

Pouring out Praise to God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 December 2020

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] We're going to consider in a moment that Mary's pouring out her heart to God, as you see in the three points we're going to consider this morning. Mary, the humble servant, and then God, the mighty and merciful Lord, and then thirdly, God, the faithful Lord, God, the faithful one.

So as we come to consider and to think and to reflect and just to allow God's Word to enter into our hearts, to worship Him, let's turn back to these two points, particularly the second passage or the second section that we read in Luke's Gospel, as Mary pours out her heart to God.

As we come to another year, and well, yes, what a year, as you look back and even look at the present time, there'll be many for whom, you know, to think of praise in your hearts might be very much the last thing that you consider, even when you think back to the last nine months of fear and torment and frustration, bewilderment even, and restrictions and disappointments and plans altered.

And yet, and yet, we still must and must come before God and come before Him with praise. Praise for who God is.

Praise for what God is, for what God's like. Praise for all that God is in His mercy and His grace towards us. And in the providence of God, before we come to this particular passage this morning, to consider the prayer praise of Mary to God.

[1 : 44] And as we're going to look at this prayer praise again, to see how this young woman, this young woman, she's been given, well, you know the context, she's been given this most unexpected news of unexpected circumstances, and the news being, of course, that through her, the birth of the royal son, the son of God, the saviour will be born.

What's her response? She praises God. I mean, yes, her world's been turned upside down, but she's not going to question God's wisdom. She's not going to question God and His choosing her to be the mother of the Lord.

I mean, her whole life has taken a new direction. Yet she will not say, why me, Lord? She's not going to say, surely someone else other than me would be more fitting to bear the son of God.

No, what does she do? She praises God. And when we look at her response, the response to God's choosing her, and the manner by which she's going to conceive and bear the promise Christ, surely to see in her response an encouragement, a fitting encouragement to each one of you, in your responses to God's intervention in your life, you know, when you think of all the twists, all the turns, the unexpected changes that happen in your life through God's sovereign control and care, that you continue to know that He does what He does in His wisdom and in His grace.

And if in Mary, in Mary's case, that you see an example to follow, an example to follow in response to God's ways with you, well, it's for each one of you.

[3 : 30] It's for me, for you, to bow before God and to do it in complete humility and to come before the Lord and say, not my will, but your will be done.

And that's an affirmation that we see, and you must, you know, come before God with, and not in a kind of grudging way, not in a sort of even half-hearted, but fully, completely, with that praise in your heart, knowing that God's will is His perfect will for your life, in order for you to glorify God and to praise Him.

Well, let's look more closely then at Mary's praise. Mary, the humble servant. I mean, as we were reading that prayer praise, that song, I mean, her whole focus in that song is praise.

It's her whole focus of praise is God, isn't God. And that surely tells us of Mary, tells us of her humility, tells us of her humble status.

She's bowing before the Lord God Almighty. I mean, this humble servant of God, she's not going to take glory in herself. And we really do have to notice that in this song.

[4 : 45] Because remember, again, the circumstances. Listen again to the words that Mary's been informed of. In fact, that we, if you had read earlier than the passage we began with, or certainly as we read in the passage we did read, she's been informed that she'll give birth to a son who will be great and will be called the son of the most high and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

He'll reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom of his kingdom there'll be no end. Then when she asks, how can this be given her present condition? She's told by the angel, 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, in hearing these words, does she respond in self-praise? Is she going to tell the whole village of Nazareth that she's the one whom God has chosen to be the mother of the promised Messiah?

Does she show an arrogance of mind that says, look at me, am I wonderful? You're going to have to regard me with such great honour because the role I'm about to play and the work of the Saviour is going to centre on me?

Is that what she says? No, of course not. There's not a hint of any self-centred praise in her heart and there's nothing of that in her lips.

[6 : 14] What does she do? She magnifies the Lord. She exalts God. She rejoices in God our Saviour. And you know, in our own self-obsessed world where individualism dominates our airways, it dominates our social media, even the advertising pressures that focus on self and me, my, I, wouldn't it be so, it's so important to stop and to reflect even on the response of Mary to the news that she's going to bear the Son of God.

she gives glory to God. She exalts God. She rejoices in God. And she's going to continue in that humble status and that's what we see here in the song.

That's her response to the news that the angels gave her. So we read there in verse 38, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

It's that attitude of humble grace that the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote when he asked this, rhetorically asked this, who will celebrate Christmas correctly?

And then the answer, whoever finally lays down all power, all honour, all reputation, all vanity, all arrogance, all individualism before the manger.

[7 : 41] And that surely has to be your response and my response, the response of all who profess to follow the name of Jesus, who profess to follow our Savior.

Surely that has to be your response at this time of year and at all times of the year. Because we can't come before our Lord and Savior with any pride in ourselves because we're coming before the one who made himself nothing when he came from heaven to earth.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul when he spoke of Jesus and to that effect. Philippians 2.8 of Jesus being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So, let nobody assume any kind of self-grandeur, any self-worth before the one who came from heaven to earth.

He came with his own free will, he came. And of course, it was through Jesus, through the word that the creation was formed and that Jesus became part of that creation.

[8 : 50] I mean, he was born in the most humble of circumstances. He would live in humble circumstances and he'd die in the most appalling shame on the cross.

But you have that mind, that mind of Christ, have that mind in humility. It's that mind that we see there in Mary in her selfless praise of God.

Praising God for his perfect wisdom even in the manner of his sending Jesus through her. She's praising God, she's praising God, the mighty and merciful God as we see in our second point this morning.

Because Mary knows her God, Mary knows God. I mean, this is somebody who's relatively young in age and yet she shows such a maturity of faith.

She shows a maturity of knowledge of God and in her prayer, in her prayer praise, she actually reveals that she's so well versed in Scripture.

[9 : 52] I mean, she's got no hesitation in praising God and using the background of Scripture to help her in that praise of God. because she knows her Scripture, she knows her Old Testament, the Scripture that she had that was there at the time.

And she knows that in Scripture, that Scripture, Old Testament, reveals God as the mighty Lord and the merciful Lord. That he alone is to be worshipped and praised.

And, you know, when we hear again Mary's song, you know, surely as we hear these words again, you are led to worship God for who he is and what he's like.

I mean, look at the way that Mary, for example, acknowledges God as the divine warrior. He's mighty. A warrior is mighty. A soldier is mighty. He's shown strength with his arm.

He's scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts. He's brought down the mighty from their thrones. There's a description of the mighty Lord, the mighty warrior, our God.

[10 : 56] And so Mary's got that knowledge of who God is. She knows God because she's been versed in Scripture, immersed in Scripture. She knows of the great deeds of God in the past.

The God who engaged in battle, battle on behalf of his people. That's where we're going to sing at the end of the service, Psalm 24, verse 8, because this tells of our mighty warrior God.

Who is the king of glory? The answer, the strong, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Or again, we can hear an echo in Isaiah 42, verse 13.

The Lord goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war. He stirs up his zeal. He cries out. He shouts aloud. He shows himself mighty against his foes.

And that recalling of God as the mighty warrior. That's not just something that's to be commended for, you know, bring to mind these Old Testament passages about God.

[12 : 03] No, bring this to ourselves, yourselves. Here's this realization that the same God who fought for his people in the past is the same God who's active in power now.

And by his power, he'll bring justice for his people. Because we've seen that, we've already seen that in Scripture. He sent his one and only son. He sent Jesus to be that victor, to bring about the victory over all who are God's enemies and the enemies of God's people.

And so we're seeing in Mary's song that continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, bringing even to our present day. Even when Mary ascribes to God at that status as mighty warrior.

But then there's continuity between the Old Testament and our New Testament times when we see Mary ascribing to God his mercy. You see that in verse 50. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

Verse 53, he's filled the hungry with good things and the rich he's sent empty away. Verse 54, he's helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy.

[13 : 20] I mean, in the Old Testament scriptures, we read of God and his mercy towards his people, delivering his people from oppression in Egypt, providing food for his people in the desert as they wandered in the desert, in the wilderness.

And then later, we see, again in the Old Testament, God's mercy in bringing back his people from exile. People have been sent into exile because of their sins.

Many years later, God bringing his people back. And God's mercy is praised, praised in the way that, of course, that God sent his one and only Son for sinners to be saved. And God's mercy doesn't end in the Old Testament, but God's mercy continues into the New Testament, even into our present times.

we've seen the truth of the Lord Jesus who's come from heaven to earth because of God's mercy. And we know that God's mercies continue even now.

And there's Mary's maturity of faith. I mean, she knows God. She knows the story of salvation for God's people. That story that progressed through the Old Testament as God as the divine warrior, the God of mercy.

[14 : 42] That story that continues. That story that found its fulfillment in the coming of the Lord Jesus as Savior, as the Christ, as the Redeemer of his people.

And so Mary rejoices in that truth as you and I. We must rejoice in that truth as we remember the birth of the Lord Jesus and its significance.

Because, of course, the story that tells, that story of salvation gives us the big picture if you like. It's not just the birth of Jesus and the manger that we bring to mind.

We bring to mind the whole picture, the promise of the Savior even as early as Genesis 3. And then as we read of the deliverance of God's people from Egypt, again, the story of salvation, the promise of a greater deliverance to come.

And God's speaking through his prophets of the promised Savior, a Savior to come, a Messiah to come, and the fulfillment of that promise in the Lord Jesus.

[15 : 47] So rejoice. Rejoice this time of year. Rejoice that all times of year. Rejoice that the birth of Jesus speaks of the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus.

and rejoice then that our divine warrior, he's come, he came to fight the devil. He came to conquer sin. He came to conquer death itself.

And rejoice too that our Lord came in mercy to give to us what we don't deserve and to keep from us what we do deserve. So this is a time for rejoicing in the Lord Jesus, rejoicing in the story of salvation.

So don't be sidetracked. Don't be sedated by the lure of an ever-increasing rampant commercialism that we're seeing so much at this time of year.

But I pray that the true joy of Christmas is known, known in your heart, in the promised Messiah, promised Christ who came for us, who came for you.

[16 : 53] He came to win that victory. And of course, that victory that we see supremely on the cross. And three days later, in his resurrection, in that victory over death itself.

Mary's poured out her heart in praise. She's poured out her heart in praise to God and is the same God whom you can praise and must praise this day because he is the mighty and merciful Lord.

And one more thing I think to say before we think of God and his faithfulness. And that really concerns Mary, Mary and her knowledge of Scripture. She composed this prayer praise based on what she knew of God and how that knowledge impacted her life, her life of praise.

And surely that's a lesson for us all. For you to truly praise God and truly to rejoice in him even to give form to your words of prayer and words of praise.

You've got to know your Bible. I mean, however young you are, however old you are, however well educated you are or not as the case might be, I mean, even the poorest intellect can praise God through his knowledge of God through his word.

[18 : 13] Whether it's from the mouths of children, as we sing in Psalm 8, from infants and from children's lips you ordered praise to sign. Whether it's from the heart expressed through the lips of those who are maybe struggling with the many afflictions in life, and yet you can still say the Lord be praised.

Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1, 28-29, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

You know, we've been given this treasure, this treasure in God's word, and that treasure that's mined, mined, just, you know, this is pure gold, this pure gold, and, you know, in that mining of that pure gold, it can never exhaust that mining.

So, use God's word well, search the scriptures, search the scriptures well, and use them even when you praise God. Even at this time of year when there's so much rejoicing, well, rejoice with knowledge and do as Mary did.

Yes, and use scripture, use the story of God as you come before God in praise and prayer. Recall his mighty deeds, recall his mercy, mercy in the past, mercy in the present, and yes, you can sing your hallelujahs to the Lord who's come to redeem his people from their sins.

[19 : 49] So, who is this God? The God of might, the God of mercy, and finally, God, the faithful Lord. And, we mentioned at the start of our words this morning how much this hymn of praise is God-centered.

Mary's praising God. She's not praising herself. She's praising God for who he is and what God's like. So, it's not for Mary to sing her own praises. She's praising God most high.

And, we do need to focus a little more, I think, on God and this particular aspect of God and his faithfulness. Those of you who were at the prayer meeting on Wednesday evening remember when we were studying the 12th section of Psalm 119.

These words that spoke of God and his faithfulness to his people and to his creation. And, it's that faithfulness of God that really is something just to end our service with and to ponder in your hearts.

Especially, in the light of the coming of Jesus to earth for us. So, one more time to turn to the words of Mary. Verse 54 and 55.

[21 : 03] He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to his offspring forever. You see, God's actions in the past pointed forward to their fulfillment in Jesus.

And, it's that aspect of promise, this promise that we're going to close with this morning. God had promised Abraham, well, almost 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus, God had promised Abraham that he'd bless Abraham's offspring forever.

That through Abraham, through Abraham's offspring, all nations of the earth would be blessed. That promise we call a covenant. The binding promise of God to be faithful.

Be faithful to what God said would happen. God kept his promise. That's what Mary's acknowledging in her song. She's got that absolute confidence that the child to be born by her is none other than the covenant child of Israel.

The covenant child of the Israel of God, the people of God, whether it's a saved Jew or a saved non-Jew. So, Mary had no doubts at all that the centuries, all the millennia, old covenant promise, that promise was about to be fulfilled through the child that would be born through her.

[22 : 28] She had faith in the word of God. She had faith in the covenant keeping God. What about your faith? Your faith in the same Lord? Is your faith such that you believe his word?

That you know in your heart that as God promised a saviour, the saviour came for his people and was fulfilled through Jesus? That when you're going to be singing your carols, when you hear all the readings that tell of the birth of Jesus, that you're aware that these tell of the promise of God fulfilled.

And because they tell of the promise of God fulfilled, they tell of a God who's trustworthy and true. Because his word is trustworthy and true. He is trustworthy and true because his promises never fail.

So, live by faith in the promise keeping God. God. And since his promise was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and the saviour's birth, then you have that absolute assurance that every promise of God for you is sure and will be fulfilled.

So, go from here, whether you're from your home or from here, leave the service trusting in the Lord who promises you eternal life through faith in Jesus.

[23 : 53] Whoever you are, whatever your past, whatever your present, will you trust in the one who's sent as one and only son for you so that you might have everlasting life in Christ.

And yes, look to the Christ child who was born in Bethlehem and see the one who was promised for you. You, me, who deserve nothing of God's mercy, nothing of God's mighty power to save.

And yet, he sent, God sent his son for you. And by faith, give him your life. By faith, trust in the one whom Mary bore.

Yes, praise God, the God of truth. Mary praised in her heart. And in that faith, that trust, know that the truth of being received into the family of God, that God has reserved that place for you.

And praise him. And continue to praise him with that knowledge that you'll be eternally praising God in glory as you have that promise. So we close with that praise in our hearts for our God whose promises never fail.

[25 : 05] Amen. And let us pray. Lord, we give praise and thanks to you for that truth that your promises are sure and confirmed in Christ.

Your promises never fail. So Lord, may we have that truth abiding in our hearts that we can trust you for all things at all times because your ways are right.

Hear us, Lord, this week. Continue in praise before you now. And we truly, Lord, pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.