**Luke 1:68-75 68Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited us and prepared redemption for his people. 69He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets. 71He raised up salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, 72in order to show mercy to our fathers by remembering his holy covenant, 73the oath which he swore to Abraham our father, 74to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies, so that we are able to serve him without fear, 75in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**

What Child Is This? He Turns Slaves into Sons

I ask you this morning: what is it like to lose your voice? Have you ever had that happen to you? You wake up in the morning and you can’t speak or can only speak with great difficulty. I don’t like it. Especially since part of what I do includes needing to talk. I just have to. It’s an extreme hindrance to not be able to speak for even a day, nine months, or even from a whole life. You are a captive to your own thoughts in a way.

Not being able to speak is fearful. Fear inhibits us from trying helpful things. Fear of the future, which we call worry, wastes away the present. Fear of disappointment stifles hope. In a real way, fear is slavery to your own thoughts.

Maybe that’s why I didn’t believe the angel Gabriel when he told me my wife Elizabeth would have a son. We had tried for years. We had prayed. We had asked God over and over to give us a son, a daughter, a child. Year after year, our prayers seemed to reach God’s ear without recognition. It was as if we didn’t have any kind of voice. We had gotten our hopes up many times. But after so long, why get our hopes up only to face the fear of disappointment again?

I have begun to feel like an outsider. Worst still is fear lead us into evil’s arms as if we are good friends. Evil can put on a friendly face, but he is a cruel master. He aims only to hurt, harm, and torture you. He wants to control, order, and get you to do only what he wants you to do. Swallowing our fear and doing our best to battle evil leaves us helpless and hopeless. We are no match for evil. Just as a newborns cries are no match to bring warmth against freezing cold, we are not match against the cruel master who wields fear. Fear sees the truth that we can’t stand against the forces of evil or the prince of this world. Any words, we could speak seem like silence. No one listens to those without a voice just as no one listens to a slave because their voice doesn’t matter.

Here, dear friends, is the source of true fearlessness. See your real enemies and see how God treats you differently. The sin that your inborn nature craves wants to control you. It wants to take you away from your true Father in heaven. It wants you to not only doubt what God says but to question what he tells you and also to speak, live, and believe against it.

God wants us to believe whatever it is he tells us. Things like: We are all sinful. We can’t come to him on our own. We need help. He is the only source of hope because he is the only one who can set us fear. He is the only one who saves. He is the one in control. He works everything out for the good of those who love him. Nothing is impossible for him.

That’s how God drives out our doubts and takes away our fear and frees us from our slavery to evil. Not by our speaking, not even our speaking in prayer. Rather, by his speaking in his Word. He speaks his truth, the truth, so that we listen and take it to heart. That’s how throughout the ages he replaces doubt with faith and fear with joy, loss with fullness. He speaks his promises and keeps them.

In fact, our God has done way more than just speak. He not only spoke his truth but he put it into a solemn promise, sealed with blood, the blood of his own Son. He took an oath on himself. His word alone is unbreakable, but he wanted people to be so sure that he would keep his promise that he added an oath. He doesn’t forget us. He doesn’t shun us. He doesn’t ignore us. He doesn’t want to destroy us.

Let me tell you, God wants his Word to be taken seriously. And from personal experience let me share how God brought that home for me. It was an answer to that prayer that Elizabeth and I made over and over. I had long ago started to question if God would ever answer that prayer with any kind of yes. There were times when I thought that God owed us a child for being such faithful believers. Times I accused God of being unfair to me because he didn’t do what I wanted. I was such brat. I was such a sinner in my actions and thoughts towards God. The evil in me was trying to turn God into my slave even while I offered incense in the temple.

The purpose of this was to illustrate how all the prayers of those who believe faithfully in God rise like the smoke of the incense wafting up and up. While I offered that incense, I of course added my own petitions. I prayed for well-being, God’s blessings. I prayed that God would turn many hearts back to him. I prayed all my usually requests for family and friends. All the usual things. Then suddenly an angel appeared and announced to me that Elizabeth and I would have a son. He even told me he would be the one to go before the Savior and how we were to raise the boy.

Dumbfounded, God was giving me so many answers to so many prayers all at one time. More than one of my requests was being answer with a yes! You would think a mature believer like me would high-five the angel before tearing out of the temple to share the good news with everyone. I, instead, was dumb. God blessed me to physically mirror my dumbness by making me silent until John was born. God didn’t owe me that. He didn’t owe to give me a son or even my sinful voice back.

God doesn’t owe anything to any sinner. You may think he does. Bluntly, God doesn’t care about your opinion. He, the Creator of the universe has spoken. Because he’s also our Savior we can be certain what he has spoken is for our benefit, even when we can’t see or believe the benefit; like when he said I would have a son or when he told my voice. Maybe that’s what you need: time to stop speaking so that you listen instead.

God doesn’t owe sinners anything. Is that perhaps a truth you need to be reminded of this morning? Have you been pouring your heart out to God for something you think you really need – a companion, a better job, more energy, less pain, a house of your own – but it seems as if you might as well be speaking to a brick wall because God hasn’t answered? Oh, but he has. God has given you a Savior. He has freed you from your sin and made you one of his children again. Jesus has rescued you. The Holy Spirit has kindled faith in your heart. That changes everything.

That’s what God gives to you and me. Now that he has rescued us from the control of evil, he grants us the blessing to serving him. He enables us **serve him without fear,in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.** That’s a different way of living. Rather than slavishly living the terrors of loss and the feeling of God being unfair, we find delight in our Lord, who ransomed us to be his own. We serve him without fear, for we believe Jesus has washed us clean. Jesus has dressed us in his righteousness. Jesus presents us to his Father as his holy siblings. Because of Jesus, the Father welcomes you who believe. He accepts and receives you as his dear child. He lets you be close to him. That’s what he promised when you were reborn into his family and adopted through baptism.

Offer all your service to your Lord. All that you are. All that you do. All that you are going through. Offer it without fear in holiness and righteousness that flows from faith in Jesus. Such faith is confident that your heavenly Father welcomes you and loves you. This confidence doesn’t come because God owes you or because he’s given you what you want. Faith only looks to Jesus. That’s where the confidence comes from, from Jesus.

Yes, that one God promised to send right after he sent me my son has come. Jesus has come as promised. He has rescued us from sin so that we now serve him without fear. I’m glad he gave me back my voice I was using sinfully to doubt him by expressing my fear. May he fill that voice and all the rest he has made me to praise him. Amen.

Points to consider by yourself or with a small group:

* Contrast the differences between being a slave and being a son.
* How is the service of a son better than the service of a slave?
* What blessings do you feel that God owes to you?
* Explain how God taking a blessing away from your can serve as a blessing.