

4. Rejoicing in God our Savior

October 11, 2015

The word 'rejoice' is not a common word that the 21st century people use often. I don't think that you've used this word in last 24 hours. I would even venture to extend it to for the entire last week. The Americans would use the word 'happy' for this.

But in the Bible the word 'rejoice' appears 238 times. In the Book of Psalms there are 60 occurrences. The Book of Luke leads all the other NT Books, when it comes to the appearance of the word 'rejoice' by showing up 11 times. Chapter 1 alone contains 4 times. The Greek word of 'rejoice' is "agalliao." It means "be exceeding glad."

What would cause a person to rejoice? Winning the grand prize of the Publishers Clearing House, \$5,000 a week for the rest of your life? Or getting our church built sometime soon? I really don't believe that getting more material things would give anyone the true definition of "rejoice." I believe that it has more in the emotional and spiritual dimensions.

Last Sunday we met two people who individually encountered Gabriel the angel from heaven. The aging priest named Zacharias asked the angel with skeptical unbelief requesting a sign, but Mary, the teenage bride-to-be asked her question in wonder-filled faith. The first one was chastised by becoming a mute until the baby was born, the second one would rejoice what the Lord was going to do in her life.

A. ELIZABETH AND HER BABY JOHN REJOICING

Luke 1:39-45 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Elizabeth knew that she herself carries the forerunner of the Messiah, but where is Christ the Messiah? The answer is made clear the moment she hears Mary's greetings. At the sound of Mary's voice, Elizabeth's baby leaps in her womb, as if to say, "He is here!" Then, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and rejoiced.

The one word that filled her lips was "blessed." Note that she did NOT say that Mary was blessed "above" women, but rather "among" women, and certainly this is true. Keep what I just said in your mind, because we are going to come back for this.

Let's return to v41. This was probably the time when unborn baby John was filled with the Spirit as the angel had promised in v15.

Luke 1:15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

Even before his birth, John rejoiced in Jesus Christ, just as he did during his earthly ministry. As the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist would have the great privilege of introducing the Messiah to the Jewish nation.

Before we move on, I must talk about the people who are for abortion. If you are a born-again Christian, you cannot and you should not possibly agree with or vote for the people who are for abortion. I know the exceptions, such as rape, incest, when the mother's life is in danger. But the majority of the cases of abortions in America do not fall into those categories. The majority of the reasons for abortion are inconvenience and no responsibility. In other words, the consequences of their actions get in their way and the consequences happen to be the lives of the innocent babies whom they don't want.

Oh, I know what they insist – "It is the woman's right." No, it is the baby's life and survival. The same people who are willing to kill those babies would do anything to protect whales and pygmy owls. These are the people who are against capital punishment of the death row inmates who murdered others. I just don't understand their logic and it is flat out wrong according to God's Word.

B. MARY REJOICING

Luke 1:46-56 And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

This song often called "the Magnificat". It resembles Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, but it also has at least 12 other indirect references to the OT. This means that Mary was a woman who studied God's Word deeply. It was in her heart, and came out through her song. It is no wonder why angel Gabriel declared that she was a highly favored one.

Mary's song shows the futility of trusting in ourselves, in political power, or in riches. Mary's trust has been in God, and it has been rewarded.

I asked you to underline v47 "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior". This means Mary knew she also needed a Savior for herself.

Before we go any further, we must visit five points declared by Roman Catholic even though they contradict with the Scripture:

1) Mary as Mediatrix

This belief asserts that Mary mediates the salvation Christ won for us on the Cross and that one of God's graces come to us except through Mary. They believe that Christ's incarnation and the redemption of humanity depended on Mary's agreement with God's plan. In other words, without Mary's agreement to bear Jesus, we would have no Jesus, no salvation and no grace. Wrong, totally wrong.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus

2) The Immaculate Conception

This is the belief that Mary herself was conceived without original sin. They insist that Mary had the perfect grace from the time she was conceived. Mary was a sinner like any other human.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

3) Perpetual Virginity

This is the belief that Mary remained a virgin throughout all of her life. They claimed that she had taken a vow of lifelong celibacy and would never know a man. Another wrong doctrine.

Mark 6:3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him.

4) The Assumption

This is the belief that Mary was taken bodily from earth to heaven so she wouldn't have to endure the decay in the grave. However, this belief depends on traditional stories. There is no biblical basis for this assumption doctrine, none whatsoever.

5) Mary as a Co-Redeemer with Jesus Christ

Not all Catholic people, a good portion of Catholics make statues of Jesus Christ on the cross one side and put Mary on the other side of the same cross to make her to be a Co-Redeemer with Jesus Christ. Again, there is absolutely no biblical basis for this, either.

I am not saying that all the Roman Catholic doctrines or believers are wrong. There are many born-again believers in Catholic realm. In Catholicism, they know better not to challenge the deity of Jesus Christ like some of the liberal Protestant groups dare to do.

However, Catholic idea of worshiping the Virgin Mary or praying to her deifies Mary to the same level with Jesus. That is an idolatry and wrong. Some Protestant denominations have tended to go to the opposite extreme and practically ignore her. That's wrong, too.

Let me put it in this way: Here is a bowl. It is nothing special about it. But if I put something special, a bowl full of delicious ice cream in it, it becomes special. Mary was a godly young woman in Israel whom God chose to be the mother of Jesus to bring Him to the world, to nurture Him, and to raise Him. Her job stopped there. Virgin Mary should be neither exalted nor discounted, but held in respect as a model of devotion, obedience and faith.

C. THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke 1:57-66 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. 58 When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. 59 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. 60 His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." 61 But they said to her, "There is no one

among your relatives who is called by this name." 62 So they made signs to his father--what he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. 65 Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. 66 And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

We can not imagine how much the people around Zacharias and Elizabeth were excited about the new arrival of this child whose birth was pronounced by an angel. They probably thought he would be the one who set Israel free from the iron fists of Rome. But mom and dad knew better.

Traditionally, a first born baby boy would be named after his father or someone else in the family. So the relatives and neighbors were shocked when Elizabeth insisted on the name John and Zacharias confirmed it.

I think that it is rather humorous for God to include v62. Zacharias might be a mute because of his unbelief, but he was not a deaf. He could hear their conversation with Elizabeth very well. But they made signs to him to ask a question about the name of the child. When I came to the United States in 1981, some Americans talked to me real loud. Because I couldn't speak English fluently, they thought I was a deaf, too.

John the Baptist was "prophet of the Highest", introducing to Israel "the Son of the Highest" who was conceived in Mary's womb by "the power of the Highest".

D. ZACHARIAS REJOICING

Luke 1:67-80 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 68 "Blessed is 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, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. 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." 80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Zacharias had nine long months to think about God's power and his own lack of faith. When he finally got the chance to say something, he used the opportunity to praise the Lord as Elizabeth and Mary had done.

Any period of discipline, whether in a nation or an individual, can seem never-ending. Yet, as Zacharias models for us, when discipline ends, God's praise should fill our mouths.

Are you enduring God's discipline lately? Perhaps Zacharias' example can guide you.

1) Don't press God to end your discipline.

It is a waste of time. He is not going to be pushed around by you or me. The discipline only continues.

2) Don't blame others for the discipline you are receiving from the Lord.

Your repentance doesn't start until you take full responsibility of your action. Without that genuine repentance you will not be restored. The discipline only continues.

3) When it is time to be restored, draw attention away from yourself, rather acknowledge the Lord and His loving plan for you.

We know this is truly Spirit-inspired prophecy because the focus of his prophecy is the unborn Jesus, not Zacharias' own newborn son John. Zacharias doesn't even know Jesus yet, but he praises Him, he loves Him, and he is passionate about Jesus. We know so much more about Jesus than Zacharias did, so what can excuse the coldness of our hearts?

E. APPLICATIONS

1) We can truly rejoice in God our Savior in spite of any difficult circumstance, if we put our trust in him and be obedient to His Word.

2) There is only God who redeemed us from eternal damnation with His own sacrifice. That is Jesus, no one else. He alone deserves our worship and adoration.

3) Any period of discipline, whether in a nation or an individual, can seem never-ending. But when discipline ends, God's praise should fill our mouths and our hearts.