

Sunrise from on High

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to the chapter we read, Luke chapter 1, and we're going to look at that section really from verse 46, so we'll include verse 45. Luke chapter 1, we did verse 45, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord, and then we have what is known as the Magnificat, and if we could just read the verses at the end there, verse 78, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Now, last week we saw how the heavenly visitor came to Mary with the most extraordinary news, news which was really, in a sense, to her absolutely amazing, baffling, that as a virgin she was to conceive and she was to bear a child, and that the child that she was to bear was the Messiah, the Son of God coming in human nature. We also highlighted the importance of recognizing that while Mary was set apart for this great and wonderful honor, that she was a sinner who was saved by grace, just in the same way as you and I need to be saved by grace.

And that shows us that Mary, although there was a tremendous honor set upon her, that she's not somebody who is to be worshipped and set up above other people. She was a wonderful woman. We emphasized that last week, where we saw her submission, we saw her humility, and we saw her tremendous faith.

Really, Mary's faith is quite remarkable. And I often feel, we've mentioned that, that we do Mary a great disservice by not maybe highlighting her life in the way that we highlight other of the saints in the Scripture. She was a quite remarkable and a devout and committed and humble and faithful Christian.

There is no question whatever about that. But we are not to elevate her beyond that. And she, of course, highlights, and we'll come to that in a moment, the need for a Savior. Now, Mary probably was in her late teens. That was round about the time when Jewish girls would be getting married. And, of course, there was this incredible announcement that she was to conceive and to bear a child. And she asked how. And she was told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that the power of the Most High would overshadow her.

And as we saw, she just accepted, accepted in the most wonderful way, this awesome, incredible news. And then she went to her cousin Elizabeth. And they spent, as we see, quite some time together.

[3 : 3 2] And we see these great words in verse 45, where Mary and Elizabeth were together. And Elizabeth, we're told there, was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud, that's in verse 42, with a loud cry, blessed are you among women, and so on. And down to verse 45, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord. And we see here the great importance of faith.

And, you know, at the end of the day, that's what matters, whether we have faith or not. It's not what we achieved in this world, although that's very important. It's not what great works we may have done, though that may be very important as well. We're not in any way minimizing or undermining the achievements and all that people attain to and do in this world. They're very important and can have far-reaching consequences for good. But at the end of the day, the all-important question is, do we have faith or not? And it is on that great day when the books will be opened, and when we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, it is then that we will understand, in a way probably that we never were able to understand here, the importance of that faith in Jesus Christ.

And we will see there fully where it says, blessed is she who believed, and blessed is he who believed, because there will be an eternal blessing. That is the future if we have faith. If we have faith in Jesus Christ, then we have not only blessing here, but we have an eternal blessing throughout the ages of eternity. And so we have this great declaration given regarding Mary and regarding, in a sense, everybody who believes. Blessed are those who believe. And then from verse 46, as it says here, we have what is known as the Magnificat. And Mary begins by talking about what God has done for her. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

So the very first thing that Mary does is gives thanks to God for saving her. And I think it's very, very important to note that, where it straightaway is showing us how Mary is somebody who needed saving.

She was not sinless. She was sinless. Although the child that grew in her womb was sinless, was kept from all defilement of the human freely, because Jesus, as he grew in the womb, would have taken off her. There's no doubt that he would have had, I believe, characteristics, possibly even mannerisms of his mother, because he was made of her substance. And yet he was kept defiled from sin, so that the human nature of Jesus was exactly like our own human nature, but without sin. That was what was separated. And so when Mary, of course, was a sinner, and she here states so clearly that God is her Savior. And that's who you and I need as well. And I would ask before we go any further today, is the Lord God your Savior today? Because that is why Jesus came into this world. He came to save. He didn't come as a soldier. He didn't come as some great statesman. He didn't come as a great leader, although in many sense, in a sense, he is the leader. He's the leader of his people. But he came into this world as a Savior.

[7 : 44] Jesus Christ, the Savior, as we'll go on, God willing, next week to see this great declaration that the angels made unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior. And so this, of course, is at the very heartbeat of the gospel. Do you have the Savior? And I would appeal to anybody in here today who has been under the gospel for years, and who knows the gospel story inside out, who would be able to tell people, who would ask, who is Jesus, that you could go to the Bible, you could take them to chapter and verse, and show them who Jesus Christ is. And you believe in your mind that what the Bible says is true, and you believe that Jesus is a Savior of sinners. And you can quote John 3, 16, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. You can quote it, you know it.

But, the question comes back, is Jesus your Savior? Is he your Savior? Not just our Savior, but your Savior, personally, your Savior. Well, thank the Lord that you know what you do know. But don't rest there until you come to know the Savior as your very own Lord and Savior. Well, Mary obviously knew him as her Savior.

And so we also see then the great joy and thankfulness in Mary's heart. It's really just overflowing. My soul magnifies the Lord. And what she can't get over is that the Lord not only saved her, but looked down upon her humble condition. She was somebody who had very little of this world's goods. Very obvious from that that they were quite a poor couple who were engaged, Mary and Joseph, that they had very little. And Mary cannot get over how God has chosen her to honor her in this way. My dear friend, I would like to think that if you today are a believer, that you are constantly thanking the Lord just like Mary did for having had mercy upon you, for saving you. Did you today thank the Lord for the salvation that he brought into your life? Is it possible that you came to church today as a believer and didn't thank God for this salvation?

Mary couldn't stop thanking the Lord. And you know, we ought not either to stop thanking the Lord if we are his children, if we've been saved by grace. Sometimes the familiarity of our salvation is such that we just take it for granted. And we trudge on. And the newness and the wonder and the thrill and the great blessing and the future is sometimes becomes hazy. And we go through the motions and our vitality and our spirituality seems to be at a very low ebb. Oh, my friend, I hope this morning that you've thanked the Lord for saving you if you are a child of God.

It's good to give the Lord thanks. We've often said that before. The Lord is looking for our thanks. Remember, on another occasion, we're looking at when Jesus healed these ten lepers.

[11 : 27] They went away to show themselves to the priest. And as they went on their way, they discovered they were healed. And remember, only one, a Samaritan, came back to thank the Lord. And remember these words of Jesus. As this Samaritan fell down before him with a loud voice returning thanks for the healing. Jesus asked the question, where are the nine? Jesus healed ten.

But only one came back to give him thanks. And Jesus is asking, where are the other nine who were healed? You see, the Lord takes note of when we thank and when we don't thank.

And if the Lord is seeing that he is filling our lives with many blessings and we are not returning thanks to him, there may come a day when these blessings will cease.

And sometimes we don't realize the blessings we have until they are taken from us. There was a time when the Lord was warning his people about these very things.

Of course, that doesn't mean, don't get me wrong, that it's only because we don't return thanks to the Lord that the Lord sometimes takes away the privileges and blessings.

[12 : 53] In his own mysterious providence and for his own glory, he will sometimes take away from those who praise him and those who thank him.

There was no home that we read about that Jesus loved like the home in Bethany. Maybe there were others, but we don't read about it. But he loved that home because he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

And yet, Lazarus was taken away. We've often seen that in the history of the church. Things that are mysterious. Things that are strange. Things we don't understand.

But God knows because God is a great picture. A great plan. You see, through the death of Lazarus, many Jews were going to come to salvation. And that was a big picture.

God always has a big picture. Even although we may not understand it, as our own life is affected. Because we often just see what we can see.

[13 : 51] What we can understand. And our understanding is often very limited. But let us give the Lord thanks. Thanks for the many spiritual blessings that we receive.

Do you thank the Lord for his patience with you? Do I thank the Lord for his patience with me? Because he is?

We so often let the Lord down. By what we are. By what we do. By what we don't do.

If other people were to treat us. If your family was to treat you. In the way that you treat the Lord.

How would you react? If other people every day. If other people every day. Were treating you in the way that you treat the Lord. How would you react? I'm sure there would be times when you'd say.

[14 : 55] I don't know if I can take any more of this. This. This person is just letting me down. All the time. And yet the Lord is forever patient with us.

Do we thank him. For his long suffering. For his patience. Do we thank him for the wisdom that guides us. As you look back over your life.

It's often amazing isn't it. When you stop and think. And you see how the Lord closed this door. And opened that door. And some of the decisions. And some of the choices you made. When you look back.

You're amazed at his wisdom. The way that he guided you along the way. Do you give him thanks. For these things. Do you thank him for all the promises in the word.

This word is full. Of his promises. Rich glorious promises. Do you thank him for the word. How precious is this word to you today.

[15 : 57] You remember. Do you think about it. That there are places. In this world. Where the believers. Cannot meet the way. That you and I meet today. We can walk here freely.

We are not meeting. Intimidation on the street. We are not in fear. At this moment. Of somebody bursting in. Maybe with a gun.

Maybe shooting. Maybe going to take us off to prison. Maybe the law coming. And imprisoning us. Because of what we're doing. Places where people do not have the freedom.

To have the word of God. We have it every day. We can open it. We can walk openly with it. Do we thank him. For these privileges.

These opportunities. These blessings. That we have day by day. Or are we just taking it for granted. Do we just say. Oh well. That's the way it goes.

[16 : 55] Or do we really take this to heart. My dear friend. If you're here today. And you do not have Jesus Christ.

As your Lord and Savior. You also have a cause for thanksgiving. For thanking the Lord. That you're under the gospel. For thanking the Lord. That the opportunity. Is set before you.

Thanking the Lord. For the invitation. To receive Jesus as Savior. To hear that great call. In the gospel. Come unto me. All you that labor.

And are heavy laden. And I will give you right. Him that cometh unto me. I will in no wise cast out. Isn't that wonderful. That today. You have this opportunity.

What an occasion for thanksgiving. Well Mary. As we come back to that. And then moves. From herself. And thanking the Lord personally.

[17 : 52] For what he has done in her life. Then moves on. And is recognizing. What the Lord is doing. Generation after generation. With his people. That he is extending his mercy.

Isn't that wonderful. His mercy. Is new. Every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

Isn't that a wonderful thought. Imagine if God's mercy. Were to run out. Imagine if we were told. That after so many. So many years.

That God's mercy. Would be limited. That there would be only. Mercy extended. To some people. But not to others. But his mercy.

Is new. Every morning. Oh my dear friends. Praise the Lord. For that. And Mary also saw. That God. In his power. And in his sovereignty.

[18 : 47] Is the Lord. Who turns everything. Upside down. That he changes things. Around. That he moves things. Around. Here we see. There the weak. And the humble. Those are the ones.

Who are exalted. And these are the ones. That are raised up. The poor. In fact. Are the ones. Who are rich. And the. The rich are those. Who are sent away empty. And we see.

How the Lord. Is able to. To. Work things. In this world. It's quite amazing. You know. That's. Again. Even with regard.

To the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. The Lord. Tells us. That. That. Many of the wise. Reject the gospel. Many of the rich.

Reject the gospel. That's a solemn thought. But that's actually. What happens. Because people. In their own wisdom.

[19 : 44] They look at the gospel. And they think. It's foolishness. And many people. Who are rich. See no need. Of a savior. Because their own riches.

Give them strength. And security. As they see it. Now of course. That doesn't mean. That no wise. Are ever saved. Of course they are. That doesn't mean.

That those who are rich. Are never saved. Of course they are. But the Lord. Is sending out a warning. With regard to these things. And so we often see. How the Lord.

Turns things upside out. Anyway. Mary stayed with Elizabeth. For three months. And then from verse 57. To 66. It tells us. About the birth. Of John the Baptist. Just look at that.

It's all very straight. Set out before us. And we find. That a crowd. Had gathered. Now the same. For. The time came. For Elizabeth. To give birth. And she bore a son.

[20 : 38] And her neighbors. And relatives. Heard that the Lord. Had shown great mercy to her. And they rejoiced with her. It's very important. My friends. That we rejoice. With those who rejoice.

And we weep. With those who weep. We should share. In people's joys. And in people's sorrows. And that's what Jesus did. In this world. When he lived. In this world. We find him.

We find him. At the wedding. Rejoicing. In the place of rejoicing. And we find him. At the grave. Weeping. So that Jesus. Entered into people's. Experiences.

In both the joys. And in the sorrows. And so. Should we. And of course. When the time came. For the baby. To be given the name. They of course.

Were suggesting. The people were saying. Zachariah. After his father. That was the family name. And obviously. The name that had. Run through. She was saying. No. John. But they were saying.

[21 : 32] There's no John. In your family. And she said. No. His name will be John. And then. Of course. Zachariah. Made signs.

And he asked. For this writing tablet. And he wrote John. And that would indicate. I tend to think. The fact that he made signs. That he wasn't just dumb. But that he was deaf. As well.

That. They made. And they would have called him. We read there. And they made signs. To his father. Enquiring. What he wanted him to be called.

Now. If he. If he. If he wasn't deaf. They wouldn't have made signs. They would have just said to him. What. What are you going to call him. But the fact that they're making signs.

Would indicate that when. Zachariah. Was. Struck dumb. That he was also struck deaf. As well. Or else. They wouldn't be making signs. So you can imagine.

[22 : 27] That for all these months. It must have been a very difficult world. That Zachariah. Was plunged into. Where he couldn't hear. And he couldn't speak. But when he wrote. The name John. And remember.

This was. Now we see. That Zachariah. Is believing. It was because of his unbelief. That he was struck dumb. But now he is believing. And he writes.

John. My friend. There are times. When the Lord. Has to take us aside. And that's what happened. To Zachariah. And in these times.

Zachariah. Was taught. I believe. He was taught a lot. You know. There are times. When we're taken aside. As well. We're looking at that. On Thursday night. At the prayer meeting. Looking at.

Elijah. When he was at the brook. Cherith. Elijah went on. To become a mighty man. Performing. The most awesome miracles. But before that.

[23 : 27] God took him away. Into the place. Of total isolation. Nobody. For weeks. For probably months. Saw Elijah.

Can you imagine that? I'm sure. Many of us here. Have spent a night. By a river. Whether it may be. We've gone fishing. Or maybe we've been. Just hiking. And it's great. And you enjoy. The peace.

The tranquility. For a night. You and I. Wouldn't enjoy it. For weeks. And months. Away up. In the eerie. Silence.

Of the mountains. With just the stream. Bubbling away. Until eventually. It also ran dry. That's where Elijah was. God was at work. In Elijah. As he was.

At work. In the likes. Of Moses. Of Moses. Who was away. For years. And years. As he was at work. In David. As he was hiding. In the caves. From Saul. As he was at work. In Joseph.

[24 : 22] As he was languishing. In the prison. And here he is at work. In Zachariah. In his deafness. And in his dumbness. There are many times. The Lord will take us aside.

In order to. Work in us. Our. Growth. In grace. Our development. As a believer. Is more important. To the Lord. Than anything else. For you personally.

You may have other aims. And ideas. About life. And there may come times. When your life. Goes in a different direction. To anything you ever anticipated. Or expected.

And you're saying to yourself. What on earth is going on? And you feel that you're achieving nothing. You feel that you're doing nothing. And you're saying to yourself. Or why?

Because I wanted to do this. And I wanted to do that. For the Lord. And the Lord is. Maybe he's not saying it to you just now. But the Lord's at work. And he's taking you aside. And it's as you're aside.

[25 : 19] That you're going to learn. Because the Lord has a great purpose. And a great plan. Not only for you. But for others. Through you. And the Lord so often works.

In this way. And I believe that that's how he was working. In Zachariah. And Zachariah. Then filled with the spirit. Begins to prophesy. Just to highlight.

Two or three of the things that he said. That the Lord has visited. And redeemed his people. Now as we know. To redeem. Is to buy back. To buy back.

Something that you once had. That's what the Lord has done. Because you know. Remember. When God made us. Originally. When man was made.

Man was made. In the image of God. And knowledge. Righteousness. And holiness. Perfect. Upright. Walking in obedience with God. Man fell. Crashed.

[26 : 15] Ruined. Lost. And God came. And he visited. In order to bring back. To buy back. And that's what Jesus did.

Jesus paid. The price. And that is why the offer of the gospel goes out. Without money and without price. Come. The word says. Buy and eat.

Buy wine and milk. Without money. And without price. In a sense it's priceless. The offer of the gospel. But the price has been paid.

Jesus paid it. He paid it. All. And that is why we are redeemed. We have been bought back. By Jesus. So that's what Zachariah is saying.

And then he says. A triumph. In verse 69. Who has raised up a horn of salvation for us. Here is a symbol of victory. That's where the horn was. And it's wonderful to know.

[27 : 14] That this is what Jesus will do. And that Jesus has done. He has won victory. Not great today to know. Because there are times. Times. That you feel.

I don't know. Whether I will be a victorious Christian. You might feel today. That victory. As far as your Christian living. Is very far away from you.

Maybe today you feel defeated. You feel deflated. You feel that you're trudging. You feel that the lessons that you learned in the past. You have failed to take hold of.

And that Christian. Your Christian vitality. Is just. It's all gone. And you wonder. Where is it going to end? If this is the way.

It's going to go. Am I just going to be on a spiral. Downward cushion. No. The Lord says. It's salvation. It's victory. And he'll see to it.

[28 : 15] Just as he has seen to saving you. Remember this salvation. When the Lord visits with salvation. He visits with victory. And although today you may be feeling like that.

In the end. You will be a victor. And you will wear the victor's crown. Because the Lord enables. By his grace.

His people to overcome. And then we go on. And just to highlight one or two things. In verse 76 and 77. We see there. The great. So he gives knowledge of salvation to his people.

In the forgiveness of their sins. Isn't that wonderful? Sins forgiven. And the idea there is to dismiss a debt. That's kind of what the word means.

In that forgiveness. Dismissing a debt. Just. That's it. There you are. And you've got a pile of debts. And you're saying to yourself. I can't pay.

[29 : 15] The creditors have called you in. Time to pay. I can't pay. And it's here the Lord is saying. No. All these debts.

They're dismissed. They're gone. Gone. Why are they gone? Well we mentioned that earlier. Because Jesus bore them upon himself. It's in the. It's all tied into the paying the price.

And buying back. And Jesus has paid the price. It's like somebody. If you have all these debts. And you're saying. I can't pay. And somebody comes in and says.

Well I'll pay. I'll write out. What do you want? What's a check? I'll write it out for you. There it is. You're free. Dismissed. To go free. Because the debt.

Has all been paid. So we find this. And that forgiveness. And finally. We see there. This divine visit. Because of the tender mercy of our God.

[30 : 10] Whereby. The sunrise shall visit us from on high. Isn't that lovely? Beautiful description. In AV. It's got the day spring. The sunrise. Has visited us from on high.

Here was this world in darkness. Spiritual darkness. Moral darkness. Just in darkness. And the sunrise. The sunrise is fairly slowly here.

In the Middle East. It rises a lot quicker. You can. You plunge from light into darkness. And vice versa. From darkness into light. A lot quicker than here. It's much more gradual here.

The sun. The sinking sun. Sometimes takes quite a while to go down. And more in the. If you're down sort of. In some parts of the world. I suppose. Maybe closer to the equator.

It's incredible. How quickly. The sun is going down. Then all of a sudden. It's gone. But the one thing about the sun. When it rises. There you are in darkness. And if you have ever spent.

[31 : 10] A night. Outside. If you've been out. Supposing you were. Hiking. Or walking. Or you were. Spent a night fishing. And you're going to get up. Very early to start. It's amazing.

It's amazing. Or if you're making your way back. If supposing you were out. And you're making your way back. Through the moors. In the early. Just as dawn comes. There's a world of shadows.

And gradually the shadows begin to go. And everything begins to take a clarity. And you're seeing. Shapes and things. And you say. Oh that's a tree. And then you're beginning to see.

And everything. The silhouettes in the distance. Become clearer and clearer. And everything then. Comes into sharp focus. And within a short time. There is no. No darkness.

Everything is absolutely clear. That's what Jesus has done. That's what Jesus. Has brought into our lives. He has come to dispel the darkness.

[32 : 08] And that is why. When a person becomes a Christian. It all becomes so clear. You might be sitting here today. And saying you know. I hear you talking about Jesus as Savior.

I want to be saved. But there's a fog in it. There's something I just can't get hold of. You know when you're converted. It all becomes so clear.

And you're saying to yourself. How couldn't I have seen that before? For the simple reason. That the sunrise. That Jesus has come into your heart. Into your life. And made it clear. Of course there are still things.

That we won't understand. But. There's a clarity. There's a light. And Jesus is the sunrise. That is why he says.

I am the light of the world. To guide our feet. Into the way of peace. Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that the way we want to walk? To guide our feet.

[33 : 11] Into the way of peace. If you were to ask the world. If you were to go around. All the cities of this nation today. And say. How would you like to walk through this world?

Would you like to have your feet guided. Into the way of peace? I reckon 98% of people would say. Yeah. Give me that.

There may be one or two. Who do not want peace in life. But the vast majority of people. Would love that. People say. How could I get that?

To have my feet guided. Into the way of peace. That's exactly what I want. Give me that. Well it's here. In the Bible. In Jesus. Jesus is the one who came.

To bring that peace. And he's able to do that. And bring you that peace personally. And guide your feet. Throughout life. In the way of peace.

[34 : 07] Let us pray. Lord our God. We give thanks for. This great word. That teaches us. How things really are. And shows us the way to go. We pray that we may.

Find this Christ for ourselves. That we may believe in him. That we may receive him. That we may accept him. And we pray that there will be. A willingness within our heart.

To follow him all the days of our life. Bless us richly we pray. Do us good. And take away our sin. Take us all home safely. In Jesus name we ask. All these things.

Amen.