

NOTES FROM PASTOR TIM'S SERMON – 11th December 2022 am
NEW SERIES FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL "God's love for the lowest"
Part 3 "Humble joy in a God of reversals"

Scripture references from the ESV

Luke 1: 46-55 And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring for ever."

Many of our congregation are suffering their own personal trials. Some of us:

- have been wrongly accused of things we haven't done by those we work with or thought were our friends
- are struggling to make sense of crimes that have been committed against us.
We have been wronged and it feels so unfair
- are overwhelmed by sinful temptations. No matter how much we fight against the sin, and pray or read the Bible, we just can't seem to get victory over this sin which wars against our soul.

What hope do we have in any of these situations? We feel weak, overwhelmed, helpless and empty.

- What we need is someone who will defend us against the lies, overcome our powerful enemies and give us victory over sin.
- We need someone who is stronger than our enemies, present with us, merciful despite our sin and faithful to us with a loyal love.

We need someone like that to fight for us.

The good news is that we do have someone like that to fight for us.

We are not at the mercy of unrighteous enemies because our God reverses unjust situations.

Our God is the God of reversals

He removes powerful people from their thrones and sends the rich away empty-handed but at the same time he exalts the humble and fills the hungry with good things. He turns things around for his people who fear him.

The Magnificat (above) is an outburst of praise from Mary's lips that comes from deep within her as she contemplates all that God has done for her personally, all that God has done for his people in the past, and all that God has promised to do for them in the future.

In this song, Mary is magnifying God. She is helping to bring in to focus the bigness, glory and majesty of God and does this by exalting four of God's attributes.

1. Mary exalts **God's strength**. In our culture, it is those who rule who have the power and the wealthy who have everything they want. Generally, those who have the wealth also have the power, because when you have money you can build a global online shopping empire, controlling who has what and when. You can buy a global social media platform controlling who gets to have their voice heard. You can purchase weapons, enabling you to control other nations with fear.

However, God's might and strength are exalted here (**vv49,51** above), but how does God use his strength?

Mary sings of how God has used his strength to exalt her on a global scale (**vv48-49** above). He has put her in a place of honour and favour, above the famous people of the day. Mary was a nobody from a nowhere place called Nazareth. If God hadn't

chosen her to bring his Son into the world, we would never have heard of her. Yet all over the world Mary is known. She is wrongly worshipped in some Christian denominations – like us, she was not sinless and she too needed a Saviour as she acknowledges in her song (v47 above). Other Christian traditions ignore her, also wrongly.

- She was not sinless but, by God’s grace, she is highly favoured by him
- She still needed her son to save her from sin, but she remains unique among those who have given birth
- She is still known all over the world as the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ

God ignored the rich and powerful and instead used his strength to miraculously conceive Christ in the womb of Mary, with the result that she is honoured globally. She goes on to exalt God for what he has done for his people in the past and, by implication, what he will do for all his people in the future (v51-3 above). God uses his strength to turn the world’s values upside down. In God’s kingdom, the greatest people are the humble people – those who fear God and trust him. God uses his strength to:

- raise up and rescue those who are weak, poor and captive – those who call out in faith to him
- pull down the proud rulers from their thrones and send the rich away into absolute poverty

One day, those like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk and Vladimir Putin (the extremely wealthy in this world) will be sent away from God with nothing. Never envy the wealthy. If they don’t know Jesus Christ and don’t use their wealth to serve humanity, especially God’s people, then he will send them away from himself empty.

One day, it will be God’s people who get everything. Jesus said: “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5). Why would you want to envy those who are destined to lose everything when you are will get the earth?

Why would you envy those who only have this world’s wealth, when you have Christ, the greatest treasure?

2. Mary exalts **God's holiness** (v49 above). God's holiness is written throughout the Bible, and there is so much that could be said about it. Primarily this attribute tells us that God is unique among all the gods.

When she sang of God's holiness, Mary may have had **Isaiah 57:15** in mind: **For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.** This God, who turns the world's values upside down, is the one who dwells with his people. The one who is from everlasting to everlasting, and is high above all rulers, chooses to dwell with those who will humbly accept him and does so to **revive their spirit**. For Christians, this time of year is all about

The eternal God who chose to dwell among us in human flesh

He did not dwell in a palace with the rich, but in the home of a humble family with the poor.

No other religion has a god who took on the weakness of humanity. Other gods may look like bigger, stronger humans but that is because men created them in their own image. They are purely the invention of man.

- Our God created humanity in **his** image and then came to earth, taking on our humanity, to dwell among us.

The eternal God, Jesus Christ, is walking with us through whatever trials we are facing. What great comfort that gives.

3. Mary exalts **God's mercy** (v54 above). God does **not** exalt the humble poor just because of their poverty and humility. If God steps in to reverse the values of the humble poor by exalting them and filling them with good things, **it is an act of his mercy alone**, because what every human deserves is God's wrath. Mary makes clear in her song (v50 above) that only **those who humble themselves before God, confessing their need of him, will receive the blessings of God's favour.**

4. Mary exalts **God's faithfulness** (vv54-55 above). God acts in this way because he is a God who keeps his word.

God promised Abraham and his descendants that he would save them from their enemies, and especially the enemies of sin, Satan and death. He promised to restore his own image in a humanity marred by sin and to establish a people who he will love with an everlasting love, and live with for the sake of their enjoyment. God is too concerned for the honour of his name to allow any of those promises to fail, so he remembers his promise of mercy to those whom he has chosen to be his people.

This is the loyal love of a loyal God to his own people.

God will never forsake his people and his promises. That is why we can trust him even in our darkest moments. We can trust him to come and help us because he has committed himself to us.

His loyal love and his desire to see his name honoured will not allow him to forsake his people or his promises.

How do we apply this to our lives?

Ultimately it is the humble who receive God's mercy and find true delight in him.

We need to apply Peter's instruction: **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.** (1 Peter 5:6)

How do we do this? We are given both a negative and a positive example of what true humility is in the narrative of Jesus' infancy.

- a) **Herod** the King of Israel. Herod was ruling over Judea. He had sought to have Jesus destroyed by ordering the killing of all baby boys under the age of 2.
 - Rather than humbling himself and accepting God's new King, Herod exalted himself in his own heart.
 - It did not end well for Herod.

God miraculously intervened to ensure that the life of Jesus was spared, warning Joseph in a dream so that they fled to Egypt, where they lived until Herod died. Today, Herod is dead and Jesus is alive. If Herod had accepted Jesus as King, he would now be seated in the highest heavens, but God brought him down and he has lost his throne forever.

God exalted his Son to sit on the highest throne of the universe where he still reigns.

Herod serves as a warning. You cannot take on God and win

One day:

- God will silence the liars by bringing the truth to light
- God will deal justly with those who have wronged us
- God will one day defeat sin in our lives forever.

In our distressing situations, God is stronger and he will ultimately deliver his servants.

b) Mary the servant of God. Mary did not ask to be chosen by God to bear his Son. God chose her. It would mean:

- Being misunderstood by her fiancé and the people in her town
- Travelling south, away from her family, so that Jesus could be born in Bethlehem, and then having to go on the run in order to save the life of her child
- Witnessing his horrible execution on a Roman cross, where her heart would be pierced through with sorrow

Yet her response to the angel is: **“Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (1:38)**

True humility (as shown by Mary) is accepting the providence of God for your life.

Many of us need to confess that we have acted more like Herod in relation to God’s providence. We have kicked against his providence, and yet God has not let go of us.

- Rather than fighting against God’s providence, the humble person accepts what God brings into their life, trusting that God is all-powerful, righteous, merciful and faithful.

That seems like a scary place to be, particularly for those of us who like to be in control. The world’s values say happiness comes:

- from being in control
- from being able to have the power to change the things I don’t like
- from having wealth that buys power and gets me out of trouble.

God reverses the world’s values and shows that true joy comes from being in the hands of a God who is:

- All-powerful to lift us from our poverty
- Unique because he dwells with us
- Merciful to those who fear him
- Faithful to his people because of his loyal love and desire to glorify his own name

The place of real joy is the place of humble submission to God even though it may not seem like it at the time.

Ultimately it is the humble who receive God's mercy and find true delight in him.