

NOTES FROM STEVEN DRIVER'S SERMON- Sunday 8th December 2024 am

TITLE: "The reason for praise" TEXT: Luke 1 verses 46-56

SERIES: "Christmas 2024 Scripture references from the

Luke 1:46-56: ⁴⁶ 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."

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

This Christmas, we will be spending time in the songs of praise generated by the wonderful news of Christ's humanity. The first of these is Mary's song, known as the Magnificat. This is not something to be studied just as a text.

The Magnificat is pure unashamed praise.

Mary is so saturated by the sense of God's hand on her humble life, his saving work for her and his presence with her that she wants to praise him from the deepest part of her being. We can often struggle to praise God in this deep way and find ourselves just going through the motions. We might enjoy singing the songs and learn something about God from the sermon, but it does not overflow into a heartfelt desire to praise him and delight in him. As we look at Mary's song and her reasons to praise, we too can find that these are reasons to praise from the depths of our heart.

Mary was a peasant girl from Nazareth and would have been looked down on and even treated with contempt by those around her. However, she is able to recognise that God has looked upon her, and can declare that he is her Saviour. (**vv47-48**). This recognition comes from the immense and unique thing that has happened to her: **And behold, you will conceive in your womb and**

bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:31-33).

Mary would have been familiar with the words of the Old Testament and thus she was able to apply what the angel was telling her. On one level, she was being saved from her lowly situation, but she also recognises that she has been saved by God as part of his great redemption plan for humanity.

Not only has God given her a son, but he has also given her her Saviour

She is looking to the future as she recognises that future generations will call her blessed (v48). Only Mary can sing this song with its full meaning. She has good reason to be overwhelmed with praise but Mary herself understands that her situation has implications for all generations.

Mary’s reasons to praise can be our reasons to praise.

1. **We can praise God from the depths of our heart because he reigns on high (vv49-50).** He has done great things for Mary but that is only possible because **he reigns!** God is mighty, holy and merciful. When we dwell on these attributes of the reigning God, we will overflow with praise.
 - a) **We can dwell on his mightiness:** He is the God of the universe who, with a breath, created the stars, the one who spoke and brought life to the world. When we look at the power of the sea on a stormy day, we might feel a sense of awe, yet that is nothing in the scale of God’s mightiness.

He has done the impossible. Mary was a virgin, and she knows that she cannot be pregnant, let alone pregnant with the promised forever King, the Son of God. We call this a mystery, because it is impossible to understand how it came to be, but it is true.

- b) **We can dwell on his holiness:** When we consider might, we might think of unrestrained power, yet our mighty God is also holy and is sovereignly in control of all things. He does not act in might because he has been caught unawares. His might is a holy might. Because it is holy, it is beautiful, majestic and perfect.

God is reigning on his holy throne over all things.

The birth of Jesus came about not as a reaction to events, but as a deliberate act by a God who controls everything, and works everything for his glory. No matter what is happening in the world, or in our lives, he is the one reigning over it all. The exalted, holy, perfect one is on his throne.

- c) **We can dwell on his mercy:** God's mightiness and holiness are expressed in his mercy and his infinite forgiveness. This mercy is only available for those who fear him, who recognise his might and holiness. If you are in Christ, then you have an infinite number of reasons for praise, when you look back over the past week or even the past day.
- Consider this: Every time you sin, God displays his mercy to you. It is a reason for praise every second of every day. His forgiveness and his loving mercy have no limits. Even when we think we have gone too far in our sin, his mercy is always more.

Our God is mighty, holy and merciful, reigning on high.

He is God over all things.

2. **We can praise God from the depths of our heart because he rules on earth (vv51-53).** When we think of a king on his throne, we might have a picture of King Charles in our mind. He is the reigning monarch, but he does not actually rule. If he tried to, he would probably find himself ousted! You could say his arm is weak.
- The arm of God, on the other hand, is strong (v51).

God not only reigns on high, he rules on earth.

His perfect might, holiness and mercy are carried out flawlessly. Fundamentally his rule is one of reversals:

- He scatters the proud, brings down the mighty and sends the rich empty away
- In contrast, he exalts those in humble estate and fills the hungry with good things

God's rule is a rule of reversals

Mary acknowledges that this is what God does, because he has already done this and will do it again. She is drawing on her knowledge of Old Testament figures, such as Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and many others who tried to stand in their own might. God brought them down, shattering their man-made thrones. Mary can see that this is

something God does continually. There is no nation which is not under his control, no matter how powerful they may seem. The nations still plot in vain, as their fortunes will be reversed, but this rule of reversals also applies to the humble and hungry.

- Surely God's rule of reversals is a reason to praise!

Nations need leaders, and there will always be rich people, but in those situations, power and wealth should never be the source of their self-satisfaction so that they think more of themselves than they do of anyone else. Whatever our position in the world, we all need to recognise that we are lowly and need God. We need:

- his might and holiness.
- to receive his mercy.
- to fear the Lord.

Rich or poor, powerful or humble, our satisfaction and joy are to be found in God alone

Mary's joy was in the Lord, even though her immediate economic and social situation seemed likely to get worse.

She was able to praise God because she was finding her satisfaction in the Lord, not in her external circumstances. She knew that the child in her womb would be the means of God bringing about his greatest reversal. The kingdom of her son and Saviour would have no end. She did not understand how this could be, but she knew it would happen.

- Mary could praise God because his rule of reversals was happening then and would continue to happen in the future for all generations who trust in him.
- This is our motivation to praise too. As we recognise our need for God, we receive his infinite mercy now and look forward to the coming Kingdom. When we fill our minds with that, we cannot help but live a life of praise.

3. We can praise God from the depths of our heart because he remembers his people (vv54-5). We find it easy to praise God when we have had a recent blessing, but that can often be more about getting satisfaction from the thing rather than from God. After a bad day, we forget the continual blessings we receive from God. We forget God's rule and reign and we forget him.

The good news is that God is not like us. He does not forget us. When he makes a promise to us, it happens. He remembers his people. At this time, Israel was in a low

place and many of God's people were probably wondering if he had forgotten them. Mary declares that this is not the case. God is bringing about his rule and reign through Jesus, fulfilling all the promises he has made to his people.

- If we are in Christ, we are children of those promises, and we can look forward, knowing that these things will come to pass.

When we come to worship together, we celebrate the God who reigns and rules, and remembers his people.

How do we return to a place of praise every day? How can our lives overflow in praise, not just in song but in our everyday lives?

- a) **We need to recognise our lowliness.** It is easy to puff ourselves up so that we do not feel that we need God. We are relatively good and generally happy, after all! However, the reality is that we are NOT okay. We are sinners in desperate need of a Saviour. Whether we have had a good day or a bad day, we have sinned against God. We deserve his divine justice and separation from him. That is our humble estate, but it is also the place from where our hunger for a Saviour comes.

**Once we have recognised our lowliness,
we can remember what he has done and what he is doing.**

Mary came to this place of deep praise because she did just that. Instead of trying to forget her lowliness and her situation before God, she brought all of it to him, receiving his infinite mercy. If we try to praise God despite our situation, our praise will be shallow. Instead, we need to bring every circumstance into our praise, and receive his mercy.

Let us recognise our lowliness and brokenness and then

Let us remember who God is and what he is doing.

He is our mighty, holy, merciful God, the only source of eternal satisfaction now and forever

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;

Tender to me the promise of His Word;
In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy Name, the Lord, the mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight;
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of His Word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.
Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and forevermore!