

# Jesus Is the Horn of Salvation

by John Piper

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*Jesus, the horn of salvation, offers forgiveness and protection from sin and Satan, bringing hope and joy to all who believe.*

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 22:3, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 132:17, Luke 1:68, Romans 5:20, Hebrews 2:14, Hebrews 9:26, 1 John 3:8

**Topics:** "Gods Faithfulness", "Salvation Through Jesus"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, highlighting God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises despite human doubts and limitations. Zechariah's silence serves as a period of reflection and transformation, leading to a profound understanding of the significance of God's work in his life. The Benedictus, Zechariah's prophetic song, emphasizes the redemption and salvation brought by the birth of Jesus, the horn of salvation, who conquers fear, unrighteousness, and enemies. Piper encourages seeking silence to grasp the stupendous significance of God's work and to appreciate the profound transformation and victory offered through Jesus, the horn of salvation.

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## Transcript

Luke 1:67-79

When Herod was king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years (Luke 1:5-7).

But God, desiring to show that He regards the broken-hearted and that nothing human can stop His resolves on their behalf, sends the mighty angel Gabriel with a word for old Zechariah:

Your prayer has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord and he shall drink no wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the Spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared (Luke 1:13-17).

Zechariah couldn't believe the news. And said as much. So Gabriel responded with indignation:

I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And, behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time (Luke 1:19,20).

Nine months later the time came. Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist. At the child's circumcision the neighbors started to call the child Zechariah after his father but, in obedience to God, Zechariah wrote on a tablet: "His name is John." And immediately his tongue was loosed and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel,

For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us

In the house of David His servant --

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old--

That we should be saved from our enemies,

And from the hand of all who hate us;

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers,

And to remember His holy covenant,

The oath which He swore to our Father Abraham,

To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,

Might serve Him without fear,

In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

For you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways,

To give knowledge of salvation to His people

In the forgiveness of their sins,

Through the tender mercies of our God,

By which the day shall dawn upon us from on high

To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,

To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Zechariah had had nine months of silence to brood and ponder and pray and meditate on his Bible, the Old Testament. His silence may have been a divine rebuke for his unbelief but God always turns his

rebukes into rewards for those who keep faith. Remember that, you who right now suffer from the scars of past sins. If you keep faith now God will turn the marks of sin into memorials of grace. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound (Romans 5:20).

I love to think of Zechariah in those months, groaning under God's rebuke, yet gradually discovering the reward. At first lacerating himself: "Why didn't I believe the word of God? Why did I have to be so skeptical? What a fool I was!" But then, gradually, in the silence of those months (I think the angel had struck Zechariah deaf as well as dumb because in verse 62 it says they communicated to him with signs instead of speech)--gradually in the silence of those months, when he could not converse with his wife or friends, Zechariah began to see what was happening. It began to sink into his head and heart that these were stupendous, unrepeatable, incredibly significant days.

I cannot pass over this experience of Zechariah without making an application for our day. And it is this: If we don't seek out silence we will probably not feel the stupendous significance of God's work in history on our lives. It would be a rare thing to be gripped and moved deeply in a noisy room. There is a close correlation between stillness and a sense of the stupendous. The most astonishing things about reality will probably be missed by those who use the radio and T.V. for a constant background drone. Be still, be dumb and deaf and know that I am God. What would it mean for your life if for nine months you could not hear or say anything! I have tried to imagine what it would mean for my ministry and home life. No preaching. No counseling. No singing. But lots more seeing. Lots more looking into the eyes of my wife and sons. (When was the last time you looked steadily into someone's eyes?) Lots more reading the great books. Lots more writing journals, poems, letters, thoughts about life. Lots more prayer and meditation on the word of God. All in absolute silence. If God should ever give me such a period, I hope that I would turn it to as much good as Zechariah did. Because when Zechariah came out he came out filled with the Holy Spirit and singing what has come to be known as the Benedictus. A song filled with insight and with a sense of the stupendous significance of what was about to happen with the birth of Jesus. So while we ponder now how we will seek some silence for ourselves let us learn from what the Holy Spirit taught Zechariah.

Most of Zechariah's song is taken up not with his own son but with the salvation the Messiah would bring. Only two verses (76 and 77) refer to John the Baptist specifically: He will go before the Lord to prepare His ways by calling the people to repentance. The rest of the Benedictus is about what the coming of Jesus is going to mean.

Zechariah begins in verse 68: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because He has visited and redeemed His people." Notice four remarkable things. First, nine months earlier Zechariah could not believe his wife would have a child. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he is so confident of God's redeeming work in the coming Messiah that he puts it in the past tense. For the mind of faith, a promised act of God is as good as done. Zechariah has learned to take God at his word and so has a remarkable assurance: "God has visited and redeemed!"

Second, the coming of Jesus the Messiah is a visitation of God to our world: "The God of Israel has visited and redeemed." For centuries the Jewish people had languished under the conviction that God had withdrawn: the spirit of prophecy had ceased, Israel had fallen into the hands of Rome. And all the godly in Israel were awaiting the visitation of God. Luke tell us in 2:25 that the devout Simeon was "looking for the consolation of Israel." And in Luke 2:38 the prayerful Anna was "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." These were days of great expectation. Now the long awaited visitation of God was about to

happen--indeed He was about to come in a way no one expected.

Third, He is coming to redeem. Don't pour into this word right away all that we know of redemption from the apostle Paul. Zechariah probably never dreamed the Messiah would have to die to accomplish redemption. It took Jesus years to get the fact into His disciple's heads that "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected ... and be killed and on the third day be raised." There had been hints of this in the Old Testament (like Isaiah 53) but none of the Jews in Jesus' day understood this.

What Zechariah had in mind when he said God had visited and redeemed His people was probably the same thing Moses had in mind when he described God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. In Exodus 6:6 Moses quotes God, saying, "I am the Lord, I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment." Zechariah, no doubt, is hoping that the Israel of his day will be delivered from her oppressive Roman overlords and that Messiah, the king of David, will reign over a liberated Israel. It has not been revealed to Zechariah that this national-political deliverance will not happen at the first coming of the Messiah but only at His second coming. Nevertheless, we will see signs in Zechariah's song that the redemption of the Messiah is more than national liberation.

The fourth thing to notice about verse 68 is that God "has visited and redeemed His people." It is the "consolation of Israel" for which Zechariah hopes. It is the "Lord God of Israel" who is coming to redeem His people. The people in view are the people of Israel. This was the chosen nation to whom the promises had been given. God had the world in view but He aimed to come to Israel first. So Jesus said in Matthew 15:24, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But just like there is a clue in Zechariah's song that God's redemption is more than national so there is a clue that the beneficiaries of that redemption are more than Israelites. We will see this in a moment.

That is the way Zechariah begins his song in verse 68, "The Lord God of Israel has visited and redeemed His people." Now in verse 69 he tells us how this visitation and redemption will happen, "God has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant, David." This is Jesus not John the Baptist. John was not of the house of David. Jesus is the horn of salvation.

This has been an exciting image for me to hold up before my mind's eye this Christmas: Jesus as the horn of salvation. The kind of horn meant here is not a musical instrument but the deadly weapon of the wild ox. This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is called a horn so we must go back to the Old Testament, no doubt where Zechariah got the image, to see what it means.

Psalms 92:9 and 10 gives us a picture of what the horn stood for:

For lo, Thy enemies, O Lord, for lo, Thy enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered. But Thou hast exalted my horn like that of the wild ox.

The horn is a sign of strength and a means of victory. In Micah 4:13 God says to Jerusalem, "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples..."

I used to watch Rawhide on TV when I was a boy and the program always came on with a stampede of cattle, most with big horns. But I never was very impressed at the size or strength of the cattle until I went to the Minnesota State Fair for the first time about six years ago. And it still makes me feel weak every

year when I go back and see those prize-winning steer. Their backs are as high as my head. Their necks are as big as a barrel, and those two horns! Every time I go past that stall I think, "What if that animal got angry?" It is not hard to imagine that the horn of the wild ox became for the ancient near eastern people (who had no cars or tanks or motors) a sign of tremendous strength and a means of victory in conflict.

Verse 70 says that the coming of this horn of salvation was prophesied of old. One of the clearest examples of such a prophecy is Psalm 132:17 where God says concerning Jerusalem, "There I will make a horn to sprout for David. I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame." When a horn sprouts on an ox's head and becomes like iron, then he must be feared by all his enemies.

But in the Old Testament one always finds the conviction that God is the one who fights for Israel. He is the one who is strong and who gets victory over the enemies of His people. Therefore, it is not surprising that the only two instances of the phrase "horn of salvation" in the Old Testament are references to God, not man. One is in 2 Samuel 22:3, and the other in Psalm 18:2. Both record the same Psalm of David after God saved him from his enemy, Saul. He says, "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."

God is his defense (his shield) and his offense (his deadly and powerful horn).

He is a horn of salvation because He uses His power to secure and protect His people.

And that brings us back now to Luke 1:69. Jesus is the horn of salvation because he is a deadly weapon and tremendous power which, according to verse 71, He uses to save His people from their enemies and all who hate them. Zechariah means primarily; that the Messiah will one day literally destroy His enemies and gather his people into His land and rule them in peace. And indeed, He will when He comes a second time. But Zechariah's words necessarily imply more than that.

Verses 74 and 75 show that the goal of God's redemption in raising up a horn of salvation is to "grant that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life." God's aim in raising a horn of salvation is not merely to liberate an oppressed people but to create a holy and righteous people who live in no fear because they trust Him.

This means that the redemption spoken of in verse 68 must include redemption from fear of enemies and from all unrighteousness. And it implies that ultimately the people spoken of in verse 68 are not merely Jews but are any who are not enemies of the Messiah, any who "serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness." So even though Zechariah is thinking mainly of the eventual national redemption of believing Israel, yet his own view of things, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, implies that this visitation and redemption of God is going to mean profound spiritual transformation and spiritual battle. And, therefore, to view Jesus as a horn of salvation is to see Him not only as a national liberator but, much more importantly for us now, as a spiritual conqueror.

If the goal of God's redemption is to be achieved--the gathering of a people who are fearless and righteous--then He must conquer fear and conquer unrighteousness. And the good news of Zechariah's song--the good news of Christmas--is that God has raised up a horn of salvation. Jesus is the great ox-horn of salvation for all those who call upon Him and trust Him.

If someone gave me a guaranteed super-duper mousetrap for Christmas last year I would have felt very little appreciation. We never had any mice in our old house. If someone gave me a guaranteed-to-catch-'em mousetrap this Christmas, I'd really feel appreciation because now we have got mice and I can't catch them all. If you offer me a quick ride after service to the emergency room at Metropolitan Medical Center, I'll think you are strange unless I see the gash in my arm or feel the severe pain in my abdomen. Then I would love you for the offer. If a police car screeches to a stop beside me on my way home from church some night and a man hollers for me to get in, I'll think he is putting me on unless I see the armed gang lurking ahead around the corner.

And so it is in all of life: we do not appreciate gifts that meet no needs or satisfy no desires. We do not value or love an offer for help unless we know we are sick or endangered by some enemy. Vast numbers of people look upon Jesus and the Christmas story of His coming as a useless mousetrap, a crazy trip to the emergency room, a bothersome pickup by the police, because they don't know that they have a terminal illness called unforgiven sin, and they don't believe in the fearful enemy, Satan. For them, the "horn of salvation" is a useless toy. For me, it is my only hope of recovery from this deadly disease of sin that infects my soul and my only protection from Satan, the most dangerous external enemy.

For there is a real and deadly disease. "All have sinned and come short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23). "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). And there is a real and powerful enemy. "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). "He is the god of this world and blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). So there is a deadly disease and an awesome enemy. And every one of us will die from this disease and be devoured by that enemy if there is no horn of salvation for us.

But, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us ... And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins.

These two things make Christmas good news of great joy to all who believe. 1 John 3:8, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." Hebrews 9:26, "Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Fear and guilt, the two great spoilers of life, have been taken away because Satan has been disarmed and sin has been forgiven. Hebrews 2:14 and 15 say, "Christ took on a human nature that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." And through that same death He paid the debt for our sin so that if we turn and follow Him in faith we are freed from all our guilt. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who has visited and redeemed His people by raising up a horn of salvation for us ... that we, being delivered from our enemies, might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

Satan may be a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, but none of those who take refuge in Christ, the horn of our salvation, can he destroy. If I were an artist, I would paint for my home a special Christmas painting this year and hang it on the wall near the manger scene. It would be one of those big oil canvasses. The scene would be of a distant hill at dawn. The sun is about to rise behind the hill and the rays shoot up and out of the picture. And all alone, silhouetted on the hill in the center of the picture, very

dark, is a magnificent wild ox standing with his back seven feet tall and the crown of his head nine feet tall. On both sides of his head there is a horn curving out and up six feet long and twelve inches thick at the base. He stands there sovereign and serene, facing the southern sky with his massive neck slightly cocked and impaled at the end of his right horn hangs a huge lion, dead.

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