

God's certain ruler

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[0 : 0 0] Now, when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.

And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you. But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan.

Go and tell my servant David, thus says the Lord, Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day.

But I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar?

Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.

[1 : 1 8] And I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel.

And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled, and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you.

You shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men. But my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

[2 : 3 9] And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

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. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

[3 : 54] And of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah. And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

[5 : 07] And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

For he has looked on the humble estate of his servants. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

[6 : 14] He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

Now, I was reading an article recently with the headline, Death by GPS. And it was asking the question, why is it that so many people blindly follow their sat-navs, even when it's clear that they are being led in the wrong direction?

So there was one lady in Belgium who wanted to go to Brussels, 90 miles away from home, and it was only when she got to the Croatian border and she saw the signposts in Croatian that she realized that she was very near Zagreb.

Or the Japanese tourists in Australia who drove their hire car into the ocean as they attempted to drive onto an island. Or the man in Yorkshire who almost drove his BMW off a cliff.

Or an American who drove his car into a lake which his sat-nav insisted was a road. Well, perhaps you've had a similar experience, I don't know.

[7 : 23] But it may well be that you're here this morning and your assumption, really, is that Christians operate on a similar basis. That following Jesus, likewise, is based on blind faith.

Faith that flies in the face of the facts. But we've seen over the last few weeks, if you've been with us as we've started our series in Luke's Gospel, both on Sundays and in our growth groups, that Luke writes his Gospel, this historical, reliable account, so that we can have certainty about Jesus Christ and confidence.

Chapter 1, verse 4, Luke says he's writing that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. And it's a certainty that those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ need as well.

If we're going to defend the message of Jesus in an increasingly apathetic culture, perhaps even an increasingly antagonistic culture, and perhaps no more so than in the next few weeks as we head into the Christmas period, it's a wonderful opportunity, isn't it, for us together, corporately, as well as individually, to proclaim the message of Jesus.

And Luke gives us the confidence and certainty that we need to do that. Well, you'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. Two simple points today.

[8 : 44] First of all, Luke wants us to be certain about the identity of Jesus. Secondly, Luke wants us to be certain about the mission of Jesus. First of all, the identity of Jesus. And again at verses 26 to 32.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great.

And notice what we've seen throughout Luke's gospel so far. All the eyewitness details. It suggests, doesn't it, that Luke's only source, or certainly his main source, can only have been Mary herself.

[9 : 46] Notice, too, there's no need for an ultrasound, because he's going to be a boy. There's no need for one of those baby books of names. Did you ever see one of those? Because actually he's going to be called Jesus.

And there's no need for them to worry about what he's going to turn out like, because, verse 32, he's going to be great. But remember that Luke is not simply writing history.

Luke is writing fulfillment. And therefore, it's the Old Testament that provides the key to understanding the identity of Jesus.

Verse 32, He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And of his kingdom, there will be no end. In the Old Testament, this title, the Son of the Most High, or the Son of God, as the angel calls him in verse 35, is the title who God gives to the one who is God's ruler and judge.

[10 : 55] I put a couple of psalms there on the outline, Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. We're not going to look at them now, but do look at them later on. And the angel promises that this baby will be given the throne of his father David and will reign forever.

And to see the full significance of that promise, keep a finger in Luke and turn back to that first reading which we had from 2 Samuel chapter 7. 2 Samuel chapter 7, page 312.

And this is one of the most important promises in the Old Testament. A promise made to King David. David, of course, who was the greatest of Old Testament kings.

And yet what does God promise him 2 Samuel 7 verse 12? When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And then verse 16, and your house and your kingdom shall be made forever before me.

[12 : 11] Your throne shall be established forever. What is the promise? Well, the repetition is the key, isn't it? That one of David's descendants will be established on the throne forever.

It's a promise that is repeated throughout the rest of the Old Testament. Indeed, one of the best known Christmas readings contains the promise. I put Isaiah chapter 9 verse 7 there on the outline.

Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forever more.

A perfect king. A king who will deal with everything that is wrong in our world. A king who will rule rightly, justly, fairly.

Now, it's a promise that was never fulfilled in the Old Testament because of the sin of Israel's kings. And therefore, you see here in Luke is the glorious announcement that this king who is going to be born will rule forever.

[13 : 22] God's forever king. not that Jesus became the son of God at his birth as if he wasn't beforehand. No, he'd been the son before all of eternity.

But it's at this point that he breaks into history for all to see. What's more, it's precisely this message that Jesus is lord and king that was proclaimed by the early church after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

to turn on to Acts. This is the last of our cross-references. Turn on to Acts chapter 2, page 1097. Here is the apostle Peter preaching the first Christian sermon, if you like.

The first sermon after the ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven. It's the day of Pentecost. And speaking of David, of King David, he says, Acts chapter 2, verse 30, being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus, God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. And then verse 36, the wonderful conclusion of the whole sermon, let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

[15 : 04] Now the implications of this could not be more far-reaching, especially with the election of Donald Trump still dominating the headlines. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, he's ascended to heaven, never to die again.

His eternal kingdom is so much greater and so much bigger than all the governments and elections in this world. One day, America and all its presidents will simply be a footnote of history.

Whereas the kingdom of Jesus will never end. He is God's forever king. Every empire, every great power passes away.

The empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Portugal, Spain, Britain, the Soviet Union, all the empires to come. But Jesus is God's eternal, everlasting king.

And of course, at the end of history, he's going to return and everyone will see that. Crystal clear. What do you say?

[16 : 13] How does Mary respond? Well, back to Luke. Luke chapter 1, verse 34. And Mary said to the angel, how will this be since I am a virgin?

How will God supernaturally break into the world? After all, verse 27, Mary is a virgin. She is legally pledged to be married. Yes, but there's been no sexual relationship. Well, the reply, verse 35, the angel answered her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. Now, I guess many of us will have friends for whom the virgin birth is one of the great stumbling blocks of Christianity.

How can you possibly believe this kind of thing? But ultimately, of course, it boils down very simply to our world view. If you don't believe in an all-powerful God, if you reject the impossibility of the incarnation of God coming down to earth, then of course the idea of a virgin birth is simply ridiculous.

But to think like that is actually to have a very blinkered world view. It is, I think, to say these things don't happen and therefore these things can't happen.

[17 : 37] It's a circular argument. But of course, if God really has come into the world, then we'd expect, wouldn't we, what we might call naturally impossible things, we'd expect things like that to happen.

As the angel says, verse 37, nothing is impossible with God. Did you hear about the man in Lancashire who bought a dozen eggs from his local supermarket cracking open the first egg?

He was surprised to see not one egg but two eggs that flopped out of the shell. Apparently the chance of finding a double yolk, if you have experienced this, apparently the chance of finding a double yolk is one in a thousand.

But amazingly, the next one was the same and the next one and the next one and the next one. In fact, he ended up cracking open ten consecutive double-egged yolks. And I did the maths on my calculator and the answer was ten to the power of whatever it was, something, far too many noughts to fit on my screen of my calculator.

What do you say? That is completely impossible. But, here is the photograph to prove it. You won't see it but here they are, all the eggs, sort of, he's broken the eggs, open all the double eggs are there to see.

[18 : 53] In other words, you and I have a choice, don't you, when we are presented with the evidence. We can either open our minds or we can close our minds.

Whether that's to eggs and double eggs or whether it's to the possibility of a virgin birth. So, the identity of Jesus.

Secondly, the mission of Jesus. Because in verses 39 to 45, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, having been told by the angel that Elizabeth too is pregnant. There's none of the usual baby talk of antenatal classes and push chairs and birth plans and all that kind of stuff.

Instead, John the Baptist begins his task of preparing the way for Jesus. Even while he's in his mother's womb, as he leaps for joy at Mary's arrival.

Well, Mary then burst into song, verses 46 to 55, famously known as the Magnificat from the Latin word to magnify. Verse 46, my soul magnifies the Lord.

[19 : 55] And her song contains two of the great themes of Luke's gospel, which we're going to see time and time again as we go through Luke's gospel. The first is the theme of salvation, of rescue.

Verse 47, my soul rejoices in God my Savior. Verse 54, in remembrance of his mercy. And we'll see next week as we look at Zachariah's song that that theme is unpacked much more.

But notice, throughout the Magnificat, how different the real Mary is from the Roman Catholic view of Mary. Notice, we'll be back in verse 28, how Mary is the beneficiary of God's favor rather than the bestower of God's favor.

Notice in verse 42, the focus is not so much on Mary herself, but on the child she carries. Notice in verse 47, far from being immaculate or sinless as some claim, instead, Mary recognizes her own need for a savior.

In verse 50, again, she is the recipient of God's mercy, not the giver of it. In other words, you see, Mary is not bigging herself up here. No, she's not sort of doing the rounds of daytime TV interviews, wanting to be the center of attention.

[21 : 24] And for the Roman Catholic Church to proclaim how great Mary is, you see, can you see how very different that is from the way in which Mary sees herself in need of a savior?

Which is why, rather than magnifying herself, of course, actually what she does here, she's magnifying God. She's delighting in God and saying how great he is.

What does that mean to magnify God? After all, you and I can't make God any bigger than he is, can we? But of course, we do naturally make God smaller than he is.

We turn the telescope round, and if you've ever done that, you know, you look through a telescope, it's meant to make things look bigger, but actually, what do we naturally do with God? Well, we turn the telescope round, don't we? So that actually God becomes smaller.

But we all naturally do that, such that the God who rules the galaxies becomes too small to care for us, too small to revere and to honor and to serve and to praise.

[22 : 34] And of course, at the same time, because we've turned the telescope round, as well as making God small, we make people big. Again, it's what we all naturally do, isn't it? We naturally magnify people, human cleverness, human greatness, human achievements.

In other words, you and I live in a world which is bent on deconstructing God, making God small, and constructing human greatness, making humanity big.

But that is to build our lives on a lie. It is to turn the truth about God and the truth about human beings on its head. And so you see, what is Mary doing?

Well, she is proclaiming the God who we naturally make small. She is proclaiming him to be the great God that he really is.

Because the other great theme of her song, as well as that of salvation, is that he will bring about a great reversal. Notice how we see this a number of times. So verse 48, Mary describes herself as humble and yet blessed.

[23 : 45] Verse 49, Mary, that God who is mighty has done great things for her. Verse 51, he has scattered the proud. Verse 52, he has brought down the mighty but exalted the humble.

Verse 53, he has filled the hungry but sent the rich away empty. And the whole point of this is that this isn't simply about the way God is dealing with Mary, but it's that actually the way he deals with Mary reflects the way in which he deals with the whole of humanity.

So you see, she starts very personally verse 48, he has looked on the humble estate of his servants, so speaking of herself, but then verse 54, who is the servant then?

Israel, God's people. He has helped his servant Israel. This is nothing short of a divine revolution. The reversal of this world's values as a new world order, if you like, is being announced.

I wonder if you're the sort of person who likes reversals or is unnerved by reversals. I imagine if I asked us to get into two different corners of the room, I imagine that question would split us down the middle.

[25 : 00] Half of us would get very excited at the prospect of reversals, the other half would be very unnerved by the prospect of reversals. Well, God is in the business of turning the values of this world on their head.

Indeed, it's the proud, verse 51, the mighty of verse 52, and the rich of verse 53, with whom Jesus Christ, as we go through Luke's gospel, has the greatest conflict.

The proud, of course, will never receive forgiveness and mercy from God because they think they're good enough for themselves. If you think you're genuinely a good person, you're never going to ask God for forgiveness and humble yourself like that.

The mighty will never receive forgiveness and mercy from God because they feel strong enough on their own. If you think you're robust enough to take on the world, if you think you're strong enough to deal with all your own problems, then, of course, you'll never ask for God's mercy because you don't feel you need it.

You don't feel you need the forgiveness that he offers. And the rich will never receive God's mercy and forgiveness because they don't want it. They have all they need.

[26 : 14] They think that money can buy everything they need. A proud, self-sufficient independence from God. By the way, the hungry, verse 53, he has filled the hungry with good things, are not the physically hungry.

It's very important that we grasp this. It's actually a quote from Psalm 107. I put the verse in Psalm 107 on the outline, for God satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

So the hungry, both in Luke and in the Psalm, are the spiritually hungry. Those who, whether they are rich or poor, they recognize their spiritual poverty.

They recognize they have nothing to give to God. They recognize they need his mercy and his forgiveness. They long for the salvation that God offers. They might be materially poor or materially rich.

As we go through Luke's gospel, there are plenty who are materially well-off, who recognize that. Fishermen, a leading synagogue ruler, a rich tax collector, a senior military officer, who all demonstrate this spiritual humility and hunger.

[27 : 35] As well, of course, as the leper, the prostitute, the outcast, and so on. So maybe you are a somebody.

Maybe you're here this morning and you think that before God you're a somebody as well. Well, please grasp these verses that God opposes those who imagine themselves to be a somebody.

Or perhaps you think of yourself, as being a nobody. And perhaps you regard yourself as a nobody before God as well. Well, please grasp from these verses that God cares for the nobodies.

Jesus' salvation, you see, results in a spectacular reversal because Jesus is God's forever king. He's God's appointed ruler and judge.

Which means it's not the mighty, the impressive, the powerful people who have the last word in this world. Jesus has the last word. And by coming into the world as God's king, he has put the world on notice that he will have the last word on the final day, the day of judgment.

[28 : 48] So the identity of Jesus and the mission of Jesus. I gather that four years ago in the right after Christmas, there was a huge billboard in Times Square in the center of New York with two pictures.

One was of Santa and the other was of Jesus. And the captions underneath simply read keep merry dump the myth.

Keep merry, keep Santa, dump the myth, dump Jesus. And you won't be surprised if it was paid for by the American Atheists Association. But the reality of course is that the captions underneath those pictures should have been the other way around.

Dump the myth, am I allowed to say this, Santa, myth? Go and talk to someone afterwards if that bothers you. Dump the myth, keep the truth, keep Jesus.

Because Christianity is not built on myth or blind faith. If you're looking on the Christian faith, we're delighted you're here. We'd love you to investigate further.

[30 : 00] Christianity is not built on myth or blind faith. Why not read through Luke's Gospel for yourself or ask Christian friends if they could give you a guided read through of one of the Gospels. Many people have done that and find it really, helpful.

Do ask me if you'd like to do that if there's no one else you could ask. Well, those of us who are followers of Jesus, why we too, don't we, we need the certainty that Christianity is not built on blind faith and myth.

Because revolutionaries, subversives, those who turn the established order upside down, are so often viewed suspiciously. They're regarded as a threat to the good order of society.

Jesus was, and those who follow him will be as well. And if that accusation is thrown at you for being a follower of Jesus, as it would have been for Luke's original readers, then you see here is Luke reassuring us and steadying us and encouraging us that actually that is normal.

It's not that something's gone wrong. It is that we must expect it and continue to defend the message of Jesus and proclaim the message of Jesus in the midst of it.

[31 : 17] Because the gospel is subversive. If in the first century, imagine this, if in the first century trusting in Jesus meant the loss of position or preferment, if trusting in Jesus was potentially going to get you thrown to the lions, then why would you risk everything you have for a Galilean peasant teacher from the back of the lions?

Well, then if you are certain that this baby from Nazareth was and is God himself entered into our world to rule forever, that he rose from the dead never to die again, and that of his kingdom there will be no end.

Which means, of course, that for those of us who are following Jesus, we need to keep our eyes very firmly fixed, don't we? on the final day. Great reminder, isn't it, on Advent Sunday, that we need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the final day of history, when Jesus will have that final word.

That is the thing, I take it, that's going to give us the confidence to be the public followers of Jesus at home, at school, at work, to proclaim the message of salvation, which so reverses the values of this world.

after all, what did Jesus say? For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

[32 : 46] kids. Thank you.