

Mary's Song (The Magnificat)

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: 03 December 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] two readings, but for simplicity we'll stick with one, and so please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter one.

We're going to, as you make your way there, I'll let you know what we're going to read. We're going to be reading Mary's song, the Magnificat. The other reading was going to be Hannah's Prayer. The reason for reading Hannah's Prayer and Mary's song together is to highlight the fact that Mary's song is really a duplication of Hannah's Prayer.

Not word for word, but it almost parallels all the way in the type of praise that is offered up by God. And this is because Hannah is in a particular position, and Mary also, though uniquely different. So we're going to pick it up here in Luke chapter one, beginning at verse 46. Now hear God's word. And Mary said, sorry, do I need to, do I need to, I don't need to, from, in case you weren't here this morning, we've already covered the bit where Mary's been told that she is with child from the Holy Spirit, and that the child is, so we know that, yes?

[1 : 29] So at this point, her song is this, and Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

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 away empty. 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 then verse 56 says, and Mary remained with her, that is Elizabeth, about three months and returned to her home. If I can just repeat what I said this morning just briefly by way of introduction to Mary's song, it would simply be this, that when God makes a promise, at some point that promise has to be kept.

[3 : 09] So when God makes a promise in the Old Testament, at some point that promise in the future, here in the New Testament, well actually Mary's still in the Old Testament, but we call Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John New Testament books, even though the New Testament doesn't begin until, you know, the death of Christ and the communion.

This is the new covenant in my blood, says Jesus. Up until that point, they're still in the Old Covenant, but you know what I mean, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The point is, is that if God makes a promise back in the day, and he fulfills it in a later period, that that is something that we believe that he will do, and indeed he does do.

But for Joseph and Mary, they had to come to understand that God is keeping his promise. It just so happens that he's keeping his promise through them. Joseph and Mary were the very people whom God was going to keep his promise in.

Mary, in particular, is the virgin that God promised would conceive a child back in Isaiah's day, and now Mary not only has to come to understand that God is fulfilling his promise, but God is actually keeping his promise in her and through her.

And it's, I guess, in many ways, it's one thing to believe a promise at a distance, or to see even the promise fulfilled in somebody else's life. But it's altogether quite a different thing to believe that God is keeping his promise through you.

[4 : 36] I mean, that's a step of challenge and of faith, and the need for a special revelation. And so, Mary, at this point, has had the angel come to her, and Gabriel has spoken to her saying that

you're with child of the Holy Spirit.

He is the Son of the Most High. He is God the Son. He has come. He will, you know, his kingdom will last forever. And this is whom you are bringing into the world.

Now, I always like to think that when Jesus was carried in the womb of his earthly mother, Mary, of the verse over in Colossians, that we're told that the world was created through Jesus and for Jesus, and in Jesus, he holds everything together.

I find that a staggering truth, a wonderful truth of what is actually happening. So think about it in this way, that as Mary is carrying the Lord Jesus Christ in her womb, at that very moment, the Lord Jesus Christ is upholding Mary to do so.

What? Okay. At the very moment, Mary decides to breastfeed her son, because that's what you would have done, right?

[5 : 54] At that very moment, the Lord Jesus Christ is upholding Mary in order for that to actually happen. So here you have the care of a mother towards a child, but that child is upholding the mother in order for her to do all that she is doing.

And that in itself is just staggering, that the Savior of the world, the one through whom the world was created and created for, is holding all things together even in the womb.

Okay? And when he's born and he's growing up, he's holding all things together even at that point. Even as he is wrapped in those cloths, lied in a manger, he is holding everything together.

We talk about the sovereignty of God. We talk about the power of Jesus Christ. But that's what it means in reality. Okay? As Mary is pregnant with child, Jesus is upholding her pregnancy.

Jesus is upholding her life. That as she gives birth to the child, Jesus is upholding that event that brings him into the very world.

[7 : 06] Now, Mary, whether her theology goes to that extent, no one knows at this point. But Mary has had to have special revelation to convince her that God is fulfilling his promise through her.

Okay? He's not just fulfilling his promise, but he is fulfilling his promise through her. And so it's quite clear when you look at Mary's song, what she understands about what God is actually doing.

She understands that God was always going to fulfill his promise. But look at how she understands what the promise fulfilled looks like. Look at the things that she mentions.

Look at the things that she focuses on. She focuses on such things as fear and of mercy, those of humble estate and those who are proud, those who are high and rich and those who are low, those who have their thrones, the mighty, and those who are of humble estate.

In other words, she begins to see Jesus, the coming of Jesus, in a very particular way, who's going to do a very particular thing. The promise of God to Mary looks like her song.

[8 : 24] We reduce Christmas and even Easter often simply down to the forgiveness of sins. And there's nothing wrong with that. But a reduction of any kind down to one truth is to ignore the other wonderful truths that come with it.

So as you listen to Mary's song, listen, not with assumptions, but listen to what she is singing. So she's already been told that the child that she's carrying is the son of the Most High, that he will occupy the throne of David, that he is one who will have power and authority over all.

And yes, he is the one who forgives the people for their sins. But here's how good Mary's theology actually is.

This is how well Mary knows her Bible. Mary, he knows her Bible so well that she models her song on Hannah's prayer.

Hannah's prayer back in 1 Samuel 2 begins like this. My heart exalts in the Lord. My heart exalts in the Lord.

[9 : 37] My horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. Now listen to the beginning of Mary's song. My soul magnifies in the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

See, Mary knows what she's talking about. Mary understands, just like Hannah understood, what God is doing, what God is actually up to.

Hannah knew that God was always going to reverse the conditions of his people. He was always going to reverse the conditions that his people lived under.

He is the God who can turn the tables at any moment, at any time in human history. Mary understands in her song that while God is the God of salvation, that God is actually going to be the God who turns the tables.

The rich and the poor are going to hold different positions when God comes. Mary also understands that when God comes, things are going to be different for a lot of people.

[10:47] Hannah also understood that when God acts, he changes everything, everything. We tend to think that when God works in this world, that some people go unaffected.

They don't go unaffected at all. God, God, we tend to think that God, you know, like the man in Psalm 73, which I find very similar to myself at times, you look out onto the world and as you look out onto the world, you think, God, how can you let that person get away with that? It doesn't seem to make any sense at all. But Mary here teaches us to see things very differently. So here's a couple of lessons.

Here's the first one. While this is a personal account of Mary and her song is unique, her song teaches us that we're included in the promise.

Okay? Mary's song is unique. What happened to Mary is unique. Kezia? And what happens to the rest of us may not be as unique as Mary, but nevertheless, the promises include us.

[12:03] The other lesson here is to pay attention to what is said rather than what is not said. Why do I say that? Well, there's a big difference between knowledge and understanding.

God wants you to know everything, but he understands that you're not going to understand everything. There is a difference between knowledge and understanding. In the same way a person can sit down and hear everything that you have said to them, they may only understand 50% of what you've said to them.

They know it all in that they've heard it all, but they don't necessarily understand it all. God wants to hear everything that he has said, but he also appreciates that we live in a world where we all learn at different speeds.

And therefore, our understanding may not be complete, but our knowledge ought to be. Why? Well, because you can only understand what you know. And if you don't have the knowledge, you cannot have the understanding that comes with it.

It's one thing to say, I have all the knowledge, but I'm still learning. Okay? And that's where we all should be. But it's another thing to say, well, I understand everything, but I don't know everything.

[13:13] Okay? If you get 10% of the information and you understand 10%, you understand 100% of everything that you've been told, but you only understand 10%.

What God wants us to be is to be, to take in the full 100%, to know it all, to hear it all, and grow in our understanding.

And the reason for that is, is because if you don't, you will fill in the gaps where you're lacking in understanding and knowledge with your assumptions. And the assumption will be this, that Jesus came to save me from my sin, which is true.

Very true. The lesson here, however, that Mary puts across is that she doesn't mention that per se. She doesn't seem to focus on that fact of the Savior coming.

What Mary focuses on here is a kingdom that comes, a power exchange of humble people being lifted high and of rich, proud people being brought low.

[14:17] To put Mary's song into a sentence, it would be, the kingdom of God has come in the Son of God. This is a kingdom coming with Jesus.

He will sit on the throne of his father David, and it's a kingdom that will last forever. This is a kingdom exchange. And as I said, as you look out into the world, you may not feel as though we're living in God's kingdom.

You may not feel as even if God has got everything under his control. You may walk around the streets and think, how can God be in control of Westerhailes?

How can God be in control of Scotland? Look at all this mess. Look at everything that's going on. Well, we don't have the patience of God, and neither do we have the understanding of God.

But Mary's song clearly points out with the coming of Jesus is the coming of a kingdom. It is a coming of a time when God reverses the conditions of the people that belong to him and the people that don't belong to him.

[15:24] One of the reasons we can't see this is because we try and look at it with natural eyes rather than faith in God's word. To use the illustration that I used this morning, you can't see the stars in the night sky at 12 o'clock in the afternoon, right?

Because you're naturally limited by the sunlight. The sunlight, the stars are always there, and the moon comes out at night, but it only comes out at night to your understanding, to your perception.

The moon is always there. The moon's there even in the daytime. The issue is you can't see it in the daytime because of the sunlight. Okay? It takes nighttime, it takes things to get dark in order to see some other things.

And God here wants you to listen to Mary's song in faith and truly understand that the kingdom of God has come. I mean, do you think that when Mary brought Jesus up, and obviously he didn't begin his ministry until he was 30 years old, that she would have expected the sort of things to happen to Jesus that actually happened to Jesus?

Do you think that as she saw her son, granted, God the son given to her, but as she saw her son dying on the cross for the sins of people, that that looked like a kingdom of God coming?

[16:45] Do you think that as she saw there and looked at her son, you know, Mary, did you know, as the song goes, which is a fantastic song, do you think Mary knew?

Do you think Mary, as she looked at the cross, saw the victory of God? Well, it's hard to appreciate what Mary understood and what she didn't understand, what actually went through her mind, but if you listen to her mouth, if you listen to what comes out of her mouth, not her mind, and if you listen to her song, she clearly understands that victory belongs to God.

She clearly appreciates that the victory belongs to the Lord, without a doubt. And so this is why, secondly, it's a song of praise and of thanksgiving.

Notice how she begins, my soul magnifies the Lord. She's not sad, but happy. She's not miserable, but full of joy. She's full of thankfulness and expectation.

Her soul magnifies the Lord, her spirit rejoices in God, her savior. Mary was a godly woman, but she was not a sinless woman.

[17:57] We know that a section, if you go back into church history and in the Roman Catholic Church, they will want to argue that Mary was indeed sinless, and you have the assumption of Mary, where Mary is taken up to be with God, and because she is sinless, and she had to be that way in order to carry the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we can go into the theology of that perhaps another time, but again, let's not assume, let's pay attention to her song. Mary includes herself as a sinner because she includes herself in the context of God being her savior.

Well, you have to be in the position of needing salvation to be able to call God your savior. Okay?

You have to be able to be a father in order for a child to call you father.

Okay? There has to be that corresponding relationship. You have to be able to be a boss of employees for your employees to call you boss. Right?

That's how it works. Well, when Mary says, God, my savior, she's not only telling you something that's true about God, but she's telling you something that's true about herself. God, my savior, the word my gives it away.

[19:17] The word my locates to us where she locates herself in the people of God. I'm a sinner just like everyone else. I may be favored. God may have done this through me.

I may be godly, but I am still a sinner in need of God saving me. She then goes on to say, verse 48, that not only me, but from now on, all generations will call me blessed.

All generations will look down, not only do I know that I'm blessed, but all generations after me will be blessed. But then she acknowledges verse 49, that all generations after me, they will be blessed as well.

That God's mercy for those who fear him will come on generation upon generation. Now, Mary could be looking back into the past and say, this is what God has done in the past, but it's clear to say that God will also do this in the future.

Mary is a blessed woman, she is a favored woman of God, but she is a sinner in need of salvation herself. So she includes herself in the song along with all the other people that need saving.

[20:31] God is using her, he is fulfilling his promise through her, but he is saving her just like he saves the rest. And then she says this, verse 50, and mercy is for those who fear him.

I want to encourage you that the fear of God is the very thing that you should be nurturing in your life, and you should be nurturing in each other's lives, to fear God.

The scripture says that there is forgiveness with the Lord that he might be feared. Now, I would never have put those two together. Think about it. There is forgiveness with the Lord that he might be feared.

I mean, what a strange couple of truths to put together to appreciate. That there is forgiveness with God that he might be feared. Well, let me try and put it this way. When you understand that God is in control of all things, it's right to fear him.

But more importantly, when you understand that God is in control of all things, including the very condition of your life, that only God and God alone is able to change the condition of your life, that should produce fear in you.

[21 : 39] So there is forgiveness with the Lord that he might be feared. Because only God is able to change the condition of your life. You're not able to. I'm not able to change mine. And we're not able to change each other's.

Only God and God alone is able to change the condition of our life. There is mercy for those who fear him. Why fear?

Well, now I understand my position before God, that it's only ever going to change if God does something. Only God can change the condition of my life.

This is what Hannah understood in her prayer, that only God can change the condition that people live under and their own life. Mary understands exactly the same thing.

To fear God then is to depend on him. It is not to be frightened of him. too often fear in relationship, human relationships, can I say, leads to uncertainty.

[22 : 39] I've been around long enough now to understand that in some relationships where people are married or they've been together for a long time and fear is there, then that kind of fear leads to uncertainty.

I don't know what he'll do next. I don't know what she'll do next. I don't know what's going to happen. So that kind of fear and those type of relationships that leads to uncertainty is not the kind of fear that God promises that we should have.

This fear here leads to receiving mercy. The fear that God expects us to have leads to the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness and mercy that we receive from God through fearing him is assurance, not uncertainty.

To fear God is to have some of the greatest assurance in your life that you could ever have, not uncertainty. So to fear the Lord is not a terrible thing, something to avoid or even to be frightened of, it's something to embrace because fear, Mary says, leads to God's mercy.

Fear leads to forgiveness. The fear of the Lord leads to godly wisdom. In fact, the fear of the Lord in all circumstances leads to the blessings of the Lord, which are good.

[23 : 58] So when you think of fearing God, do not think that God is expecting you to live a life of uncertainty. To fear God is to live a life of full assurance, total assurance in the Lord.

There is forgiveness with the Lord that he might be feared. Mary says, and his mercy is for those who fear him. Fear him, Mary says.

Notice then the next thing that Mary opens her eyes to. That he is a God who is able to bring down the mighty and uplift the humble.

That he is a God of real blessing. She expresses that God is her savior, and that is true, but she expresses that God is everyone's savior, in the sense of those who fear him, of those who have mercy, of those who fear God and receive his mercy.

In other words, what Mary is proclaiming to us is that God is a God of blessing. Okay? God is a God of blessing to you. This is the God that comes into the world.

[25 : 06] He has come to bless. And so with that, we conclude, but it's an open conclusion. Notice how Mary's song doesn't imagine a future, but actually foretells the future.

Okay? He has shown, He has done this in the past, but remember, this is something that God is doing by keeping His promise. The reason why Mary sings this in this way is because she understands that if God has done all this in the past, and now He's doing this now, what is He going to do in the times to come?

Mary understands by quoting Abraham at the very end, He spoke to our fathers Abraham and to his offspring forever. Surely she would have understood the promises that were made to Abraham include us, the generations that are to come.

Now, Mary is just one of those unique people that gets to be the right person in the right place at the right time. I, however, am never that person, it seems to be.

I'm never in the right place at the right time and that. But that's how history and promises work. Let me explain. Mary just so happens to live at a time where not only does she know that God made the

promise, but she's living in the time where God is fulfilling the promise.

[26 : 30] But you think about all those people that lived before Mary. They appreciated that God made the promise and they lived every day of their life waiting for it. We look back on the promises that God made and think, well, we're just waiting for the next ones to be fulfilled.

Mary is bang in the middle. Mary not only understands the promises of God, but she gets to live in them, being fulfilled. We simply, not in a negative way, but simply look back and rejoice in faith that they have been fulfilled at this time.

So here's the exhortation. God fulfills his promises through his people. Here's the parallel between Mary and you.

What God does may be unique to Mary, but it's not isolated to Mary's life. Only one woman in the whole of human history could be the virgin that would bring forth Jesus Christ.

It had to happen somewhere at some time in some nation to some people group to some woman. It just so happened that God chose Mary. It had to happen somewhere and this is where it happened.

[27 : 49] But if you think about it just for a moment, just open your mind and heart just for a moment, how does God do anything in this world? Is it not through you? Is it not through God keeping his promises to use you, even in the local church?

So here we are praising Mary for how God used her or praising God for how he used Mary, and yet we sit here thinking, wouldn't it have been nice for it to be used like that? Well, I'm not so sure it would have been nice to be, isn't it interesting that we all want God to use us, but we don't necessarily want God to use us like he used Mary.

We all want to do great things for God, but there's not too many of us who want to be a Solomon, or who want to be an Ezekiel, or a Jeremiah. We all want God to use us, but we want to pick and choose who we want to be and how he uses us.

Well, I'd imagine that we all want to be used by God, but not too many of us would want to be Mary. But nevertheless, it goes without saying that you are used by God.

Your life is never, ever wasted. God works out his promises, out his blessings, through you, to the people in the church, and to your neighbors outside of the church.

[29 : 04] That's how God continues to work in the world. Mary had to learn that God was fulfilling his promise, but she had to learn that he was fulfilling it through her.

Well, we should sit here or stand here this evening and realize the same thing, that while Mary's situation was unique, it isn't an isolated. God continues to work through his people, it's just in a different way now.

God uses you just like he did Mary, though he uses you in a different way. God works through you just like he worked through Mary. Why?

Well, because Christ came down to us where we are so that we can go to be where Christ is. We are the very mouthpiece of God on earth to proclaim that truth.

In short, and with this we'll finish, the incarnation is about God becoming man, but it's also about God dwelling in man.

[30 : 09] So the incarnation is about God becoming man to eventually God dwelling in man so that we can eventually dwell with God. That's the incarnation. That's Mary's song.

We belong to the king, the king of glory. Amen. Christ, you stand here this evening. But not only did God come and therefore he is with us, but he is also for us.

Amen.