

God of Mercy and Power

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

LUKE 1:68

W e humans do not hold mercy and power in tension well.

Those who gain power often enjoy it and tend to seek more, while those who are gracious tend to surrender power (or have it taken from them). Undoubtedly there are exceptions, but by and large, we know and can observe that this balance is not easy to achieve. But unlike us, God is somehow *both* the most powerful and the most merciful, perfect in his display of each.

We see God's gracious might highlighted in several ways in this story about John the Baptist's birth and early days. In fact, this theme of gracious might is hidden in plain sight for us English readers. We learn that Elizabeth wants to name the boy John in keeping with the message that Gabriel gave to Zechariah (Luke 1:13). Those around her are surprised; this didn't cohere with the custom of naming a child after someone in the family. So



why John (*Yohanan* in Hebrew)? It means “God is gracious,” and this boy will proclaim God’s gracious works on behalf of the whole world.

Zechariah has been unable to speak since the day he learned his wife would have a child. But as soon as he writes the boy’s name, his speech is restored, and he erupts in praise. Through this sign, the people know this boy is special. They ask one another, *What will he be?*

But Zechariah casts their gaze in the right direction. Yes, the boy has a special role, but *the Lord* is to be praised. The powerful Lord of all “will come to us,” Zechariah says, and will be in the midst of his people.

But the Lord’s display of power will not be oppressive. Instead, it will be liberative. The Lord has “raised up a horn of salvation” in order to “show mercy to our ancestors” and to “rescue us.”

The idea of God showing mercy is linked to the idea of God’s people being in sin. Like their ancestors who received similar prophecies (1 Sam. 2:10; Mic. 7:20; Ezek. 16:60), they deserve punishment but they receive an outpouring of grace.

Why does God do this? So we can serve him. This is a gift so that we might truly experience “God with us.” The Song of Zechariah promises forgiveness of our sins and illumination to guide us on the “path of peace.” As Luke continues his gospel, he will return to these themes many times, highlighting how the coming of the Messiah ushers in restoration and justice—true and lasting peace.

Meditate on Luke 1:57-80.

Where in this passage do you see the mighty power of God? Where do you see the mercy and grace of God? Pray, expressing your response to God.