

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER



Luke 1:45–55

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- A. Loves to Exalt God (Luke 1:46; 47–55)
- B. Humbles Oneself before God (Luke 1:47; 48–55)
- C. Clearly Believes God (Luke 1:48; 49–55)

During this Christmas time, I'm sure some of you think what kind of person Mary was. We don't know if she was shy or bold, timid or dauntless, whether she was a curious woman or a more laid back one. We don't know. Mary's outburst of praise in this passage in Luke shows what kind of woman she was in her heart. We might not be able to see her personality or outer physical features, but we see other things which in the end are more important. For the most important qualities are the ones we speak less about and the least important qualities are the ones we are preoccupied with.

Our world is more interested in what kinds of culture it shows in the way it dresses or talks. Our world is much more attentive to beauty, riches and strength. In essence we look at this world in a rather blind way, missing out on the most important elements of our lives. And if our mind is on such things which this world esteems, will not our plans and hopes have more to do with these things than others. For instance, in training your child, do you really focus on the pure and hidden qualities that please God, that in the end really matter, or are you more interested in them having lots of money and position? What are we chasing after in life? May the pus from the world be cleansed from our eyes to greatly esteem those things God esteems. There would be no Christmas story, no Christmas, if God didn't esteem those things which the world doesn't pay attention to.

During this Christmas time, I would like us to turn our hearts to Mary, the mother of Jesus to regain a clear perspective of what God wants in our hearts - more than comfort, security, college funds, musical talents, good jobs, etc.. She said a wonderful prayer. It is interesting that for Zacharias in Luke 1:67 it was a prophesy. We don't see this in the words of Mary. It is recorded as just being something she said. I like that for it can be much more accepted by each one of us for perhaps very few of us are prophets but all of us can speak. In her words we find a most marvelous spirit which God was well pleased to use. Though a young women probably about 15 to 20, we see the strong mature godly character in her life.

Let's look at the refreshing qualities that come alive in these words of Mary, the mother of Jesus. And please brothers, let us learn with our sisters, for we know that it is the heart that makes the difference in our lives. Let us look into her words, her prayer, and be careful to at least better understand three characteristics that enabled God to use Mary: her praise, humility, faith.

A. Loves to Exalt God (Luke 1:46; 47–55)

The first wonderful quality that Mary exuded that we should also possess is the heart to praise God. Praise is an essential part of prayer. Before a person understands praise, he just cannot understand what it means when Paul says "rejoice in the Lord always." It is only when you have a heart to praise God, that you begin the transfer of attention from upon your own life and circumstances to God's glorious presence.

Mary is just overwhelmed here. She has found that God wants to work in Mary's life; Her heart is taken back. Her deep real person - her soul, exalts the Lord. God has become a focus of all her excitement. He has become for her one in which she could never give enough praise. She has found the Lord as her personal Savior. God had mercy on her, and she was greatly moved.

She gets more specific as this Psalm continues. She speaks of how a glorious God would use her in such a wonderful event as the Incarnation. She is only a slave. She wonders at God's awesome ways. How could He use her? Why would He ever use her? Why would He even let her know of these things? God has done great things for her, and it has led her to the throne of God.

She is not just thinking of the blessings in her own life. She is hardly so narrow-minded to think that God's special work in her life is only for her sake or that she might feel fulfilled. It is for the sake of all of God's people. Notice verses 50, 52, and 53. His mercy is not just upon her life but upon generation after generation. Those who were poor will become rich; those that are hungry will be filled with good things.

Application

Some women are bitter against God for not using more of their gifts and talents, or why He has made women to be troubled with bearing children and trapped in the home. This attitude is so unfortunate. It is true the mother's work is rarely properly acknowledged. Fathers seem to be oblivious to it all. But sisters, do you not see that if it was just that one of your sisters could be chosen to bear the Messiah to be our Savior, that it is worth all the trouble? Or don't you understand that through you God raises up new lives?! I think there is much confusion today on the place of women in society. But when women can cherish how God wants to use them, then you will also be able to praise God as Mary. It might not be a Savior to be born; it won't be, but it still is a life to hold and care for. It is a child we can pray and hope that becomes mighty in loving and serving God.

Application

Isn't it true that many of us think it enough to be God's child. But you have not yet discovered that God wants to use every Christian. He has differently equipped us and placed us in various circumstances to do His will. If we think having eternal life is the sum total of our Christian lives, then we have missed out on an important aspect of Christian living. Service is not so special because we are important, but the realization that God wants to bring His blessing to others through your life. There are some with a perspective about them that somehow God saved them, but they never even dare to think that God would want to use them. But this is the truth. Step back into the awe of seeing God wanting to use you. Not only be stunned by His having you, but wanting to use you. Then you will see a heart of praise develop. Words of thanks and gratitude will naturally spring from your heart.

Only when God unlocks our minds to see the magic of His touch in this world will we find God's awesome presence. We will look beyond His good gifts to see His marvelous person. We will be more attracted not by His favors but by His presence. We will seek Him and again and again marvel at each sign of goodness sent our way, big or great. Whether it be a meal, a home, a bonus, a child, a Messiah, your heart will with every sign respond with an open heart of exaltation.

B. Humbles Oneself before God (Luke 1:47; 48-55)

The second important quality seen in Mary is a humble heart. Indeed, one cannot praise God with a prideful heart. This is self-evident. A prideful person likes all praise and attention to go to himself. They are self-admirers. The inner quality of humility is then of essence if we are to have a proper relationship with God, and we should not be surprised to discover it in Mary. In fact, in a Roget's Thesaurus, under "humble oneself" are four categories: humility, respect, piety and worship.

Humility is a most difficult word to define. The easiest way to define it is to make it the opposite of pride. Most synonyms used are not in the right context. Words like demean, disinterested, knuckle under, abase, etc. are used. They imply it is a mean and inferior position. To a degree this is right, but the Christian context gives honor to this label of humility. Mary said it in a good way in verse 48 “For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant.” She understands her position to the great Creator to be a slave, δουλος. A man or woman before his or her Maker lives in a humbled position. We live in deference to His will.

Even after God has dealt so abundantly with Mary, she is still a humbled woman. In fact, because she is humble, she becomes even more humbled at being so used by her Maker. She doesn't all of a sudden transform into a goddess because God chose her to be the Virgin Mother. She is not to be worshipped. She is blessed and that no one can deny or take away from her, but like Jesus Christ her Master, she lived a humbled life. She had no castle; she did not get on the talk shows. She knew all of this was not because she dreamed it up; God was at work, and she could take part in it. She was willing to do whatever God intended.

A truly humble heart will seek out God's wishes. This one will delight in what his Master wishes. Mary saw that even though she would be considered a slut because she was pregnant before marriage, that she was willing to take this shame so she could be part of God's plan. No matter what, she was ready. He does not fuss taking his part. He delights in the fact that he has a part at all.

Application

This brings us back to evaluating our own lives. Are we humble before God? Are we like Mary caught up in the service of God rather than trying to assert one's own way. Are we ready to stand out for the Lord as He would lead us? Evangelism is a act of service that can shame us by rejection. Living by God's righteous standards might put your job or reputation at stake. Even giving money as the Lord leads might put your investments for family and self as second place. But the humbled servant recognizes all that he has is of the Lord, and having it means it for Him to dispose of. We will gladly comply as Mary.

C. Clearly Believes God (Luke 1:48; 49–55)

We talked about faith last week. We saw that faith was the critical element of prayer and Christian life. Without faith at all, you have no Christian life. But having that faith, we must utilize it to please our Heavenly Father. And God is testing each of our hearts as to how we are going to respond to Him. Mary was tested here.

She knew God was a great God. Some say that it was because she didn't know the facts of life that she called this a miracle. This is ridiculous. Luke the physician wrote this narrative; he says in 1:4 that he was after “the exact truth.” He wrote it very clearly explaining how the Incarnation took place. It was not Joseph who impregnated her, but the Holy Spirit which would come upon her (Luke 1:34-35). After all, she did ask, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Sex education is not complicated; what is difficult is protecting a sanctified view of sex. Our government has twisted the issue and is causing havoc in our country. Mary was a virgin and this virgin status is unabashedly what God demands from every young person before marriage. Sexual approaches and intimacies out of marriage is wrong. But Mary had confidence before God precisely because she was a virgin. She was knowledgeable and faithful and this led to the confusion, not ignorance.

We shouldn't fear that we do not have enough faith. What He was asking of Mary to believe is more than He has asked us. Notice how God prepared her. We read how Zacharias and Elizabeth miraculously would have a child. Zacharias, however, questioned God's intention in verse 18. As a result Zacharias was silent until he named his child – John, John the Baptist. Mary took up the challenge and believed when told what would happen by the angel. This is what her relative was saying, being filled by the Spirit (see Luke 1:39-45). In verse 45 she is said to believe that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord. Blessing followed belief. We don't know what would have happened if she did not believe.

Actually, we see in her words that her faith is not just simply that she got pregnant, but as promised this Son of God would be born. She knew He was the hope Israel was looking for. She knew God had chosen her to bear the Messiah. This is the mystery of mysteries of how God became man. Notice how her faith generated great words. She had God's promises stored up in her heart and when she saw God pledging to fulfill them by sending His Son, she was just overjoyed. This is the key. She saw what God wanted to do and she believed it. She then accepted her part in God's great plan. She was going to be with child, and not with any child, but God's own Son. She believed and therefore was blessed. She knew this was to be the blessing to many many people, to the oppressed, to the lost, to the poor, to the humble. She believed the message.

Application

May we also take comfort from this miracle here in Mary's life so to welcome what God might want to do in our lives. God usually doesn't work in isolation. He seems to scatter miracles and great promises at different times. I wonder if this is not the time when He will raise up His church to make disciples around the world. I wonder if maybe we will see that some of the people who come to know the Lord in Oakland will be trained here and sent elsewhere to preach the gospel. This is just a beginning. We are given a promise and we respond. Will we not also have confidence like Mary that God will do great things because of His great mercy?! Will we express our discontent to God and in just living an average life? Will we not hope and expect Him to bear spiritual fruit from our lives?

Summary

So we join in with Mary. We praise God. We are humbled in God's presence. And we believe His Word. With exaltation, humility and belief, the world will be reached even in our generation. It is about time the church recognized what great things God has planned. We should be further humbled that He would use a small church in a small city to bring His glorious gospel around the world.

The simplicity and the humility of Christ's birth should cause each one of us to go forth in this Christmas wiping out our greed, recognizing that if the most basic care, rags and warmth and love was enough for Jesus in that manger, then anything more than these things are luxuries including what we call basic: portable playpens, pampers, mattresses, sheets, 20 outfits for each season. These things may not wrong if we with grateful hearts see them as more than our Savior had. But if God wills, we can be secure in the Lord's arms without all of these things. Why do we question how many children we can afford when God sees fit to give children irrelevant to our financial circumstances? Stand back and follow Jesus all the way.