Luke - Commentaries by John Thomas Mawson

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, "Praising and Blessing God"

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“Behold thou shalt be dumb and not able to speak ... because thou believest not my words (Luke 1:20).

“And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:22, 53).

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The Gospel of Luke commences with a dumb priest in the temple, and closes with a company of men in that same place “praising and blessing God”: proof to us of some great occurrence between the two.

Now if any man on earth ought to have praised God it was Zacharias, for he was a priest, and in the temple of God. Moreover the angel of God had just announced to him most blessed things; but there was no response in his heart to the glad tidings from God: he met them with rank unbelief. As a consequence the astonished Gabriel pronounced God’s sentence upon him, and his dumb lips became the outward sign of his inward and spiritual state of unbelief; and this condition was typical of that in which all men are by nature.

It was not for this that man was created, for it is written that whoso offereth praise glorifieth God: God created man for His glory — a well-tuned instrument — to respond to the touch of His infinite goodness with intelligent and joyous thanksgiving. But the devil spoiled God’s ‘handiwork by introducing distrust of God into the heart of man; and the chord was lost, and the music died out, and instead of songs of praise greeting God’s advent in the garden, Adam — a fallen man, a sinner against God, cowered away in dumb fear from the One who loved and had lost him.

But God cannot be baffled, nor His purpose thwarted, and the apparent triumph of the devil only yielded the opportunity for the establishment of the praise of men upon a secure and eternal basis.

This basis is found in Christ. He came to be about His Father’s business (ch. 2:49): this business was to call sinners to repentance (ch. 5:32), to seek and save that which was lost (ch. 19:10), “to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (24:46, 47). He came to destroy the works of the devil, and to deliver men from his power and bring them to God, so that faith might take the place of unbelief; and love supersede enmity, and worship and thanksgiving break forth from hearts and lips, that erst were dumb.

It is intensely interesting and blessed to see then that when He was “carried up into heaven,” His mission to earth completed, there was left behind in this world of sin, and unbelief; and sorrow, and death, a company of men who had been put into tune with heaven, and whose hearts vibrated with responsive praise to that boundless love which had been expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ: they were filled with great joy, and were continually... praising and blessing God.” It will be readily admitted that theirs was a most blessed and desirable condition: and yet this is the normal Christian condition, and where it is absent in true believers there is some cause. But there are certain things which are necessary to it, and these are clearly indicated for us in this closing chapter of the gospel.

The Word of God

The two disciples traveling to Emmaus had no song, for sad men do not sing (ver. 17). They had placed their hopes in Christ as the glorious immediate Redeemer of Israel, but instead of realizing these hopes they had seen Him rejected by the Jews and “crucified in weakness;” and these walkers according to the light of their eyes were returning to their own homes gloomy and disappointed. There was no need for their despondency for that day was the most glorious in all the annals of time: and if the stars of the morning sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy when the earth’s foundations were laid, how much more cause for joy was there on this day in which was manifestly established a new creation which can never be spoiled by sin and death! But the Lord laid bare the cause of their gloom when He said, “ O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken “(ver. 25), and it was necessary for Him to begin at” Moses and all the prophets,” and expound unto them “in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (ver. 27).

Unbelief lay at the root of their sadness: their own thoughts, and perhaps the traditions of men, had a larger place in their minds than all that the prophets have spoken. Hence they did not understand the thoughts and ways of God.

It is important to note the way that the Lord took to lead them out of the darkness into which unbelief had carried them. He did not straightway reveal Himself to them, as we might have expected Him to do; but He threw them back upon the Scriptures. As another has said, “He led them into the infallible Word of God, which discloses to us the divine counsels of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, that their faith might rest on the testimony of God in the written Word.”

They had neglected to heed all the Scriptures, and so they had missed the precious treasure that the Scriptures contained, the truth as to Himself.

Who but God could have revealed beforehand those sufferings and that glory, and with what reverent joy we who know Christ can turn to the Holy Writings, knowing them to be God-breathed, to find them like unto a golden casket which when opened reveals priceless gems, which glow and scintillate before the astonished eye! It was thus with these two troubled disciples, for as they saw and heard things concerning

Himself, their sadness and disappointment fled, and their hearts glowed with hope, and faith, and love.

The first essential to fullness of joy is to believe all that God hath spoken, to accept His word in simple and unquestioning faith; we shall never understand it, or Him, until we do this; for it is “through faith we understand” (Heb. 11:3), and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

This ministry of Christ is continued to us by the Holy Spirit come down from above, for He has come to take of the things that are Christ’s and show them to us; but this is not apart from the Scriptures: they are indispensable to our understanding the ways of God in Christ.

The Risen Christ

But the value of the Scriptures is that they turn the thought and eye to Christ. We are therein taught the glory of His shame; for more glorious was He, thorn — crowned and rejected, than if He had been borne to the throne of David amid the acclamations of the multitude of Israel. Upon the dark background of that unmeasured and unrelieved sorrow there shone the glory of His moral perfection. Men despised Him for what they judged to be weakness, when as a lamb He was led to the slaughter, but then there shone forth that infinite meekness, absolute subjection to the will of God, and the strength of a love that no terrors could daunt. Moreover, it was then that the wisdom, and might, and love of God were displayed: that cross was the triumph of the divine heart, and there in that shamed and crucified MAN we see the glory and wisdom of God’s eternal plan. Throughout the eternal ages that cross will be our grandest and most profound contemplation.

But the disciples who had lost Him for awhile (for they could not follow Him into that mystery of darkness and sorrow when surged around Him the hatred of men and devils, and when His soul was made an offering for sin) had found Him again: He was with them in all the value of His sacrifice and the power of His resurrection. He was with them as the Savior who had died for them (verse 40); the Center to gather them (verse 36); the Lord to command them (verses 46-49); and the great High Priest to sustain them in the blessing He had secured for them (verse 50).

With hands uplifted in blessing He was parted from them: they knew that He had gone to the exaltation of God’s throne, they knew that that place was the only one worthy to receive Him, it was His due: infinite perfection had received just recognition, and in the sense of this their hearts were filled with exultant joy and praise.

We have the same blessed triumphant Savior, Center, Lord, and Priest, the One in whose mighty hand all the purposes and promises of God are held securely, so that not one of them will fail of fulfillment. He is given to us to be the object of our love, and our Lord; to dispossess every idol: and, as in all things He is pre-eminent, we too shall worship Him, and be filled with great joy, praising and blessing God.

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, Peace: As Presented in the Gospel of Luke

J. C. Trench

As Presented in the Gospel of Luke

Peace Prophesied

“Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord... to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:76-79).

It was thus that Zacharias, being filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke of his infant son John, and how great and wonderful are the blessings which he prophesied should come to men by the advent into the world of the Lord Jesus Christ; blessings having the TENDER MERCY OF OUR GOD as their cause.

These blessings are: —

1st. LIGHT for those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.

2nd. REMISSION OF SINS.

3rd. THE KNOWLEDGE OF SALVATION, and these three leading up to what cannot be known without them.

4th. THE WAY OF PEACE.

Have we each come to know that we are the objects of God’s tender mercy? Has light burst into our souls as the spring of day? Do we know that our sins are all forgiven? and have we got our souls saved, with the certain knowledge of it? If so, we have been guided into the way of peace! What a deliverance is ours if an answer in the affirmative can be given to these questions! A deliverance from sins, and darkness, death, and its shadow! A deliverance into light, pardon, salvation, and peace! Could anything be more blessed than to be assured of the possession of all these things, in the Lord Jesus Christ? It was John’s mission to announce the advent of the Lord Jesus as the Bringer of these blessings to men.

Peace Proposed

Luke 2:1-20

All the world was set in motion by a decree of Augustus requiring that a census should be taken, and all went to be enrolled in the census scroll — everyone to his own city. The imperial Caesar little thought that his proud decree was to bring about the fulfillment of God’s word by His prophet, but so it was, for Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem according to Micah 5:2. And to Bethlehem this decree required that His virgin mother must go.

“And she (Mary) brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

That despised and unnoticed Babe was the Eternal Son of the Father — the Son of God — the Creator, Upholder and Heir of all things — God manifested in flesh — Image of the invisible God — yea, God over all blessed forever! The great world moved on its careless way, nor reckoned it what a marvel had come to pass before its eyes. God come down to men, and to be a Man to reach them!

To the humble shepherds on the hillsides of Judea, keeping watch over their flocks by night, appeared the Angel of the Lord; the Lord’s glory shone about them and the angel announced “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord,” and scarcely were these words spoken when suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of angels praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good pleasure in men.” (Chapter 2:14, N.T.).

Glory is ascribed to God in the highest, and PEACE is announced for the earth in connection with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this Peace proposed to earth was of necessity conditional upon the acceptance and hearty reception by the earth of the Person who brought it, and who alone could make it good.

It is of the last importance that this great fact should be clearly perceived, for as every Christmas comes round, the difficulty in men’s minds, and I may add in the minds of many Christians too, recurs, namely, how is it that the promise or announcement of the angels has not yet been fulfilled?

During a great war a striking leading article appeared in “The Times” which commenced “How hollow the promise of the angels, Peace on Earth’ sounds amidst the rattle of musketry and the roar of artillery, with their attendant bloodshed, slaughter, and desolation!” and today the great thought of the European powers is to be ready at a moment’s notice for deadly strife. All the ingenuity of men is engaged in the production of mighty engines of destruction, and nations groaning beneath taxation for the maintenance of armies and navies might well ask how this state of things is to be reconciled with Scripture.

The answer is simple. “Peace on earth” depended on the earth’s acceptance of the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord, and lasting peace is impossible otherwise. Has He been received in this way by the world? Most assuredly not. There was “no room” for Him at the beginning, He had “not where to lay His head” through life, and at last, despised and rejected of men, He was betrayed by the Jew, and taken by the Gentile to the chorus shouted by the multitude, “Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” and accordingly — scourged, smitten, spit upon, mocked, stripped, and crowned with thorns, He was crucified and slain! In short, “His life was taken from the earth,” and with Him all hopes of peace for earth have been taken too; until He comes again in judgment, sweeps the scene of all iniquity, and, after crushing His foes, establishes peace with righteousness as its basis. This we must understand, or the “Times” difficulty will be ours.

Peace PossessedLuke 2:25-32

But the fact remains, that the peace which the world had refused can be had and enjoyed by every individual ready to receive the Lord as Savior. An instance of this is afforded in the same chapter. When the infant Jesus was brought by the parents into the temple, pious old Simeon was there, and seeing the Holy Babe, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation.”

Peace entered Simeon’s soul when he received God’s Salvation, that is, when he received Christ. So it will be with all who take the Lord Jesus as their Savior. In Him both salvation and peace are found. Neither is there salvation in any other.

Peace Pretended

Luke 11:14-22

In spite of the fact that the Jews received Him not, Jesus went about doing good amongst them, showing forth the gracious work of God in their midst, but the Pharisees attributed His miracles to the Devil. They said, “He casteth out demons through Beelzebub.” The answer to that blasphemy was simple. “If Satan cast out Satan, how could his kingdom stand?” The fact is, man was under the rule and power of Satan, and the Lord Jesus came to break Satan’s power and set his poor victims free. “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.”

From this we learn that there is a kind of peace which the Devil ministers to his dupes. For he is “the strong armed man” — the world is his “palace” — and unsaved sinners are his “goods.” His desire is to keep the sinner asleep by the administering of his opiates, such as drink, lust, pleasure, pride, riches, and even religion in one or other of its varied forms. The Lord Jesus came to give peace, but they blasphemed against Him, and then He plainly indicates that if they had peace it was of devilish derivation. A false peace, such as those who had said “Peace, peace when there is no peace.” The truth is that “The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

Peace Precluded (on Earth)

The manifest rejection of the Lord in Luke 11 will in some measure prepare us for the surprise in Luke 12:49-53, where there seems to be a flat contradiction of the announcement of the angel in Luke 2, “Peace on earth.” “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay: but rather division.”

This is startling, but it confirms what has been set forth, that the rejection of the Lord is wholly incompatible with the realization of peace on earth. Therefore, when His rejection came clearly into view, the Lord very plainly repudiates any idea of peace on earth being possible, and He here indicates that His coming to the earth would not result in peace, but in fire and division. For those who receive Him, there is indeed peace to be enjoyed, but this poor “earth” may look in vain for it until after judgment has cleared out of His kingdom “all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (Matt. 13:41), and “when [His] judgments are in the earth, then shall the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.”

Peace Perpetuated (in Heaven)Luke 19:37-44

“And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and to praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: PEACE IN HEAVEN, and glory in the highest.”

It was now no longer “peace on earth” but “peace in heaven.” And why this striking change? Because the Lord was going there after that He should have risen from the dead. Peace follows Him. Wherever He is received, peace must be.

Peace PostponedLuke 19:41-44

“And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but NOW they are hid from thine eyes.... because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

Poor Jerusalem! The time of her visitation by the Prince of Peace had come, but she remained sullen and unapproachable. She did not know the time of her visitation, nor did she know the things that belonged to her peace. In this she was as the world at large to this hour! The tender heart of the blessed Lord was filled with grief as He looked down from the elevation of the Mount of Olives upon the guilty city, and He wept over it as He uttered this solemn and affecting plaint! and He added, “But now they are hid from thine eyes.”

May we not, however, put the emphasis on the word “Now”? and comfort our hearts with the contemplation of the fact that in a future day it will be different, and Jerusalem will not only know the Lord (whom she crucified) as her Lord and King, but from that then blessed spot will flow peace to the whole world?

Then, indeed shall she know “THE THINGS THAT BELONG UNTO THY PEACE.”

Peace ProclaimedLuke 24:36

Ere Jesus spoke the gladdening words “Peace be unto you” He made peace by the blood of His cross, He made atonement for sin by taking upon Himself the penalty of sin and meeting all the just claims of a holy God on account thereof. God, in consequence of this, has raised Him from the dead. He was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification, that being justified by faith we might have PEACE WITH GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ. So that what the world lost by the rejection of the Lord, the individual believer can have and enjoy by faith on the blessed Savior, who ascended into heaven, and is sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

To sum up, then, what has been before us as gleaned from the gospel of Luke:

PEACE

was prophesied by Zacharias,

was proposed by the angels,

was possessed by Simeon,

is pretended by Satan,

is precluded from earth during Christ’s rejection,

is perpetuated in heaven,

is postponed for Jerusalem until she shall receive the returning King,

is proclaimed to believers now that Christ has risen;

and it may be added is personified in heaven,

where peace is established, for

“HE IS OUR PEACE.”

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