

## Visions and Revelations

### Message 3: The One Who Prepared the Way for the Lord of Life

*Note: This is a lightly edited transcript meant to aid saints in personal and small group fellowship and pursuing.*

Now, we come to the third week. I'm very happy to have this chance to properly share something with you. Every Lord's day is about thirty minutes, so that you can hear a very concrete message. Why is it only thirty minutes? Because there are very little illustrations and almost no stories. So the whole thing is kind of concrete. It's very much like a kernel. So with this, brothers I strongly advise you to not just listen to the messages, but to spend time with the brothers through the website so that you can review it and go over it together. Then, I hope the full-timers can add in the abstracts and different items for us to fellowship together, to pray together, and to pursue together. So in a way, this one, two or three month period can actually become a blessing to the church life. It can bring us out of the principle of what we do week after week: coming to the meeting and going home, making no difference in our life. Rather, we may desire to have a new beginning before the Lord through this fellowship.

Last meeting we shared that there are seven dispensations. The first five are in the Old Testament, concluding with the Dispensation of Law. The New Testament reveals two dispensations, and of these two, the most crucial is the Age of Grace. The Lord Jesus Christ is gracious, and in His grace we have Him. In His grace we have Him abiding in us. In His grace we can be one with Him. In His grace we can grow in Him. In His grace we can live by Him and with Him. In His grace we can enjoy Him and partake of Him. In His grace, we are short of nothing because we have the bountiful supply of the Spirit, who is just Christ Himself. We should be happy that we are in this new covenant.

But, you see, because of man's thought — not just two thousand years ago with the thought of the Jews, but even today — we are still fighting and struggling between the Old Covenant and the New; between the Age of Law and the Age of Grace. For this change, the Bible gives us at least five people with clear visions to show us different aspects so that we can be ready to come to and to participate in the New Covenant Age — that is, the Age of Grace.

The first person was Joseph, who we covered two weeks ago. Now, beginning this morning, we will begin to cover the other four people. First, the vision which God showed to Zechariah, who was a perfect Jew and a faithful priest. Second, the vision which brings in the reality, which was given to Mary, and which shows no matter what the age is or how corrupt the age can be, there's always some who are very pure before the Lord and ready to do anything, to pay any price, for the Lord's sake. Mary's purity and faithfulness caused her to be able to beget Jesus, the substance of the universe. Third, there's a group of men who are unknown to everybody, who

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never even had a thought they would be remembered for anything. They're just common, yet they are very pure and faithful, so they tend the flock at night and the Lord appeared to them.

The fourth is the most interesting: there are some wise men. The Bible calls them men of wisdom; you can also say they have philosophical training, or that they pursue the meaning of human life. They are the real pursuers, trying to understand what is going on with human life. These wise men saw the star which took them on more than a year's journey until they found the baby boy. Don't look down at this story. It is not just a story of three wise men who came with three offerings, eventually departed and, by the visions and revelations the Lord had given them, returned without seeing Herod. No—actually, it typifies and indicates that the Savior—Jesus—is ready not just for the Jews, but for all tribes, for all races, for all nations, and for all the God-created people on this Earth. The whole globe is the site for receiving the salvation of Jesus Christ. So there's advancement of that star. That star becomes us, and we are the stars with different lights, and that star advanced. The Lord says, "in my hand I hold seven stars which are the seven messengers." In other words, the stars are the serving ones, the life-giving ones, the helping ones, those who can minister life. These are the ones held by the Lord. Remember what Peter said: you wait until the day dawns, the morning star appears in your heart (2 Pet. 1:19). The morning star is the star which turns darkness into day, and which tells you, "the day is coming." You see a clear picture from the wise men. It is not as simple as we say—three wise men saw the star, came to offer three things, then they left and it's over. No; it is not over. It is an indication of how rich the New Covenant is. With the New Covenant age—the Age of Grace—the grace is not only given to Jews; the grace is also given to Gentiles. It is given not only to Gentiles nearby; even the Gentiles far away need to trace the star, to track the star, and to follow the star for close to two years. To everyone on this earth, no matter how remote you are, the Lord says, "My grace is for you".

Now when you consider these, aren't they extremely interesting and extremely meaningful? There's the vision with Zechariah. There's the vision with Mary. There's the vision to the shepherds. There's the vision, through a star, shown to those who pursue the meaning of life. It is marvelous.

This morning we will have a simple meeting to cover Zechariah. If you read the outline you will see 'Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John.' This first vision has these three crucial characters. "Zechariah" means "God remembers." "Elizabeth" means "God swears," or "God's oath." Many people say John means "God loves him"—but actually, if you really study the Greek word, the name "John" means "God gives grace; God is the gracious giver." This is marvelous. Why this family? One is extremely godly—a serving priest. His wife is not only godly but is of noble inheritance—she's from Aaron. Together they beget a person who totally brings them out of what they have. That is John, the one who gives grace.

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Now let's just come to the story. Zechariah is very faithful, so according to his turn he came to offer to God, which means he is not only just a godly man, but he is a godly serving man. He is not just a godly serving man, but he is able to come into the temple, even into the holy place, where he is able to enjoy the showbread as his satisfaction and is able to enjoy the lampstand as his need. Eventually, and most crucially, he is mature to the point where he is able to come to the incense altar and offer incense. The incense altar is the most crucial part in the Old Testament. All the experience is concluded in the incense altar, where God and man walk together. It typifies a man so constituted with God that they can be one with God and offer incense to God. This is marvelous. Do you know where the incense altar is? After Jesus' death the incense altar came into the holy of holies, which means such a man bears the testimony of the ark of testimony. This man brings about the reality of the ark of the testimony. This shows how a Christian can be mature—how man can be mature—such that they are in full operation of God's economy. This is marvelous, but let's come back still to the story.

When Zechariah was there he was trying to offer incense. Then the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him, "Now you shall have a son." How did he get this vision? Because it was according to the custom of the priesthood; his lot fell to burning incense. In other words, he does everything according to custom: I was born a priest; at 30 years old, I began to serve as a priest for 20 years; if it's my turn, I am able to walk into the holy place to offer the incense and that is my lot; this is my life. But this time, something vital happened. I don't know how many times Zechariah had been there before. There should be a lot of priests, and a lot of families of priests, according to the line of Aaron. Finally, it's his turn. He must have been there a number of times, since that's the custom; that's the habit. So now he does the same thing. He never expected anything would be different. He was very godly and faithful, so he went in to fulfill his duty. He brings the incense, comes to the incense altar, and tries to offer, but this time something is different. Do you know what's different? An angel came and told him, "Hey, wait a minute. Don't just do these things all the time. Yes, it is from God, but you must have something *of God!*" *From God* is marvelous, but *of God* is very precious! If I have a lot *from God*, but nothing *of God*, where is the value?

So the angel says, "It's from God. God told Moses, Moses arranged the order, and now it's your turn. So now, finally, you have come to offer the incense, but let me tell you: no, don't just have everything from God; you must have something *of God!* So, now you shall have a son. You should name him John." Now do you understand, if you were Zechariah, how you would respond? The Bible says he knelt down. So, his first response should be to say "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! You have told me something new; I see something new." But no, his question is: "how can this be?"

I have been in the church meetings for 20 years. If an angel really came to say something to me, my answer would be "how can this be?" I'm so used to it now. I'm accustomed to it. This is my custom. This is what I'm doing every week: I come to the meeting, I see the brothers and say

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“Hi” to them, I even have a love feast with them, then we listen to the message, we have fellowship, and we go home and wait for another seven days. What is that? That is a custom. We need revelations and visions. This time he saw a vision and his first response was “No. Impossible.”

This is just like today. When I tell you “The church in Cleveland can be revived,” you say “That’s impossible.” “The church in Cleveland can become a strong testimony,” your word is “Impossible.” “The church in Cleveland can bear something of the Lord,” yet your word is “Impossible” because you become so accustomed to what you’re doing now. That may be why God allowed this kind of virus to come, to tell you to get out of your custom. You still have Christ. You still have Life. You still have the Bible. You still have the ministering ones. You still have the brothers and the sisters. You can still have fellowship, but get out of that hall. Have some reality of Christ. Your first reaction is: how can this be? If you take the meeting hall away I will be dead at my home for many months! No. God is the God of grace. God gives you grace. God says “I’ll use this situation for you to have a new beginning.” You can have a new beginning. Zechariah’s answer was “how can this be?” This is just like you brothers, you ask “how can this be?” It is also just like me. If someone asked me, “Can Cleveland be revived?” Doctrinally, I would say “Yes, because the Lord is mighty.” In reality, I would say “No, because I don’t believe it works.” I would have never even dreamed a virus would come in and tell you to stop your meeting. Your meeting is too old. You need something new, something fresh. You don’t need just a gathering of religion, you need a gathering of Christ. So now, these are a few months for us to rejuvenate. To restart our Christian life. How do we restart? By begetting. Are you able to beget a son? When you see the son is here, you will be so happy and begin to declare: this is totally by the grace of God! God gives grace! You should be so happy.

The angel told Zechariah: “You don’t believe because you ask ‘how can this be?’ You don’t believe, so I’ll make you dumb”—the Bible actually used the word mute. I believe he was made dumb because not only could he not speak, but seemingly, he also could not hear. Now, this muteness is not light; it seems he can only hear the Word of God. The angel told him, “You shall be mute.” He heard it, then he came out, yet He couldn’t say anything. He just used his hand to point at his ear, then point at his mouth and they knew he saw a vision—he must have seen something. I’m always amazed and surprised at these people. Why didn’t they pursue it further? The Bible never said even one person asked, “What did you really see? What happened to you?” It is very interesting. A lot of people come to the church meetings, but no one cares what happened from the Lord. Everybody cares that I’m in the service, I’m listening to the messages, I offer my money, I do my duties, I even have love feasts with the brothers. All these people were there, yet nobody cares.

Eventually the child came. What did he come from? First, from Zechariah: “God remembers.” Second, from Elizabeth: “God swears; The oath of God.” All of a sudden, he saw John and these became true. “My name is ‘God remembered.’ I have lived my life—all of my life—and God

remembered.” Then Elizabeth says “I’m a descendant of Aaron. I know God made an oath. So, I’m in God’s oath.” Let me be very honest with you: this is just like you brothers. “I’m saved. Praise the Lord, I’m eternally saved! I’ll go do whatever—” brothers, how many of us really care? Let me ask you: do you care? Do you care? Do you care about the salvation you have? But, God remembers. God made an oath.

One day, God Himself came through Gabriel. “You will have a son. The reality will come.” It’s interesting, when the reality finally came, all those who were godly after Jehovah joyfully surrounded this miracle and they declared “He must be according to tradition. His father’s name is Zechariah, therefore his name should be Zechariah.” We live a Christian life. I go to this church, so my children and grandchildren should go to this church. That’s what the name Zechariah means. I do this, I follow this, I’m in this, I’m with this, and I will be all my life in this, and my generations after me will be in this. So people say, “I was in this church, my mother was in this church, and my grandmother was in this church. When this building was built, my ancestors participated in these meetings.” They are very proud of it. Do you realize, God would say, “Oh, wait a minute. Where is grace? Where is my grace? I want to be your grace so that you’re able to come to the New Testament age.” So, when the baby was born, they insisted his name should be Zechariah. If you’re a Christian then your kids have got to be Christian. If you go to this church then your kids have got to go to this church. Is this wrong? I wouldn’t say it is wrong, but it is inadequate. There must be something new. There’s got to be something fresh from God.

Eventually, the wife came in. She said, “No, God told us his name is *John*.” “No, his name should be Zechariah.” Even the elders may decide his name should be Zechariah. Do you realize that? Sorry, I’m not talking about any elders. But, once someone is saved, what is your first concern? “Will they come on the Lord’s Day?” Isn’t that Zechariah? A baby is born and who cares for his food? Who cares for his health? Who cares to be with him? Who cares to raise him up? We count people by: “Are they coming to the meetings?” What does that mean? Zechariah. I’m Zechariah. I’m making the meetings. My son should also be Zechariah: making the meetings. Oh, this is a sober matter. So eventually they say “Okay, Elizabeth, you’re so strong, let’s talk with the dad.” So they talk with the dad and the dad says “Oh, his name should be John.” He wrote it on a piece of board: *his name should be John*—God gives grace. Right after that, do you know what happened? Zechariah can hear. In turn, he can speak.

At some point Zechariah had a vision. I believe it was when the angel told him “You shall be mute.” All of a sudden, he found out: “I can’t hear anything. I can’t speak anything.” Now, within him, he became very clear. The angel told him, “because of your unbelief.” So he began to consider: “I believe in God. I’m a priest. I’m serving God, aren’t I? I’ve been serving God all of my life. I’m going to be a retired priest. Now, how can you say I don’t believe? The belief must be something new. It’s not the belief I used to think. In my old belief I am sinful, so I offer a sin offering; I have problems, so I offer a trespass offering; I don’t live properly, so I offer a meal

offering. Now, as I begin to think about something new, it's more than just, 'I have a situation and I offer something.' It's a matter of 'Now I see something.'" So, when Zechariah considers it, "I will have a son. God—the angel of God—said to give him the name John, which means *God gives grace*. God is gracious. God is graceful to us—to human beings. I realize now it's not a law—it's grace. It's not Moses' commandment—it's grace. It's not even that I offer my priestly life—it's grace. It's not how good I have been in my life. My name is *God remembers*. My wife's name is "God swears". *God remembered* and *God swears*. Now, the reality has come. What is the reality? Grace. Grace! It is not going to church on Sunday morning. It is not going to 3170 Warren Rd. It is God's grace. I don't despise coming to the meetings. You should come to the meetings. But if you really think that's enough—NO! That's not enough. You need something new. Something fresh. You need God's grace. Eventually the whole church needs something new.

I have a dream: one day, if there's a vitality produced, there would be groups pursuing together. Groups reading together and praying together. Groups preaching the gospel together. Groups that could even pick up a burden to care for the needy: go to the jail, go to a retirement home. I am old and can't do much, but I can make a cake for those who are old. My life is different. I'm in the church life; I care for God's interest; I care for God's created man's profit. Brothers, don't you believe it's possible for the church in Cleveland to come to that? The church in Cleveland should have that kind of church life. No one says, "I go to the meeting," but everyone says, "I do go to the meeting every Lord's Day, but that is only a *part* of my church life. My real church life is in my operation during the weekdays." What is that? Grace. Brothers, by grace you were saved and by grace you love the Lord. But for some reason, even if you're saved, you love the Lord and it becomes a custom. To express His grace doesn't mean "I go to church; I go to the meetings." No, no. God says, "Something new! Something fresh!" John should come. Not an old Zechariah (*God remembers*), but the reality: God not only remembers, but He also gives you grace. By grace, a lot of things will happen. It would be great if, in the church in Cleveland, there could be 10, 20, or 30 brothers and sisters who could declare, "I want to live a life by grace!"

Right after this, the angel testified that Zechariah would beget a son and the son's name would be John. Then, everything became different for Zechariah. For a period of ten months he couldn't hear and he couldn't speak, which typifies the Old Testament. Remember, the Lord spoke to the Israelites: I speak to you, but you won't listen. Because you won't listen, there is nothing you can say for me. You are dumb. You are mute. You can't hear, then you can't speak.

I think Zachariah would have had a lot of consideration on this. My life is the life of a priest. But what am I really doing here? Now in these nine or ten months while he was considering and reconsidering, I believe his heart was gradually opened more and more. He began to realize, the age changed! It is no longer the Old Testament age. The salvation—the Savior we are waiting for—is coming! When He comes, everything will be different. Do you know what is happening, brothers? Let me tell you: at that time, Zechariah had such joy: "Do you know who my son is?"

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My son is not the Savior, but my son will be a man walking, running before the Savior! He will be pioneering the way for the Savior!” This is what the angel told him. Eventually he will have Elijah’s heart, Elijah’s energy (or strength). He will be like Elijah. When everybody forsook God, Elijah said, “come here. I stand for the Lord’s interest.”

The whole Old Testament is typified by man’s religion. What is religion? Custom. I get used to it. It is something holy, but I get used to it. It is something precious, but I get used to it. Because I get used to it, there is no new speaking, no new revelation, no new light, no new encouragement, no new strength, nothing new, because I habitually live in this. Now the Lord says, “Come on.” Zechariah says, “My son. *My son*. The Lord has told me, my son is the man of grace and he will have the heart and the strength of Elijah and will walk in front of the Holy One, the Lord.” What a commitment. I think within him there is a lot of joy. He may be mute, but he was joyfully declaring: “marvelous!”

At this time, when the kid came, he eventually began to testify something marvelous. If you turn to the Bible, Luke 1:63-64 says “*His name is John, then his mouth was opened*”. The interesting part is all of the people see it and all of the people keep on asking, “What kind of child will this be?” I like this statement, but I also hate it. I like this statement because they really care. I hate it because they don’t really care. Isn’t that you? Sorry, brother, isn’t that you? You care, and don’t care. Do you love the Lord? Yes. Do you love the church? Yes. Do you care for the Lord and the church? Yes. Do you really care? Then, all of a sudden, no. It doesn’t interfere with my life; I still have my life. So they all ask a question, “What kind of kid is this?” Nobody said, “I will buy a house nearby and watch him grow. I will follow him.” No, everyone went back to their old life. Isn’t that today’s situation? We all come home to our old life and the Lord, through his government, says, “I will cause a certain virus to come up so that you will be at home too much. You will get tired of your home until, by being home, you have a desire: Lord, something new. Something new. I want something new.”

With this, he had a marvelous declaration. He says, “*The Lord is to be blessed!*” Now he is very bold. It is not the old Zechariah, nice, pious, and even, in a way, godly. Now, he became wild: he stood up and declared, “*Blessed is the Lord God of Israel...*” Hey, can you stand up and say, “Blessed is the Lord of the church in Cleveland!” Can you? One day, if a group of you, everyone stood up one by one and began to declare, “Blessed is the Lord of the church in Cleveland,” the church in Cleveland would really be blessed, because the Lord is blessed. And more than that, “*he has redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us.*” He saw something. All of the Old Testament indicates redemption, but they called it “atonement,” not redemption. But here he says redemption is coming, and salvation is coming. Redemption is judicial; salvation is organic. Judicially, he solved all of our problems; organically, he also solved all of our problems.

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Furthermore, he said, “*God remembered his holy covenant.*” God has a covenant, not a promise, to Abraham, because he said, “*his holy covenant, which he swore to our father Abraham.*” He and Abraham had a covenant. What is the covenant? “You will have the land and your seed will be like the skies. Then you will be a great nation.” With the land, with the seed, there shall be a great nation. This is the promise. Now I think Zechariah can sit there, and could even close his eyes, and he would have a view: it was a history, it was a story, it was an attractive story, but now I see something! I see something is coming. My son will be the pioneer to bring in the reality of it—that there will be a land for the Lord, there will be descendants for the Lord, and eventually the Lord will have a great nation unto himself.

More than that, the Lord swears. He says, “Oh, John, as a child, let me tell you: you shall be called the prophet of the Most High. The Lord is Highest, but you are His prophet, for you will go before the face of the Lord. He is coming. You will go before Him to prepare His ways.” What a commitment he predicted. What is John’s life? He will be preparing the way. Do you remember John’s life? It is true: he got away from religion. His word was “repent!” What does repent mean? Change! What does change mean? Change from the Old Testament to the New; change from your old mind, following the law, to prepare yourself for the savior to come. Repent! So eventually *you will “prepare his way.”*

His conclusion is very interesting, even somewhat poetic. He said, “*Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;*” Isn’t that poetic? Could you write something like that? And more than that... “*To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death To guide our feet into the way of peace.*” Do you see how vision changes people? How vision produces reality? How vision is bringing you from one place to another place? What a marvelous story. You should tell the Lord: Lord I worship you. I have such a Lord, such a Christ. May the Lord be with us.