

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“All Flesh Shall See the Salvation of God”

Rev. David K. Groth

December 5, 2021

Luke 3:1-14

We're in Advent now, and a good portion of Advent is about eschatology. Eschatology is big word; it's that part of theology that is concerned with death and judgement, the return of Jesus, the end of this life, this world and the beginning of new life in the new creation. Eschatology is about the assurance we have as Christians, that, in spite of the chaos and deterioration around us, the Lord is still in control and has already won the ultimate victory. So, eschatology is about living by faith and not by sight. Even in the last days, when there are wars and famines and earthquakes and great persecution and the hearts of many will have grown cold, as Christians we still know the ultimate victory has already been won, and salvation already belongs to us. That's eschatology.

Let me explain it in this way. When I was a young child my parents would occasionally take me and my older brothers to UW Badger football games. This was in the mid 70's and the Badgers were not good in those days. I remember one game in particular. It was the fourth quarter; the Badgers were losing something like 3 to 47. The stands were emptying out; only a remnant of fans remained, many of them wearing the yellow and black colors of the opposing team. In the midst of all that irrefutable defeat, the UW Marching Band strikes up “On Wisconsin”, UW's victory song. That's eschatology. That's living by faith, not by sight.

We have that going on in our text. Luke begins with a list of people, important people, powerful people, influential people: Caesar Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, Herod Lysanias, the high priests Annas and Caiaphas. These were the power brokers of the day, the political and religious leaders. These were the big dogs. These were the people in charge and they knew it.

It certainly did not look like God was running the show; not at all. It seemed the Lord had gone dormant. Maybe He had finally had it with His people and turned His back on them. After all, it had been over four hundred years since the last of the Old Testament prophets. This was the big gap between testaments, otherwise known as “the silent period” when the prophets ceased to speak. Neither God, nor His prophets, were in the news. The big dogs were in the news, those political men with power and influence. But God seemed only a quiet and inactive spectator.

Then, one day in the wilderness, the voice of a true prophet cries out once again, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”. “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Did he really mean that? This must be one of those “by faith” things, because there was not much visible evidence that that's going to happen any time soon.

In fact, consider the Baptist's own plight. He would soon find himself in prison, for having called out Herod for taking his brother's wife to be his own. Soon after that John would lose his head, because of the silly oath made by a half drunk and lustful old man to a young woman who had just danced for him and his friends. In any case, it appeared God was no longer interfering with the wicked plans and actions of men. It appeared He was washing His hands of them, and was just going to let them have it their way.

And so it is today. The ones making the news today are the presidents and prime ministers, business entrepreneurs and scientists: people like Xi Jinping, China's president, or entrepreneur Elon Musk. People like Vladimir Putin, Nancy Pelosi, Donald Trump, Mark Zuckerberg. These are some of the power brokers of our era. These are the big dogs of our day. These are the ones in the news. Meanwhile, it sometimes seems that God has gone inactive and silent again. Dormant. “All flesh shall see the salvation of God”? It doesn't seem likely, because what the people in charge are doing has little to do with the salvation of God.

“All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” It didn't seem likely 2000 years ago either, but then, we got a glimpse. The glimpse is Jesus, of course. He is our strength and our salvation. He was born in a manger and visited by magi. He preached the truth and healed the sick. He came to the world and turned it upside down by calling everyone to repent and by offering forgiveness to all who believe. Isaiah foretold His coming, as did John the Baptist. They were looking forward in time.

We, in contrast, look back to Jesus. We look back to His incarnation. It is Advent, after all. But we also look back to His life and ministry. We look back to His suffering and rejection. We look back to His shame and His death

where he died for our forgiveness. But we do not stop there. We look back to His resurrection from the dead, and we see His vindication. We see the evidence of His victory over sin and death and the devil. When we look back at His resurrection, He also directs our eyes toward the future and His promised return.

Remember how His disciples watched Him ascend into the heavens? Acts 1:10, "They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee', they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go.'" He will return. Not quietly and weakly, as in little Bethlehem. This time with power and great might. Then John's words will be fully manifested. On that day, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." It doesn't say all flesh shall be saved, but rather that all flesh shall see His saving work, those who believed in Him, but also those who rejected Him. Philippians 2, "Every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Some will bend their knees in celebration and confess Him to be Lord, as they had been doing all along. Others will bend their knees and confess Him to be Lord for the first time, in acquiescence (not faith), because they can no longer deny it. They will only be acknowledging what is no longer possible to reject. For them, there awaits an entirely different fate.

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God". For us as Christians, it's beginning to show in our lives already, as if already true. In verse 10 of our reading, the crowds asked John what they should do in light of the coming of Christ. John was concrete and specific. He gave directions appropriate for their context and vocations. To the people he said, share. If you have two tunics, share with him who has none. If you have food, share with those who don't. To the tax collectors, he said do your job with integrity. Don't collect any more than you are authorized. To the soldiers, he said, "Don't extort money. Don't make false accusations. Be content with your wages."

He was calling all of them to come together as a unique community that would serve each other, and their neighbors, as if they really believed the salvation of God was at hand.

And so should we as Christians. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." That shows up in our lives, as we show the hope we have in Christ. For instance, the way we suffer, knowing our suffering is not outside the Lord's knowledge. It's not outside the Lord's love. It's not outside the Lord's will. So we endure it patiently.

The salvation of God shows up in the way we grieve as well, for as His people we do not grieve as those without hope. We grieve as those who believe in the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

The salvation of God shows up in common and daily ways, especially in our vocations. We fulfill our vocations with faithfulness and (when possible) joy, knowing our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Whatever your vocation is, whether an accountant or a street worker or citizen or sibling, go at it as if working for the Lord.

There's no joy in doing work poorly just to get it done. The joy comes in doing our work as best we can. If you're a grandmother, be the best granny you can possibly be, tender and kind, patient and faithful, teaching the faith also to your grandchildren. If you're an office worker, do your work with integrity, loyalty, optimism, looking for opportunities to let your light shine in the darkness.

Please note, John's focus is on public behavior. The response to God's grace is not just a private piety, not just something that goes on within the safe confines of your home or church. It's *never* just between you and Jesus. It's between you and everyone else. "Share what you have with the world. Don't take advantage of others. Don't misuse your authority." It's all public behavior.

And notice, John isn't telling anyone to give up their vocations and become church workers. He's telling them to work for the glory of God, within the vocations they already have. Be a tax collector, but don't cheat. Be a soldier, but don't take advantage of anyone. Be a cop, but don't be "badge heavy". Be a plumber and be the best darn plumber you can possibly be, to the glory of God. Be a roofer, but don't cuss and swear up there. Be a politician, but serve the public's interests, rather than your own. Be a soccer dad, but not a jerk on the sidelines; be a mama bear, but also listen respectfully to the teacher's concerns about your child. In all these ways, the salvation of God will show up in our lives for all eyes to see.

"What should we do?" the crowds asked John. Live it out is the answer still. Live out the life of faith, within all your vocations. That's where it's at, trying to be as good as we can at what we do, and to use what we have responsibly. Trying to be honest and kind and just and fair and forgiving and generous. Trying to live as Jesus lived, not to save our own skins on the Last Day, but rather, out of gratitude, for the salvation He has already won for us.

While we do this, we live by faith, not by sight. We live eschatologically, knowing the victory has already been won, even though it sure doesn't look like it. Even when the score board tells of another lopsided defeat, we strike up the victory song. Amen.