

***"MY SOUL EXALTS THE LORD"***  
***LUKE 1:46-56***

After a second deployment in Iraq, Stacy Bare returned home but he wasn't doing well: he was drinking too much, thinking suicidal thoughts, and struggling to think about the future and manage life. "What am I doing with my life? What does it mean to be at home, a veteran, anyway?"

To try to distract himself and do something constructive he went on a hike with his brother. But they were arguing. The trail led to a ladder. "We climbed up, still shouting at one another," recalls Bare. "Then we looked up and wham!" Above them towered the **Druid Arch** — a sunset-colored outcrop in Utah's Canyonlands National Park. The men's jaws dropped. Then they laughed and hugged. "What were we even arguing about?" Bare recalls thinking.



Seeing something magnificent and transcendent redirects our minds and hearts and helps put all things in perspective. And seeing something magnificent also leads us to worship and praise. And that is exactly what Mary did when she met with Elizabeth after Gabriel had announced the conception of Christ, the Messiah, in her womb. Though she did not have a context for a virgin to be pregnant, she believed. And as she believed and as her understanding of the significance of God's blessing on her and the role He had given her grew, she also worshipped.

**When we talk** about biblical worship, we mean a response of submission and delight in God; that delight has two expressions —

- 1) ascribing honor and adoration to Him, and
- 2) living honorably for Him (it's both word and deed — something we say and something we do).

As you think about Mary, she had already expressed the desire to live for God as an act of worship (Lk. **1:38**) — and then she acted by going to Judah to visit Elizabeth as a reflection of her faith and trust. In Luke 1:46-56, she also expresses in words her submission and especially her delight in God. The background to this song gives us a motive for worship; the words of this song give us the content of worship.

***WORSHIP GOD IN WORD AND DEED.***

Mary's song guides us to worship by providing **four attributes** of God-honoring worship —

1. A Heart **PREPARED** for Worship (vv. 46-48)
2. A Contemplation of God's **INFINITE CHARACTER** (vv. 49-50)
3. An Anticipation of God's **GRACIOUS REVERSALS** (vv. 51-53)
4. A Reflection on God's **FULFILLED PROMISE** (vv. 54-55)

- Luke is a historian, recounting the story of Jesus, the Son of Man:
  - ✓ In chapters 1-2 Luke tells us the foundation of the story (prologue) and the promises of Christ in the story — and we will be in those promises for the next several weeks.
  - ✓ **In this passage**, Luke continues a series of songs which reflect confidence in God and gratitude toward God. Like many of the other songs of Scripture, they are designed to help us remain steadfast and faithful to the Lord. And they are expressions of delight in God.
  - ✓ In Mary's song we are encouraged to worship and discover four attributes of God-honoring worship...

**WORSHIP GOD IN WORD AND DEED.**

## **1. A Heart PREPARED for Worship (vv. 46-48)**

- Remember the background to this story —
  - ✓ Four hundred years of silence after Malachi...
  - ✓ Announcement to Mary (Lk. 1:26-38; esp. **vv. 28, 30-33**; note her acceptable “doubt” — v. 34).
  - ✓ Announcement to Joseph (**Mt. 1:18-25**; righteous, gracious, obedient man)
  - ✓ Affirmation and song of worship from Elizabeth (vv. 42-45)
  - ✓ These are teenagers — so young, yet obviously mature in their faith (and knowledge of Scripture)!
  - ✓ While this song quotes extensively from the OT, it parallels the setting and song of Hannah (**1 Sam. 2**).
- These verses are explosive and effusive in praise and gratitude (notice how she begins) —
  - ✓ ***My soul exalts the Lord.*** “Exalts” = “magnifies” = “*Magnificat*,” which is what this is often called...
    - The vb. **exalt** means “to make large” (Magnify can mean to take something small and make it appear large, or something large and make it appear “small” — comprehensible).
    - When used towards people/God it is praise because of that person's individual greatness.
    - The word **exalts** is also a present tense — this song is not something new, but the overflow of what she always and continually does.
    - The focus of her joy is not in the baby (whom she doesn't mention in the song), but **the Lord** (Master) who has sovereignly graced her with this responsibility.
  - ✓ ***My spirit has rejoiced*** (v. 47) = parallel to the previous phrase in v. 46 — Mary is being emphatic!
- Mary is ready to worship and demonstrates that readiness in three ways —
  - ✓ **Her song is constructed with OT references and quotations** (at least 12 ref's & 1 Sam. 1-2). These indicate that her mind is saturated with the truth of God. She had so contemplated Scripture that when she had reason to praise, the Scriptures “flowed” out of her (her blood was “Bibline...”).
    - She had no Bible in her home; all she had were the (Bible) songs she sang and the Scriptures she heard read in worship — and her mind is saturated with the book. That's exemplary for us.
    - Like the psalmists, she is ready to sing praise to the Lord —

- *Psa. 34:3 O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.*
- *Psa. 69:30 I will praise the name of God with song And magnify Him with thanksgiving.*

✓ **Her song reflects correspondence between her words and desires — *my soul...spirit* = Ps. 19:14.**

- She is inviting the examination of God of her soul — she is not being hypocritical.
- She is genuine. In her heart *and* with her words, she is thrilled with what God has done!
- (And remember that this comes at great cost & uncertainty.)
- When I sing, pray (publicly), talk in home group, do my words accurately represent my heart?

✓ **Her song contemplates the Lord with humility — *God my Savior*.**

- She does not say, “God, my co-redeemer...” She is not providing her own salvation.
- The Roman Catholic church teaches that she is, with Christ, a dispenser of salvation:

Her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes still further. “In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace.”

“This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation ....Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.” [Catechism, ¶967-69.]

- Mary recognizes that her personal need is the same as Israel’s corporate need — **salvation**. She does not dispense salvation; she receives salvation and points to the only Savior of men...
- Notice all the humble words: **Lord** (He is the master); **my Savior**; **humble state** (lowly service as the young, poor bride of an unknown carpenter); **bondslave** (lit., slave, v. 38); **count me blessed** (cf. v. 42; ≠ “I am worthy of worship...”). Had she meditated on verses like these?

- *Psa. 25:5 Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; For You I wait all the day.*
- *Psa. 106:21 They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt,*
- *Is. 12:2 “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid;  
For the LORD GOD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.”*
- *Mic. 7:7 But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.*

- No matter how God uses you (great or small), remember that you are ever dependent and needful of Him and His salvation. And He will give you the salvation you need.
- Mary prepared herself for worship by recognizing her need (sin) and going to the Savior...
- We don’t prepare ourselves for worship by asserting our greatness; we prepare ourselves (like Mary did) by asserting our weakness, emptiness, and neediness....

**Notice the next attribute of God-honoring worship —**

## 2. A Contemplation of God's INFINITE CHARACTER (vv. 49-50)

- Whenever you read the Bible, one of the questions you want to ask is, “what does this reveal about God?” You want to learn to enjoy and honor God’s nature — to become “big Godders.”
- We will not worship something that is small and unimportant...
- God was BIG to Mary. Three primary attributes of His character —
  - ✓ **He is the *Mighty One*** = OT history is filled with manifestation of God’s power:
    - Creation (Gen. 1-2)
    - The birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 21)
    - The plagues against Egypt (Exodus 7-12)
    - Crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River (Ex. 14; Josh. 3)
    - The miracles of Elijah, Elisha, and the visions of the prophets.
    - Cf. Pss. 106, 136; Stephen’s sermon (Acts 7). See Dt. 10:21; Ps. 71:19 — “who is like You?”
    - Mary thinks particularly of the great things He has done in *her* life — **for Me** (cf. vv. 34-35).
    - Do you contemplate and thank the Lord for the great works and privileges He has given you?
  - ✓ **He is the holy One** — ***His name is holy*** = Every action of His strength is consistent with His holiness.
    - As Mary contemplates His power in the incarnation, she recognizes God’s holiness in that action, and also His provision of holiness (Jesus came to be the righteousness we could not be).
    - This line likely comes from **Ps. 89:18**; cf. also 71:22; Prov. 9:10. He *is* holy and gives holiness.
  - ✓ **He is the merciful One. *His mercy is eternal...*** = (**Ps. 103:17**) I.e., His loyal, covenant love is for every generation of Israel. He is gracious. And no **generation** of Israel is exempt from His covenant.
    - (Though only those who **fear Him** will experience the fulness of that covenant.)
    - The wonder is that His mercy is as extensive as it is and that it is ever-present. (Think about the generations of Israel that we might have cut off; **Jer. 3:8-10** is followed by **3:12-15ff**)
  - ✓ Mary was not articulating random truths about God’s character, but demonstrating that all God’s attributes are in harmony with one another, and all are always true in His actions (great & small).
- As you think about the activity of God in your life, it is sometimes tempting to think that He isn’t strong enough, or that He hasn’t done something rightly, or that He doesn’t care. (Those are some of Satan’s favorite lies about God.) Mary’s recitation of these attributes correct that ungodly and false thinking.
  - ✓ *Every act* of God in your life is not only strong and powerful, but also holy and merciful.
  - ✓ Every circumstance of your life is an act of God’s mercy in your life.
  - ✓ Our task is not to question why God isn’t **holy** (right or just) or why He isn’t **merciful** (kind, gracious, or loving). He is. What we have from Him may not be easy, but it’s holy and full of grace.
  - ✓ A couple of decades ago one of the leading theologians of the day was diagnosed with liver cancer and within a few weeks, James M. Boice was in Glory. The last thing he said to his church was:

Everything he does is good. And what Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, says is that we have the opportunity by the renewal of our minds — that is, how we think about these things — actually to prove what God's will is. And then it says, "His good, pleasing, and perfect will." Is that good, pleasing, and perfect to God? Yes, of course, but the point of it is that it's good, pleasing, and perfect to us. If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you'd change it, you'd make it worse. It wouldn't be as good. So that's the way we want to accept it and move forward, and who knows what God will do?

- ✓ Our task is to contemplate our circumstances in light of these truths and worship Him.
- ✓ Someone may sin against us this week. Instead of claiming "unjust!..." we recognize that God is not unjust in allowing that to happen, and, even when suffering, we can worship and praise Him.

|| Here are four attributes of worship — ||

|| ***a heart prepared for worship — a humble saturation in the word of God.*** ||

|| ***a growing contemplation of God's infinite character.*** ||

### 3. An Anticipation of God's GRACIOUS REVERSALS (vv. 51-53)

- In these three verses there are six vbs. that would normally be translated as past tense, but can (and probably should) be translated in the future tense — "He will..." — Mary is so confident that God will accomplish it that she says these things have already been completed.
- All these phrases refer to "reversals" — various forms of deliverance (***mighty deeds***) for His people.
- Have you ever made a decision that six minutes or six years later you wish you could change? God will...
  - ✓ ***scattered the proud*** = God casts out those who are strong in their own estimation (***thoughts***) Prov. 15:25; 16:5, 18-19; 29:23.
  - ✓ ***brought down rulers*** = more literally, "tear down" or "destroy" = e.g., 10:17ff; Nebuchadnezzar.
  - ✓ ***exalted those who were humble*** = e.g., Lk. 7:20-23; ultimately of Christ Himself (Phil. 2:5-11).
  - ✓ ***filled the hungry*** = yes, filled with food, but more, filled with righteousness (6:21; Mt. 5:6)
  - ✓ ***sent away the rich*** = those who are self-righteous and self-dependent, God will reveal as inadequate — Lk. 18:25, the rich man, depending on his riches, may knock, but will be rejected.
  - ✓ (Notice that she is thinking about the reversals that benefit others and not herself; another demonstration of her humility.)
- What do these verses teach? Mary hears the announcement of the angel to her and Joseph, hears the testimony of Elizabeth, and believes that what God has promised He would fulfill (1:45).
- There is injustice, but it will not dominate for eternity. It seems that unrighteousness always prevails. But 100,000 years from now in the presence of God we will begin to see the shortness of sin and Satan's domination — it will seem but the shortest blink of an eye...
- Psalm 34:8-15 is true; there is a reversal coming, and that reversal was initiated by Christ's advent.
  - ✓ Be patient (your "injustice" is not as long as you think it is right now).
  - ✓ See God's grace in these coming reversals (He's not obligated to give them...)

Here are four attributes of worship —

**a heart prepared for worship — a humble saturation in the word of God.**

**a growing contemplation of God's infinite character.**

**a patient (trusting) anticipation of God's gracious reversals**

#### 4. A Reflection on God's **FULFILLED PROMISE** (vv. 54-56)

- All these coming events, Mary notes, are the fulfillment of the OT covenant, as given to **Abraham**...
- That is, the coming Messiah in her womb is the great gift in **remembrance** of His promise.
  - ✓ God has **remembered** that He is **Israel's helper** and that she is uniquely His servant.
  - ✓ God has remembered that He promised to be **merciful** patiently withholding wrath (**Rom. 2:4**).
    - Every action of God in helping Israel is a demonstration of His memory of His covenant
    - The provision of Christ as Messiah is the culminating demonstration of His covenant
    - He made a promise. He has helped. He does remember. He is merciful. These are eternal (**forever**, v. 56) and unchangeable truths.
    - Lesson: God's action in the incarnation is motivated by His loyal love to Israel — He is faithful to His promises and loyal to His people.
- As Mary joyfully worships, she concludes where all worship of God finishes — recognizing the immeasurable grace of the provision of Christ.
- So where are you today?
  - ✓ Ensnared by sin and you can't see your way out? Christ is the gracious gift of mercy to repentant
  - ✓ Sorrowing for loss and pain? Weak, overwhelmed and inadequate? Christ is your help.
  - ✓ Giving up and not enduring? Christ is the eternal promise... Trust Him only for your salvation.
  - ✓ This is the message of Mary's song, and the communion table to which we now turn...

**CONCLUSION:** In his book *Good Morning, Merry Sunshine*, Bob Green shares journal entries from the first year of his daughter's life:

This is something I'm having trouble getting used to. I will be in bed and there will be Amanda's head staring back at me. Apparently I've become one of the objects that fascinate her. It's so strange. After months of having to go to her, now she is choosing to come to me. I don't know quite how to react.

All I can figure is that she likes the idea of coming in and looking at me. She doesn't expect anything in return. I'll return her gaze, and in a few minutes she wants to be back in the living room and off she'll crawl again.

There is a fitting image of worship — we go to God in worship not because we gain something, but because of His inherently great nature and goodness. We go to Him in worship because we delight in Him.

Because God doesn't change, He is always worthy of worship — it is always appropriate to declare our joy and submissive contentment in Him and it is always appropriate to live in submissive conformity to Him.

He doesn't change. So we always worship. *Our* circumstances change — but when they change, we still worship.

- We worship when we get the job and when we don't.
- We worship when we have children and when we don't.
- We worship when we are healthy and when we are sick.
- We worship when we aren't sinned against and when we are sinned against.
- We worship when life is easy and when life is difficult.
- We worship because He is God and He is good.

We worship by giving honor to God in both our words and our actions, because worship is always right.

**BENEDICTION:** Jude 24-25