

The Birth Of John The Baptist

Turn with me to Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 57.

These scriptures that we will read in a moment that tell us about the birth of John the Baptist are filled with prophetic promises, prophecies that tell about the special ministry that God called John the Baptist to carry out, even before he was born.

And intertwined within those prophetic words are also promises that not only tell about the immediate days of John and of the Lord Jesus, but also tell about days that are yet to come, days that span all the way into the Millennial Kingdom in the very last days of this earth.

Folks, God is eternal! And His plans are eternal, from eternity past through all of eternity future. And here in these words, we are being invited into the very beginning moments of His eternal plans for the redemption of all those will turn and give their hearts to Him, both His children, the Israelites, and also us, you and me, His adopted children. Praise the Lord! Listen, beginning in verse 57!

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.

⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John."

⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name."

⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ 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.

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 father 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 God; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (Luke 1:57-80)

One of the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church and of some of the Baptist Churches is a doctrine that sometimes unites their members together, but at other times gives cause for them to disagree. That doctrine is the doctrine of "Predestination", the belief that God truly is sovereign and that He truly does insert His hand into the lives and the affairs of men and women on the earth, causing things to take place, things that would not have taken place naturally, even so far as to foreordain the eternal destiny of men and women, seemingly without regard to their personal plans.

Now, while that doctrine might be uncomfortable to some people, we still know, with a certainty, that it was not a doctrine contrived within the minds of men, but instead came straight out of the mind of God onto the pages of these scriptures, the pure and holy truth of God.

Listen carefully to what God has to say about this matter of "Predestination" in Ephesians chapter 1! There beginning in verse 3, God tells us,

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵having predestined us to

adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

And continuing in verse 11 of Ephesians 1,

¹¹In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹²that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:3-12)

And then, listen on further to these words in Romans 8, beginning in verse 29, ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Predestination is real and it is as much a part of these scriptures as the other doctrines that we hold so dear, the doctrines of salvation, of redemption and of sanctification. And it is only as men grab hold of such doctrines and misapply them with some of their own interpretations that these doctrines get misunderstood, and too often, even corrupted.

And most of the objections to Predestination that I have heard people make, seem most often to have to do with their unrelenting need to maintain their own status of having a "free will", often holding onto a doctrine that is not in these scriptures, a doctrine that insists that God would never "violate" man's "free will".

Folks, God is not required to seek your or my counsel or permission before He makes His plans and then carries them out. He is God and He is sovereign over all His creation. And to insist that He seek our permission in matters borders on making us to be the ones who are sovereign.

I personally don't understand such humanistic rationale. God is far more trustworthy to make right and good decisions than I am. And praise the Lord that He is.

Predestination simply states that God can and does have a plan for each of our lives. And He foreordains how those plans are to take place. And part of His plan includes predetermining the life and the eternity of those whom He chooses.

But why is the “Doctrine of Predestination” important to our study of these scriptures before us today? It is because these words that we have been reading here in Luke chapter 1 are filled with exactly that, God making choices in the lives of men and women, irrespective of their own personal plans, and then carrying out those plans to completion.

God did not first seek the counsel and permission of Zachariah, Elizabeth or Mary. And neither would He seek permission from John the Baptist before bringing him into this world and then sending him out to “prepare the way” of the Lord Jesus. But of His own “will” and purposes, God ordained and carried forward all of the things that were taking place. And all of these things began long before either of these babies were conceived within the wombs of their mothers, and long even before the foundations of the earth were laid.

Here, in clear and plain language, we see that God, of His own will, inserted His hand into the lives of Zachariah, Elizabeth and Mary and foreordained each of these events to take place. He chose Elizabeth and Mary to bear children. He chose Mary to bear Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world. And He chose Elizabeth to bear the great prophet, John the Baptist, a prophet who would go out ahead of Jesus and prepare the hearts of men and women to receive the salvation that Jesus would give to them.

God brought John the Baptist onto this earth to carry out a very special mission. Here in verse 76, Zachariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied about John’s exact calling saying,

⁷⁶ “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, ⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; ⁷⁹ To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79)

And John would do exactly that. Later on, after John grew up and began to preach, regarding the Lord Jesus, it was said of John in Mark chapter 1,

² As it is written in Isaiah the Prophet, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. ³ "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'"

⁴John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:2-7)

These words are so very clear. John's calling was foreordained long before John was ever born, to go out ahead of Jesus preaching a message of repentance for the remission of sins. And he was to baptize the people as a symbol of the washing away of their sins.

With that preparation, the hearts of the people were readied for the "gospel of salvation" that Jesus would preach to them. And as Jesus would save them, He would baptize each of them with the "Holy Spirit and with fire."

Folks, I don't know what most of you have studied and believed in the past about such matters as these, of God foreordaining the steps of men and women and even the predestination of their eternal souls, but it is clear from these words here in Luke chapter 1 that God makes plans for men and women's lives, and He carries His plans out to completion.

As those words in Ephesians 1, and in Romans 8, that I read to us a few moments ago tell us, God "knew" us before the foundations of the world, a "foreknowledge" that was more than just "knowing". It was a kind of "foreknowledge" that had within it a deep and "everlasting eternal love". And from those very first moments before time began, God had a plan for each of us, a plan that He would orchestrate and carry forward from the moments of our conception and birth, on until we joined Him in the everlasting glories of heaven.

Those promises again, beginning in verse 29 of Romans 8.

²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

And we can also see God's plan being carried out in the life of John the Baptist. Here in Luke 1 and in Mark 1, and in other portions of these Gospels, we can clearly see that before John the Baptist was even born, God had foreordained the steps of His life, here at the beginning, and then all the way through to the end, his conception, his birth, his life and yes, even his death, and on into eternity. Nothing was left for anyone to alter or to change.

And note here that even his name, John, was part of the plan. God kept every minute detail of John's life under His own control, even his name.

Now why God insisted upon naming him John, I'm not altogether sure. But just as Jesus would do later in renaming His disciples, I believe that God simply wanted to remove all of the vestiges of John's self-life from him right from the beginning.

A name carries with it a history of family and of self. And God wants His children to be unique to His calling.

And from these scriptures, we can clearly see that John remained faithful to his "name" and to his calling. From all that we will read later about John's ministry, he did all that God foreordained for him to do. Jesus Himself would later compliment John by saying of him that "there was no greater man, born of woman than John the Baptist".

And I think it exciting to see how here even in the earliest moments of John's existence, God was at work within his soul. While he was still within his mother's womb, John "leaped with joy" as the "yet to be born Jesus" entered the room.

You and I have been so indoctrinated with the worldly idea that unborn babies are nothing more than fetuses, "blobs of tissue" that are unable to know, see, or feel the real world. And because of that, we can feel comfortable as we show no mercy and slaughter them with abortions.

But again, as we can clearly read here in these words, while still in his mother's womb, John recognized the presence of Jesus, the "King of Glory", and he "leaped with joy".

No, you and I might not understand it all, but why should that matter. Even in the womb, John rejoiced at the presence of his Lord.

And John's rejoicing would not end there. He would rejoice more and more as he would grow up and go about the ministry God had called him to carry out. Later in John chapter 3, in talking to some of his own followers, John would say, ²⁷ . . . 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰He must increase, but I *must* decrease. (John 3:27-30)

John never stops "leaping for joy". Here in these words, John presents himself as the "friend of the Bridegroom", the "best man" in the wedding. And John tells his followers that as the friend of the Bridegroom, he "rejoices greatly", "leaps with joy" as he hears the voice of the Bridegroom.

A note here . . . God defined a very special role for John the Baptist. As was said in these words I just read, John would be the "friend of the Bridegroom". He was not the Christ and the bride would never belong to him, but would ever and only belong to Christ, the Bridegroom. As "friends of the Bridegroom" you and I must never be found guilty of seeking the affections of the bride for ourselves, but must always turn the affections of the bride back to Jesus, the Bridegroom. It must be your and my earnest desire that the bride would always "leap for joy" at the presence of Jesus.

Too often, in today's church organizations, many of the church leaders have their own personal "following", people flocking to see and to hear the words of their preacher. That has a good side to it, but it also has a very wrong side to it. It is only good if those people are gathering to hear about the Lord Jesus, and Him alone. Any other motive is wrong.

Before we close out our time here today, let's consider again why God gives us a glimpse into the details of these private conversations of these dear servants, Zachariah, Elizabeth and Mary? I believe that it is because God wants you and

me to know that He was at work in every minute detail of this special event that was taking place in their lives. Nothing was left to chance or to the will of men.

Why is that so important? It is because God wants us to know with a certainty that He not only created and set this world into motion, He also inserts His hand into its daily workings and He sustains and controls all that takes place within it.

Does He still allow our "free will" to intermingle into all of those matters that He is foreordaining for us? Yes, He does! The Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us that God is the "First Cause" of all that takes place, but that He does not do away with "second causes", people's responses, even yours and mine.

Our "free will" can and does change the direction of some of God's plans for us, but only to the extent that He deems good for us. Otherwise, God's plans and His purposes will stand, and they will be carried out to completion.

So, let me ask you. Are you willing to be as these dear servants of God, to be vessels of God's service, to yield up the plans and the purposes that you have ordained for your life, in favor of some alternate plan that God has for you?

Zachariah, Elizabeth and Mary were willing. And they would be greatly blessed because of their willingness. But folks, as we can now see, their blessing, their surrender, went far beyond their receiving a personal blessing for themselves. The entire world was blessed because of those dear servants.

Can you imagine that for yourself . . . that the surrender that you might make right now, might bless men and women for an eternity? That is the way that God will work, if we will only be willing to surrender ourselves up to His service.

Listen as we close . . . First from Jeremiah 29:11

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

And then from Philippians 1:6

confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

