

## **Divine Prophecy**

### **Regarding God's Word**

This morning we will see prophecy that was fulfilled and continuing to be fulfilled. So first, let me define prophecy. True prophecy is divine and comes from God alone. As Peter wrote in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter, <sup>19</sup>“we have the **prophetic word more fully confirmed**, to which you will do well to **pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place**, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup>knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For **no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man**, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:19-21) Peter is saying God has inspired the words of Scripture through chosen men by His power and His person the Holy Spirit. If we do not believe this truth, then the Bible is just the stories and advice and wisdom of men.

The problem this presents is that history clearly shows us men are most often fallible and wrong. This is why what most of the world believes that if there is a God and he has many paths for people to believe in him or that God is just man's attempt to explain what man cannot or there is no such thing as sin, meaning what is right for me is right for me and has little to do with you. On the other hand, God is never wrong and he tells us if we believe in him, he will reveal himself to us through the Bible so that we may know him and worship him and we will be able to live with the hope of eternity. For those who believe, as Peter wrote, we are to “**pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place**” and as believers we are to be the light of God in a dark world just as John was the light heralding the long awaited Messiah; John declared Jesus was the Christ.

Believing God gave us His Word, His Scripture, the Bible so we may know Him and worship Him changes everything in our lives, how we live and how we perceive the future. This means all who believe, accept what the Psalmist wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true ...” (Psalm 19:7-9) This is the basis on which I live – not lip-service, but heart-felt belief and love of God and his divinely revealed Word. My beloved you cannot be half-in and half-out, straddling the fence does not work, the Lord says of those who are lukewarm – he spits them out - you either believe completely, and are fully-in or you belong to the world and you are fully-out. If you believe then you know that everything in the Bible, all Scripture has the purpose to “bear witness about me”, Jesus said of himself. But the religious, those of the false religions of the world, those who call themselves “Christian” but do not fully believe that the Bible is the divine Word of God as his gift to mankind, Jesus said this, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:39-40) Search your hearts this morning and ask yourselves, “Do I believe?” Not, do you believe intellectually, not just do you believe emotionally, but do you believe with your mind, heart and soul to the point it is who you are? For if you believe then you live out Jesus’ great commandments, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31) Is this true of your life? For if one believes their life give evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. Do people see in your life “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law?” (Galatians 5:22-23)

An angel sent by God spoke to the Apostle John saying, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, **‘These are the true words of God.’** <sup>10</sup> Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’ **For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**” (Revelation 19:9-10) The Bible is, as the angel said to John, “the true words of God.” We are NOT to have idols in our lives and we are to worship God only. As the angel instructed John “‘Worship God.’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” It is not about religion or idols or man-made rules, as the Jews became religious people of many rules, but it is about a relationship with the living God of the universe through His Son, the man-God, Jesus the Messiah.

Because the Person and work of God is found in every passage of His Word, the Bible, each passage reveals God and his plan of salvation for us. This passage about the birth of John the Baptist is no exception and concludes with “**For the hand of the Lord was with him.**” (Luke 1:66) Everything in the story of John exposes us to God and his plan of salvation through the fulfillment of prophecy – this is the divine revelation of God to mankind. Prophecy is only for those who believe; for to understand it one must have the Holy Spirit, who is God and the spiritual wisdom He places in ones regenerated soul.

### **Regarding John**

As great as John’s father and mother’s joy was at his birth, our joy is even greater. Both John’s parents and the people present at his birth knew something special had taken place. In verses 13 to 20 we read of God’s prophecy and Zechariah’s resulting dumbness and the circumstances concerning the birth of John. Now at John’s birth people have become aware of God’s involvement and for Luke writes “**all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,** <sup>66</sup> **and all who heard them laid**

them up in their hearts, saying, ‘What then will this child be?’ ” Our joy is greater than John’s parents because we have the advantage of knowing the answer to their question, “What then will this child be?” Hear the answer to this question as Brother Garth reads from Matthew chapter 3.

### **Please stand for the Reading of God Word - MATTHEW 3:1-12**

Please be seated.

John’s parents, and many others throughout “the hill country of Judea” knew there was something special about John and God was involved in blessing Zechariah and Elizabeth with a child, a son, but they did not know John’s future as we do from the scripture passage you just heard. Let me return to the beginning of our passage.

Luke begins this passage in verse 56 with “Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth.” The time Luke writes of is representative of several important events. First, Mary had left just prior to this time to return to Nazareth to meet with Joseph and prepare for the time of the birth of the Messiah. Second, this time represents the climax of redemptive history. God’s great plan of salvation for fallen man is put into action with the birth of John as the forerunner of the Messiah. Third, Zechariah’s naming John breaks the time of silence, not only for his 9 months, but also for the over 400 years of silence since the last prophets of the Old Testament spoke. It is the beginning the time of the New Covenant.

God gives his people blessings even when they do not understand them. There are many things about our world and the universe we do not understand, but through God’s created universe he is blessing us in a multitude of ways even if we do not fully understand. The people present at John’s birth did not understand the blessing, which had just happened, some would understand later. Beginning in verse 59 we read of John’s circumcision and naming. At this time in history people did not know about

many things of science as we do, they did not know how germs, bacteria and how many diseases were spread. Circumcision had both health benefits and the setting apart of God's people. Circumcision greatly reduced the transmission of infections between a husband and wife. In fact God instructions for cleanliness laid out in the Old Testament made the Jewish nation a people of the lowest infection and disease rates in the ancient world. Secondly, circumcision marked all Jewish males as belonging to God. Lastly, circumcision was part of the Abrahamic covenant found in Genesis 17 and served, as a lesson and symbol from God that man had a deep spiritual need to be cleansed from his depravity and sin. This problem of sin was passed down from generation to generation and before sin offerings were instituted the removal of the outer skin showed that God marked the Jewish people for the removal of sin. First, the need for sin to be dealt with was through the cutting away of the flesh, then the sacrifice of animals and finally the sacrifice of God's own Son.

Now lets examine the prophecy of naming John. Zechariah had been silent for 9 months. Jump down to verse 62 and we find something of interest, [“they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called.”](#) Examining the word structure in verse 20 where Gabriel told Zechariah he would be silent and not speak can mean both not able to speak and it can also mean not able to hear. Now in verse 62 there was no reason for the people to make signs unless Zechariah was both deaf and dumb. He had obviously communicated by writing to his wife, Elizabeth, what the angel Gabriel had instructed. Elizabeth therefore without hesitation says the child shall be named John or *Ioannes* ([ee·o·an·nace](#)) which the Greek form of the Jewish name Jehohanan ([yeh·ho·khaw·nawn](#)) meaning “Jehovah is a gracious giver”. God is a gracious giver of blessings and now God's plan of blessing the world with the Messiah who will atone for people's sins is put into play with the birth of John who will be the herald of this great news of blessing.

Elizabeth naming the child John when there were no relatives with that name went against Jewish custom. The family and friends present therefore thought she had made a mistake. The Jewish people had become a people of rituals and customs, and they were focused on tradition - not God. Here God shows he will break the customs that over the centuries had brought His people to lose their spiritual relationship with Him and replace it with rituals and customs and traditions. This is the same problem we face today. Ritual, customs and traditions can lead to religion instead of a relationship with God. Even though we here at Canyon Bible work to focus the Word of God and not the traditions, rituals and customs of man that have invaded the Church of Jesus Christ over the last 2000 years it is difficult to maintain our focus on a relationship with God through Jesus. We must be people who work at a loving relationship with God through his written and living Word. People like routine and order and it is our natural tendency to build man-made structure to replace God's, just as the Jews did.

Zechariah learned his lesson concerning doubting God and had 9 months to consider what that meant. Whereas Elizabeth in verse 60 objects to the family and friends wanting the baby to be named after his father, she goes against custom and says, **“No; he shall be called John.”** Family is shocked by this and quickly decides to go over her head and they turn to Zechariah. In response Zechariah does not say his name shall be John – he declares, **“His name is John.”** Again we see God's prophecy being fulfilled.

Because of Zechariah's obedience his mouth is loosed and he praises God. Because of Elizabeth's obedience to God and her husband, and because of Zechariah's obedience we read of the result of their faithfulness beginning in verse 65, **“all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,<sup>66</sup> and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, ‘What then will this child be?’ For the hand of the Lord was with him.”** God is planting the seeds for the Messiah and for people to know that John's ministry is not of man but of God. Did Elizabeth and Zechariah know the future and know they were preparing for their son to lay the foundation for the

Messiah? Most likely they did not. Do you know the future and how God will use you in his plan of salvation – most likely not, but that makes no difference in God’s calling you to obedience and faithfulness and then you will, as time passes, gain understanding.

God fills Zechariah with the Holy Spirit and he speaks divine prophecy from God.

Just as Peter wrote, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)

### **Regarding Zechariah**

God’s Spirit comes upon Zechariah and prophases beginning with praise to God for what he has promised and for what is now coming to be. We know from scripture that the Holy Spirit was given to specific people at specific times for specific reasons prior to Pentecost and this is the case with Zechariah. This prophecy is short, it contains only 2 sentences - the 1<sup>st</sup> of a 125 words and the 2<sup>nd</sup> 102 words.

First, Zechariah says in verses 68 to 70, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a **horn of salvation** for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old ...” God has visited, through his angel Gabriel, both Zechariah and Mary for the purpose of revealing and setting into motion the redemption of people through the long awaited Messiah. The Messiah is the “**horn of salvation**” meaning he has the power to save and as prophesied in 2 Samuel and Psalm 18:2, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the **horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**” Therefore according to Scripture the coming Messiah is God. Also as prophesied earlier the Messiah will come from the lineage of King David. Verse 32 of this mornings passage reads, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of **His father David.**” Since the scriptures do not link John the Baptist to the house of David

this must refer to Jesus. Psalm 132:17 prophesied, “There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.” This is now fulfilled; Jesus is the horn from the house of David and John is the lamp that will light the way to Jesus and through believing in Jesus as the Messiah one will have salvation.

This 1<sup>st</sup> sentence ends with saying God swore an “oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” This is also fulfilled for Jesus will deliver those who believe in him as their Lord and Savior from the enemy of sin and believers will be able to live without fear and serve God with “love for “the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30)

As Zechariah continues in verse 76, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins...” This was John’s calling; he was the last prophet of the Old Testament and he declared the New Covenant by preparing the way for Jesus and he gave knowledge of God’s plan of salvation to the people. As recorded in the Gospel According to the Apostle John in chapter 3, John the Baptist said, “I’m not the Messiah, but I’ve been sent ahead of him.” John the Baptist was clear throughout his ministry that he was preparing the way for the Messiah and only the Messiah had the power to save.

Zechariah by the power of the Holy Spirit saw the coming of the Messiah whose life, death and resurrection would bring the promised new covenant. Zechariah writes in verses 78 and 79, “the sunrise shall visit us from on high <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” “Sunrise” means rising and is the first light of dawn bringing forth God’s truth. The sunrise will come “from on high” meaning heaven from which Jesus descended. As

we read in Psalm 113, “Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high.” (Psalm 113:5) Jesus will bring the light of God’s truth to those “who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” symbolizing the darkness of mankind because of their sin nature and that they live in the shadow of death because Satan has power over this world. It is Jesus the Christ that will have power over the darkness of sin and Satan who is the lord of the shadow of death and because Jesus lives he brings salvation to mankind. Zechariah was given the privilege to prophesy the future of God’s salvation plan. Is it any wonder the hill country of Judea was talking about John and Zechariah’s prophecy? With the end of this short but profound prophecy Zechariah fades away and John’s life is shrouded until he reemerges in chapter 3 to begin his ministry of declaring the coming of the Messiah.

So we have seen prophecy fulfilled and prophecy that will be fulfilled. This continues to show to those who study and believe the Bible is the divine word of God given through his prophets and writers that God is truth and can be trusted to fulfill his promises.

## **Regarding You**

What does God’s prophecy say about each us, you and me? God is true, but are we? God called Zechariah to obedience and because of his doubt the angel silenced him for 9 months. He grew from this experience and proved faithful. God filled him with His Holy Spirit and he saw the future and prophesied about it. Are you like Zechariah in the temple, because of your doubt you silence yourself? Or are you like Zechariah the prophet declaring God’s salvation to those who are sitting in darkness and living under the shadow of death? God has given us prophecy and I pray we prove faithful to live out his prophecies. Jesus declared as the only son of the Living God, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Because Jesus has all authority he commands each believer, <sup>19</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

My beloved, my prayer for each of you is that you live as Zechariah the prophet and his son, John the Baptist, declaring to the world that sits in darkness and lives under the shadow of death the saving light and truth of Jesus Christ. My beloved, will you be silent or will you be faithful to declaring the good news, the saving gospel of Jesus Christ and receive the blessings of God? Let us live as faithful lights in this dark world! Amen!