian freedom fighters cut the elevator cables so German occupiers would have to climb if they were going to take in the view.

In May 1925, a Paris newspaper ran an article citing that the Tower was beginning to rust and needed extensive repairs. Soon after, five of the most prominent scrap iron dealers in Paris received a letter signed by **Victor Lustig**, *Deputy Director General of the Ministere de Postes et Telegraphes*. Lustig wrote that since the cost to renovate would be so costly, the government had decided to reluctantly, quietly, and secretly sell the seven-thousand-ton iron structure for scrap. Meeting with the five, Lustig secretly met with **Andre Poisson**, and for a substantial bribe, offered him the contract. Poisson obliged. Soon after the money changed hands, Poission discovered the shocking news: **Lustig** was a con man, not even French, and continued to do the same con six months later. Poission was so embarrassed he did not even report the theft to the police.¹

What does this have to do with Christmas? The birth of Jesus is the signal of the centerpiece of God’s redemptive plan that encapsulates the whole of Scripture and history. The whole of history past was longing for His appearing and all of eternity future will revel in His rule. If the main theme of Scripture and creation itself is *God glorifying Himself*, then Christmas is a key part of the story of *blessing all nations of the earth through Jesus Christ, redeeming people from all nations as a people for His own possession, to dwell with Him forever*. Far too often we can **fall for the con**: we are offered the scrap metal by way of **distraction, deception, and distortion** of God’s revealed word and will, relegating the story of Jesus to a mere point in time or having only to do with us. This Christmas we want to climb to the heights of the Biblical story of Christmas, to see the redemptive story of God’s preordained plan, so we can revel in our Savior who condescended from glory, humbling Himself in order to offer forgiveness to those who longed for salvation.

Luke 1 gives context to the birth narrative of Jesus. Luke wrote to a non-Jewish audience so he bent over backwards to help connect the events of Jesus birth and life to the rest of the OT, starting with a Jewish priest serving in the Temple named **Zechariah, a righteous and blameless man**, but also who was advanced in years and whose wife Elizabeth was barren. On his turn to minister in the Temple, he was

¹ This story was adapted from “*Is the Commission still great?*”, by Steve Richardson, pp. 187-189.

burning incense and praying to God, which would have included hope that God would visit and redeem. This time, **his prayer was answered specifically**, as the angel Gabriel appeared and gave him the message that prayers had been answered, and he and Elizabeth would have a son named John who would prepare the pathway in the power of Elijah to make ready the people of the Lord! But much like the story of Peter's angelic release from prison, who knocked on the church's door while they were praying for his release, refusing to listen to young Rhoda that their prayers were actually answered leaving Peter outside knocking on the door, Zechariah did NOT BELIEVE THE ANGEL. In a comically tragic response, the angel said "*I am **Gabriel, I serve in the presence of God, and I bring you good news, and YOU DON'T BELIEVE????!!***" Zechariah would then be mute for the nine months of gestation as John the Baptist would grow in Elizabeth's womb, giving him plenty of time to ponder the significance of what was happening.

At the birth of his son, he told everyone the boy's name would be **John**, not a family name, and at this his tongue was loosed. What follows is one of the most oft neglected prophecies of Christmas, but one of the most complete looks at redemption in a compact set of verses. This prophecy is a **bridge**, moving from OT realities to New, the last bit of explanation, description, and anticipation before the **incarnation**. **Christmas did not come out of nowhere**, and in fact, was the culmination of Biblical prophecy and history. When we see it fully, as one story, we will see a **beautiful tapestry of promises called covenants, as God redeems people from their sin to a restored relationship with Him**.

The Grand Story of God's Redemptive Panoramic (1:67)

Luke 1:67-68 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

Before addressing the covenant promises of this prophecy, let's give a little more context to where we've been in our own study in 1 Samuel. We have been studying a time in Israel's history where God brought His people into the land of promise with a king to rule for them. We will see that David will become the pinnacle king, the one in whom God would give an eternal promise. But we also know that this united monarchy did not last long, and the kingdom divided with the Northern tribes falling in 722 B.C and the Southern in 586 B.C. to Babylon. After a time of exile, the people came back into the land, but this time with no king, no strength, and weak or fractured worship. The Temple had been rebuilt, but by the time of Zechariah it was controlled by the Romans through the leadership of the Sadducees, a group who discounted much of the OT and who took advantage of the people. It had been **400 years** since God had brought new revelation. Think about how long **400 years is!** That would bring us back to 1623, when the Dutch were still in conquest mode! **The silence had been deafening**. But Zechariah finally realized what God was doing.

God had **visited** and **provided redemption for His people**. **Redemption** is the cry of mankind and creation itself since the Creation and Fall. Genesis 1-11 introduces the essential parts to His redemption plan – **creation, the fall, God's judgment in the flood, and the separation and proliferation of people in tribes, tongues, and nations**. Or another way to think about this is Paradise created, Paradise Lost, and how Paradise would be regained. From the promise of the seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent in **Genesis 3:15** the hope of redemption begins to come into focus. It explains the fundamental question that every being who has ever lived must answer: *how does sinful man, who was expelled from the presence of the God in the Garden and given a sentence of death, get back into a right relationship with their creator God?* This provides the context for the story of the Bible, in which we see the **gospel itself** not as a flat, 2D picture but a full orb, 3D, glorious picture of God's grace, mercy, and love.

This makes all of the Bible, including the story of Christmas, not only important, but gives us the opportunity to see the great lengths God goes to bring to Himself those who hate Him. We are a part of this grand story, but we need to remember, we are only a part. **Why is it so important for Luke's readers (us included) to see redemption in panoramic instead of a flat picture?**

- **The Gospel is simple, but it should never lose its “AWE”** – The good news of the gospel, that God forgives our sin and brings us back into a restored, loving, worshipful relationship with him should never simply be a tagline at the end of a sermon or word we use to add in to justify activity. The reality of the gospel should take our breath away as it gives us living hope, should floor us in how much God loves, and cause us to bow in worship to a God who bought back sinners and enemies to Himself.
- **We must remember where we fit in the story** – How many of us have been frustrated, disappointed, and even nervous about the future of this country? How many are scared for our kids and grandkids future in this world, as we see things rapidly change before our eyes, and the changes are not leading toward truth and righteousness, but immorality and injustice. Without a larger view of redemptive history, **hope would be hard to find**. If we believed that God intended this world at this time was to get better and better, it would seem that God has failed in His plan. But if we understand that all of history is reached a pinnacle at the appearing of Jesus Christ, we are much more assured that He will return and make all things new in the future. This world as it stands today is not our home, but we long for a future redemption where Jesus will visibly reign and rule, bringing justice and righteousness to all. We also remember that we get to be a part of redemption, but we are only **a part of a much larger story than merely us**.
- **Redemption has an end goal in mind** – Hope is a theme at Christmas, but hope is only as good as the one giving the promises – someone can sign a \$700 million contract to get primarily paid out in 10 years, but that is only good if the organization is able to do it! Because God kept all His promises in the incarnation of Jesus, we have hope that He will continue to do so into the future, as we look to the glorious end of redemptive history where we will reign **with Christ, being with Him and serving Him forever**. This allows us to be *focused, settled, hopeful, restful, confident, and bold today*. The End Game is seen in **Luke 1:74**, where Zechariah explained the ultimate end of deliverance was that we might ***“serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.”***

The Covenant Promises of God’s Redemptive Panoramic (1:69-80)

Coming back to the text, we see that Zechariah leans heavily on his faith and understanding that God **keeps His promises** in making covenants. In fact, he will lay out **3 distinctive covenant promises from the OT that the coming of Jesus significantly moved forward and partially fulfilled**. Covenants are not something we think often about (although if you wear a **wedding ring** you have made a covenant), and they are parts of Scripture we are often not familiar with. But covenants are what made redemptive history move, what kept them going. Covenants don't seem glamorous, but without them, there would be no salvation. **Dr. Michael Grisanti** (one of my seminary professors) wrote this:

“As God set forth the various Biblical covenants, each one represented a step forward in the revelation of God’s intentions for the world. Rather than operating in distinct orbits or realms, each covenant builds

*on the preceding covenants. Each covenant introduces new elements to God's revelation of His plan and those elements become part of the **multi-faceted tapestry of biblical covenants.**"*²

Some covenants of the OT, like the **Mosaic given in the Law**, were conditional and bilateral, meaning it had obligations on both the giver and receiver of the covenant. If Israel kept the Law, there would be blessing, but if they disobeyed, there would be the consequence of punishment. However, there are **3 main covenants** that are known as **Grant Promises**, where the commitment lies with the giver himself, putting the obligation on Himself and HE protects the rights of the vassal without demands. In **Genesis 15**, when God made the covenant with Abram, He walked between animals cut in half, signaling that if **He broke the covenant, the same thing would happen to Him** (see also Jer. 34:18-19), which means He was pretty serious.

As we look at **three covenants**, they each had to do with **salvation and deliverance**. These covenants were **unconditional in their complete fulfillment** (although there were consequences for not keeping them along the way), they were **unilateral** (made by God and kept by God), and **everlasting**, meaning there was not an end date when they would end. In order to understand how these affect us today, we must understand (briefly) how they were made, what they meant for Zechariah, what the implications are for us, and what they will still be into the future.

The Davidic Covenant

Luke 1:69-71 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;

When matching the strength of salvation with the "*house of David*", Zechariah was connecting the coming Messiah with the **Davidic Covenant**, given to David in **2 Samuel 7**. As we'll see in the narrative of 1 & 2 Samuel, David had achieved peace from surrounding enemies to the point that he wanted to bring the **Ark of the Covenant** to a permanent dwelling in Jerusalem, moving from a tent to a Temple. It was here that God promised David **a great name** (7:9), a **place** where Israel could be planted in Jerusalem (**7:10**), and **rest** from enemies (7:11a). These would be fulfilled in the days of David, but God went on to Promise beyond David's days, giving him a **house** (7:11), a **seed** (**7:12**), and a **forever kingdom** (7:13). The last three are of utmost significance, since the house would not be a literal house, since God said Solomon would build a Temple, not David. No, the house would be a **dynasty, a posterity, a succession of Kings that would come from David's line**, even if there was failure on behalf of the offspring (Psalm 89:30-36).

Why is this so significant to Jesus and us? Back in Deut. 17, God laid out the role and features of what a king was supposed to be, and in **Psalm 72** it affirmed **what Solomon should have been**. The king would *judge with righteousness and justice* (72:2), *defend the poor, give deliverance, and crush the oppressors* (72:4). He would have *dominion over the universe* (v. 8), and *all the nations would serve him* (v. 11). The king would *deliver the needy, pity the weak, save the needy, and redeem life* (14). *His name would endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun would shine, and all the nations would bless His name forever* (17-18). He would be a **universal, redeemer, deliverer, ruler, savior who had dominion and judgment over the entire world**.

² Michael A. Gristanti, "TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999), 250.

But no descendent of David ever lived up to this billing. It pointed to a **greater king**, and Zechariah saw that fulfillment in the One his son John the Baptist would announce. Jesus entered as a **redeemer king**, one who would save those who knew they needed redemption. But there is something still lingering with His kingdom, as He has yet to fulfill all the promises of the full covenant, which means **only during the millennial reign of Christ will the peace and prosperity depicted in Psalm 72 find fulfillment.**

At Christmas and every day, we remember and celebrate that Jesus is our King, who lived, died, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, putting all principalities and powers under His feet. He rules today, but one day He will come again and rule physically on this earth, bringing His rule and dominion. He has **authority and power to do so**, and though He came in weakness as a baby in a manger, He rules with might now and forever.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Luke 1:72-75 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 us⁷⁴ 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.

When you think Abrahamic Covenant, remember **Genesis 12** (also 18:18-19; 22:17-18; 26:3-4; 28:13-15). It was here, after the Flood and Tower of Babel, that God chooses Abram to initiate His two-part response to the dilemma of sin and judgment: 1) He would bless the **name and nation of Abraham**, meaning the eventual nation of Israel would be a focal point of God's redemptive plan. 2) All the people/nations of the earth will be blessed through him (12:2-3). God ALWAYS has planned to bring all nations back to Himself, since His plan was for global salvation. **Psalm 67:2** asks for God's graciousness **so that "His saving power would be known among all nations"**. Isaiah 49:6 God called Israel to be a light to the Gentiles (non-Jewish nations) that *my salvation may reach the ends of the earth."*

But more than this, the NT ties this OT covenant with the gospel commission of the NT in **Galatians 3:8**:

*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, **foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall **all the nations** be blessed.*

God used the nation of Israel to usher in a king from the line of David, and Jesus fulfilled that requirement. The goal was to bring salvation to all nations, as Jesus came to **seek and save the lost** (Luke 19:10). When Zechariah saw that his son would usher in the one *"to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace"* (1:79), He saw the coming Messiah Jesus as an extended fulfillment of this covenant, one that calls us to be justified by faith. **What does this remind us at Christmastime about Jesus?** Jesus coming reminds us that He came to offer salvation to the nations, not just us. We have a broader mission, a commissioned command to spread the goodness of Jesus and the good news of the gospel to all nations. The Great Commission did not simply come about at the end of **Matthew**; it has always been the plan of God. The church now builds on the foundation of the prophets from the OT, being the primary entity God now uses to reach the world. **But what is the message we give? That is found in the final covenant covered by Zechariah.**

The New Covenant

Luke 1:76-79 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."

The first two covenants had to do with deliverance, salvation, righteousness, faith, ruling, blessing, and justice, but neither dealt with a vital issue that we all long for: **forgiveness!** The OT Law could cover sin by sacrificing animals in the place of mankind, but no amount of goats or sheep could change the heart and deal with sin. Forgiveness could ONLY come through the sacrifice of a perfect Lamb, an atoning work of One who was born of a woman but born without a sin nature, who fulfilled the demands of the OT Law. Forgiveness could come through **Jesus Christ alone**.

Way back in **Deuteronomy 30:1-10**, God prophesied that what Israel truly needed was obedience **from the heart** (2), demanding that God would circumcise their heart to be able to love Him *from* the heart (6), allowing them to turn to God with all their heart (10). The problem is, without a heart transplant, how can anyone do that? So God promised something called **the New Covenant**, found in **Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:22-32**:

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will **make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 **not like the covenant** that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 For this is the **covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and **I will write it on their hearts**. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, '**Know the Lord**,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**"*

This promise given to Israel was different than the Mosaic Law since the COULD NOT change the heart. Ezekiel mentions that our heart of stone had to be replaced with a heart of flesh so that we could worship, love, and obey God from the inside out, not through mere external conformity. Jesus not only came into the world as our King, but as a sacrifice. When He will hang on the cross, he **ratified and initiated the New Covenant**, which He celebrated with His disciples in the upper room before His death (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The NC means that salvation **is an act of God that He produces in us through the death and resurrection of Jesus**, all motivated by God's *hesed* love, His tender mercy.

"The NC provides the essential things that all the other covenants lacked --- A new heart, power to obey God, fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit, and forgiveness of sin." John MacArthur

At Christmas, we remember that Jesus entered into humanity as part of the eternal plan of God, to bring back the sinful nations to Himself out of His great love and desire to redeem humanity to Himself. When we think of Jesus' birth we remember that He is King, one who rules over all nations, and offers forgiveness through His precious blood, shed on the cross.

The Christmas story sets up like a musical: Mary sings, Zechariah sings, Simeon sings, the angels sing – but we get a future look at a choir sing in **Revelation 7:9**: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, **"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"** This is the panorama of Christmas – God's redemptive plan for all the nations!!!