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“ROBUST HOPE”
Luke 1:68-75

Hope. Sometimes, robust hope seems like a luxury reserved for the young, the strong, and the naïve.

The young can afford to hope. They’ve got their whole lives ahead of them. The world is opening up to them, fresh and new and filled with possibility.

The strong are able to plow through obstacles and power through disappointments. Their hope is guaranteed by their impressive abilities and bountiful resources.

And the naïve? They wear blinders. In the storm, they see only the rainbow. In deepest darkness, they always expect the light. They can hardly help but hope!

? But is there full-bodied hope for us when we do not fit any of those profiles?

- {Lk 1:7} Zechariah and Elizabeth are not young, they are **“both well advanced in years.”** Their lives are mostly behind them. The freshness and newness and possibility have long since faded.

Neither are they strong. He is just another priest in defeated Israel serving a deity who has not spoken in 400 years. She is a woman, so her rights are strictly limited and she has no resources of her own.

- {Lk 1:7} Nor is this couple naïve. Their fondest dreams were dashed decades ago, for they have never been **“able to conceive”** a child. In their culture this is the most

harrowing grief, the bitterest disappointment, and a humiliating badge of social dishonor.

Robust hope seems like a luxury reserved for the young, the strong, and the naïve. Zechariah and Elizabeth are none of those things.

The bit of hope to which they cling is a feeble, withered thing. It lies buried under layers of desolation and resignation.

- This is evident in the dialogue in Luke 1:13-20. Zechariah is on duty at the temple. Suddenly, the angel Gabriel appears with exceedingly **“good news”**: **“your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John”!**

John **“will be a joy and delight,” “great in the sight of the Lord.” “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”** He will draw many **“back to the Lord.” “He will go on before the [Messiah] ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**

Is Zechariah filled with elation? Does he break forth into joyful praise? No.

Does Zechariah faint with amazement? Is he stunned into silence? No.

Instead, he asks, **“How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”**

That is his knee-jerk reaction to the great news spoken by one who **“[stands] in the presence of”** Almighty God! **“How can I be sure of this?”**

Surely, we would respond differently! Our words would be more *spiritual*, wouldn’t they? Or would they?

Is Zechariah's doubt so hard to understand? His is the voice of chronic disappointment, of shrinking dreams, of hopes raised only to crash down again and again.

Speaking for myself, hope has generally come easily; but there have been moments, days, seasons even, when it appeared illusory. In recent months, my hope has been tested by bladder cancer.

? Have you ever been tempted to abandon hope? Have you ever teetered on the brink of despair? Have you ever strained your eyes and seen nothing but gloom?

{Ro 15:13; 5:5} Take heart! The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is **"the God of hope"**: true hope, substantial hope, hope that **"does not put us to shame,"** does not expose us as fools for believing it.

□ Please turn with me to Luke 1:67-75 [page 1042 in the pew Bible]. Elizabeth has just given birth to John. **"Filled with the Holy Spirit,"** Zechariah "[prophesies]":

⁶⁸ **"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people
and redeemed them.**

⁶⁹ **He has raised up a horn [a mighty king] of
salvation for us**

⁷⁰ **in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets
of long ago),**

⁷¹ **salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us –**

⁷² **to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,**

⁷³ **the oath he swore to our father
Abraham:**

⁷⁴ **to rescue us from the hand of our
enemies,**

**and to enable us to serve him
without fear**

⁷⁵ **in holiness and righteousness before
him all our days.**

When we first met Zechariah, he was a dried up old man. Now he is bursting with robust hope.

Contrary to the laws of nature, he has become a father. It is a miracle! Of course, he is buoyant.

Yet that is merely the icing on the cake! Zechariah's essential hope is not centered in John; it is a response to the LORD's mighty acts of salvation.

Hence, this hope is not just for him and Elizabeth. It is for all the LORD's people.

? What is this hope? How can we share it?

☆ First, this life-transforming **hope is** Emmanuel: literally **'God with us,'** and by extension God for us.

■ Zechariah praises **"the Lord, the God of Israel"** (verse 68) **"because he has come to his people and redeemed them."**

{Is 40:30} Our hope is not in youthfulness. **"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;"** in any case, no one remains young forever.

Our hope is not in human strength. Many trust in physical vigor, weapons, wealth, technology, expertise, tradition, and wisdom, but all of that fails in the end.

{Ezek 13:10; Jer 8:11} Our hope is not in naivete.

Everyone who feels secure hiding behind **“a flimsy wall,”** who says **“‘Peace, peace’ ... when there is no peace,”** who rejects truth because it is inconvenient, is a fool.

Here’s where it gets really interesting, and maybe a little surprising.

- Robust hope does not depend on our goodness.

Luke states that Zechariah and Elizabeth are **“both ... righteous in the sight of God”** (1:6). They have admirable character – but their hope is on its last legs.

- Nor does robust hope depend on our obedience to God. This couple **“[observes] all [his] commands and decrees blamelessly”** (verse 6) – yet their hope has all but evaporated.

{Php 2:6; Jn 11, 14} Real hope, vigorous hope, transforming hope that overcomes age, weakness, and head-on encounters with suffering and evil, is Emmanuel. It is the presence of the Son, **“Who, being in very nature God [was] made in human likeness.”** It is the **“the Word”** who **“was with God, and [who] was God,”** and forever is God, making his **“dwelling among us.”**

- ☆ Second, this hope is more extravagant and expansive than we imagine.

When Zechariah uses the phrases: **“his people,” “for us,” “our enemies,” “our ancestors,” “our father,” “rescue us,” “enable us,”** and **“all our days”** he means Israel. He is talking about people who were born to Jewish mothers, and the tiny handful of former pagans who have converted to Judaism.

The Holy Spirit gives Zechariah a glimpse of Messiah’s ministry, but his worldview narrows his vision. He expects Christ to conquer Rome, establish Israel as *the* one and only super-power, and initiate sweeping spiritual revival among the descendants of Abraham. Put bluntly, he is Israel’s Savior.

{Gal 3:28; Lk 5:31; Eph 2:15} The reality is so much greater! Robust hope is not limited to Israel, for in Christ **“There is neither Jew nor Gentile.”** It is not confined to a privileged demographic, for in Christ **“There is ... neither slave nor free, neither male nor female.”** It is not held in reserve for the righteous, since Jesus did **“not come to call [them], but sinners.”** It is not set aside for those who **“[observe] ... the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly,”** for Christ **“[set] aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.”** God offers his hope to everyone, freely, without exception.

As a corollary, robust hope does not consist of taking control of the nation, vanquishing our enemies, and compelling morality. No! It is ‘God with us’ and for us.

- ☆ Third, this hope took on flesh at Christ’s First Advent, grows among us in the present, and will be fully realized at Christ’s Second Advent.

{Is 9:2} As for the First Advent: Jesus of Nazareth is THE embodiment of hope. Thus, **“The people walking in darkness / have seen a great light.”**

{Eph 2:22} As for the present: Messiah is not here. He ascended into Heaven 40 days after his resurrection. Yet **“in him we are ... [becoming] a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”** ‘God [is] with us’ and for us in and through the followers of Christ.

{Rev 19:16} As for the 2nd Advent: Jesus *is* **“a horn of salvation,”** the **“KING OF KINGS”**; but many do not recognize his Lordship. Even now he **“[rescues] us from”** sin, death, and the devil; yet we are frequently defeated. He constantly **“[enables] us to serve him ... in holiness and righteousness,”** yet we often do not.

{Php 2:10; Rev 11:15; I Jn 3:2} But when Christ comes again **“every knee [will] bow,”** **“the kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord ... and he will reign forever and ever,”** and **“we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”**

If you are young, strong, or naïve, enjoy it while you can! But hold on loosely to the hope those qualities provide. And if you aren’t – do not despair!

If you are a good person and you keep biblical law blamelessly, keep it up; but don’t hope in yourself! If you aren’t those things – don’t give up!

✎ Robust hope, hope that does not let us down, is this, and only this: Emmanuel, God with us and God for us. This hope is more expansive than we imagine. And it will be fully realized when Jesus comes in glory!