
Two Acclamations

Luke 1:37-80¹

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How do we respond the goodness and blessings of God in our lives?

Luke has written this first unit (for us, a chapter) in a Hebraic parallelism:

Zechariah

Mary

Mary

Zechariah

Even from the very beginning, we see the central focus is on Christ.

Now we turn to great songs of praise, two great acclamations of the greatness and goodness of God.

Mary's Praise (v.39-56)

We open then with Mary traveling to see Elizabeth.

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

The Affirmation of God's Promises (v.39-45)

Mary's praise is a response to Elizabeth's calling her blessed. The flow of her being blessed and honored by Elizabeth is turned upward to the Lord from whom that blessing came.

Remember Mary's life's context, in which this is set. She is a young lady who is engaged. Her husband is a mature, spiritual man who seems to have her best

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interest at heart. She has just been told that she was going to give birth to the Messiah! She is pregnant. Who in the world is going to believe her? In fact, the accusation that He was illegitimate was thrown at Jesus during His ministry. Imagine her conflict. Here she is – pregnant with all the wonder and glow that goes with it. But she is not married and the story she has to tell is absolutely unbelievable. She goes to Elizabeth who is also expecting, she who is way beyond the age of child bearing. And her greeting in verses 42-25 sets everything aright.

This spontaneous outburst of magnificent praise comes from a heart that has reflected long on the Scripture and lovingly on her Savior. This act of worship arises from Psalm 34:1-4:

I Will bless the Lord at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall **make its boast** in the Lord;
The humble shall hear it and **rejoice**.
O **magnify** the Lord with me,
And let us **exalt** His name together.

Mary is glorifying God and enjoying Him.

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

The Expression that Lifts Her Worship (v.46-47)

Mary is exulting in her Sovereign (v.46) The word *to exalt* literally means “to make large, to make great”. In Mary’s praise, then, there is declaration. She says out loud what God really is: HE IS GREAT. And there is magnification. She has an enlarged view of God.

It is as *Lord* that He is exalted, made large, magnified. He is the master, the King, the Sovereign. He is all of this whether we acknowledge it or not. He stands great and mighty over all the kings and all the idols and all the pursuits of our hearts. Let us join with Mary to magnify the Lord with her. Let us, like Mary, worship God, our Sovereign and Savior *with all our being*.

Mary is rejoicing in her Savior (v.47). The word *to rejoice* means “to exult, to delight, to take pleasure.” Now the personal note takes place. In her inner being, her spirit, she delights and exults in *her Savior*. Even in the shadows and types and figures of her Jewish worship, she knows she is expecting a Savior. The angelic announcement to Joseph was that the one being born to Mary would save His people from their sins. Mary appropriates this for herself.

That Mary rejoices in *her Savior* is important for it shows that:

Mary was a sinner. Only sinners need saviors. Only the dead need life. Only the lost need to be found. Only the unrighteous need to be justified. The belief that Mary was sinless is totally without foundation in the Scripture.

Mary needed a Savior. She had no perfection, holiness or merit of her own. She needed the redeeming work of the Son of God *just like everyone else*. She has no righteousness or merit to give to any who pray to her.

Mary needed a mediator. She needed the interceding blood of the Savior to plead her case before the mercy seat. She was not, is not nor ever can be a mediatrix herself. The son she was carrying would one day stand before God the Father as her high priest and plead her case and impute to her account His own righteousness.

Mary needed to receive her Savior. She had to acknowledge that the saving work was *for her*. She sinks into the same pit of sin as each of us – she was lifted up by the same merciful hand that lifts us up.

The whole cult of Mary worship stands exposed by the Scripture. She is a sinner, a saint and a servant just like the rest of us. Rather than bowing to her, calling on her aid, pleading her merits and expecting her intercession, why don't we follow her example and exalt our Sovereign and rejoice in our Savior!

The Experience that Motivates Her Worship (v.48-50)

Mary's motivation to worship is surrounded by the Word. It begins like a deep river whose spring is in Psalm 138:4-6. It flows through her life and empties into the ocean of Psalm 103.

(v.48) From **Psalm 138:4-6** here is a great God to whom thanks will be given by all the kings, whose praises will be sung because His glory is great, and He is exalted – yet He has an eye on the humble and the lowly. God is very near to those who think little of themselves and very far from those who think much of themselves. Her worship is motivated by the fact that *this is just like God*.

Mary has a Biblical view of herself (v.48). How is it that God could pay attention to her? Why her out of all the maidens in Israel? She was lowly, poor and insignificant and yet God paid attention to her to such a degree that it would have lasting effects. It involves lowliness - in her own eyes and blessedness - in the eyes of others. This is the way it must always be. This is one of the essential spiritual laws of the Kingdom. Those who are most lowly and humble in their own eyes will have God's eye on them.

Mary has a Biblical view of God (v.49) God is one who in His greatness does great things for the lowly, the humble, those who tremble at His Word and fear before His throne. It involves greatness - in what He does and holiness - in what He is like.

We must never separate these. When God from His greatness stoops to do great things for us *He never bends His holiness*. His very reputation and fame are at stake. So to the outward eye, this great thing done for Mary might appear to have been from sinning. But, Mary affirms that it is a holy thing that will be borne by her. Why? Because God has staked His reputation and fame for holiness on it.

Now her praise returns to Scripture (v.50) in Psalm 103 - This great Psalm just rings with the mercy of God. To sinners He has shown lovingkindness and compassion. He has forgiven their sins. Man's life may be fleeting, but the covenant mercies of God are everlasting. And since this is so, then Mary is experiencing the very fulfillment of those mercies in carrying the Messiah. Verse 50 is the hinge upon which her worship turns. The mercy of God is on those who fear Him.

May our worship be motivated by a real and genuine experience with God.

The Exposition that Informs Her Worship (v.51-56)

Mary's great doxology unpacks Psalm 98 in her own situation. There she finds a salvation theology that informs her worship. She mixes the truths and the exhortations from that Psalm with her passion for God and her perspective in life and lifts it up in a rehearsal of God's mighty salvation acts. The heartbeat of her praise is the salvation God brings in the Son she bears.

This 3 stanza song, Psalm 98, has three basic ideas on which Mary builds her expository exultation.

She highlights the salvation from God (Psalm 98:1-3). The first stanza is the primary focus of Mary's thinking. She draws from the very language, *His right arm has done mighty acts*. The mighty act is the revelation of His righteousness in His salvation. In remembering His promise to Israel, He publishes hope to all the peoples.

Mary's response is the response of God's people (Psalm 98:4-6). God's people respond to God's salvation with great gladness. It would be hard to see Mary *simply reciting this*. No, it is ringing with joy and gladness in loud singing. She

may be humble and lowly in her poverty, but she is mighty and loud in her praise.

Mary lifts her own warning to all (v.7-9). Imagine the scene these verses convey. At the coming of Christ as judge, all creation responds with joy and gladness for He is going to do what is right. If this is so, how then ought we to worship and live?

What does Mary do with this text? Notice that she extracts ideas and connects them to other texts.

The thrust of this portion is how God deals with different categories of people. Luke includes this in his writing to show why Israel is cut off (she is proud) and how the Gentiles are brought in (they are humbled in God's mercy). So here are the mighty acts of a saving God.

God Scatters the Haughty (v.51)

God takes the proud and *winnows them*. The flaying process is what is in view. When you want to separate the wheat from the chaff, the first process was to lay it out and to flay it with sticks. This broke up the hard shell and prepared it to be tossed into the air for the chaff to be blown away. God winnows the proud.

We often talk about *attitudes* as though they were some sort of inward bent or inclination. This is not the view of the Bible. Attitude is a process of thought. Being proud is a way of thinking about ourselves, others, and God.

Pride imagines us at the center of things, as being the hero. We all do this. *And it is not harmless.*

Pride imagines that all the good things are because of you and all the bad things are because of others.

Pride thinks over all the offenses against us and imagining ways to *set it right* by pressing our agenda.

Pride keeps telling yourself lies about the way you are: lies that either make you better than you are or worse than you are.

The essence then of pride is a process of self-talk and self-thought that centers on us and our own importance.

Maybe some of the bad things that happen to us are the careful winnowing work of a saving God. He is flaying away at the chaff of our pride and self-centeredness and self-esteem. He aims to bring about humility and others-centeredness and esteeming of Christ.

God Exalts the Humble (v.52)

It is one of the purposes of the Kingdom of God to tear down all systems of power and to elevate people of humility. In this way His own Kingdom rules in the hearts and lives of men.

God is bent on exalting the humble. Humbleness is certainly not self-importance nor is it self-impotence. It is simply not thinking of self at all. Humility is God's gift of a broken heart. It is the pattern of Christ. Humility sees the cross as the supreme pattern for self-sacrificing service. Humility bows low today, not for some later exaltation, but for Christ to be exalted.

God exalts the humble because He exalts Christ.

God Satisfies the Hungry (v.53)

This is a direct quote from Psalm 107:9 which reads, "He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." It is those who are hungering and thirsting who are filled. I am becoming more and more convinced of this: *you will never receive from God anything that you do not seek in God.*

What satisfies those who hunger and thirst, is *God*. What a paradox: *the rich are sent away empty*. Why is that? Because they are rich? No, because their riches satisfied them. How sad it is: they came full and left empty. That's because those who come empty, go away full.

Too many people who profess Christ have never developed a taste for Him, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:2-3) We have a taste for all the dainties of Egypt, the sweets of the world, the fleeting pleasures of sin – how these things dull our senses to the riches of the banqueting table where Jesus sits. We need to go into the desert and in the wilderness to so as to learn to hunger and thirst after Him. Then, we will be satisfied. The hungering and thirst is our part – the satisfying is His.

Do we hunger after Christ? Do we thirst for Him?

The Testimony She Extends (v.54-55)

Mary shows how God is going to fulfill His promise in His covenants to Israel. She sees the One to be born of her as the help to Israel. But her words convey language that Luke uses in New Covenant terms. That salvation that Emanuel brings is soteriological not political. It reaches back through His promise to Abraham and reaches forward through Christ to all the spiritual offspring.

It is rooted in the covenant mercies of God's promise. We need once again to be thinking in covenant and promise categories. God's salvation is grounded in the grace of the New Covenant. The principle and particulars to Abraham are expanded and explained in Jeremiah so that in Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus, will all nations be blessed

It results in lasting salvation for God's people. These words are not to be heard merely in Jewish terms. Paul has clearly shown in Galatians that the seed of Abraham that relates to God's promise is Christ. And being in Christ makes us sons and heirs as well.

In hearing these words, we need to have a larger sense of gratitude that God has not limited salvation to one national origin or ethnic identity. It was and still is His eternal purpose to redeem for Himself people out of every language, tribe, and people group. If not, then there is no hope for most of us.

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Mary lingered at Elizabeth's home until just before her baby was born.

Zechariah's Prophecies (v.57-80)

What Gabriel had announced and promised, came to be.

The Affirmation that Obeys God (v.57-66)

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

His Naming his Son (v.57-63)

When Elizabeth gives birth to their son, there is a great celebration (v.57-58): John's parents, neighbors, and relatives meet and rejoice at his birth. Of course, it is a huge party. They have many friends and much family.

The circumcision of this infant boy is also a great moment (v.59): This is performed on the eighth day. It was at this time, in Jewish culture, that boys were usually named. This boy's birth would be most significant because he is the firstborn.

There is real confusion when the boy is to be named, John. (v.60-61): People are puzzled that Elizabeth insists that the baby will be named John. Does the mute Zechariah agree with this? What does he think? Will he affirm this in spite of no one having this name in his family?

The confirmation comes from Zechariah (v.62-63): Calling for a tablet, Zechariah writes, "His name is John!" No argument. Just total obedience to God's message through the angel Gabriel.

His Worshiping the Lord (v.64–66)

⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zechariah is suddenly able to speak again. Not only did the prophecy come true but so did the promise. Zechariah’s chastening for disbelief comes to an end. He has believed, in an obeying way.

From that poise, Zechariah begins praising. Now that his tongue is loosed, he honors God. The miracles of his restoration and the words of his praise and prophecy caused wonder and amazement throughout all the region around his home.

The Prophecy that Exults in God (v.67-79)

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

This is not merely a song, but is also a prophecy. It flows from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Zechariah was filled with the Spirit in the sense that Old Testament saints were.

His Prophecy concerning his Savior (v. 68–75)

Notice the distinctively New Covenant focus...

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

The birth of Jesus assures the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (v.68–72). So, John will be the forerunner of the coming Messiah. The Messiah will be both redeemer and ruler. Jewish expectations would tend toward this redeemer would save them from their enemies. By this point in Jewish history, there was little expectation of the Messiah as a redeemer from their sins. But the Scripture in the Old Testament had that sense too. The Messiah would come to redeem His people in a way far beyond the expectation of most. But

for Luke's audience, this would be huge. The church is a part of God's great, forever kingdom. So Jesus, the Redeemer and Ruler has begun the age of the New Covenant which fulfills all that was anticipated.

The birth of Jesus assures the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (v.72-75). Zechariah sees the coming of the Messiah, which his son will be announcing, as being the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. This is remarkable at some level. It is still focused on a national deliverance from the enemies who subjugate them in the land. Luke's audience would have begun to see the connection of Jesus to Abraham as the ultimately promised descendant. Zechariah's praise and prophecy was true to the Scriptures, true to his understanding, but not complete. This is exactly how the Old Testament works. It is true, but limited. It is shadows of the real, but not the real. The reality all unfolds in Christ.

His Prophecy concerning his Son (v. 76–80)

The mission and ministry of this boy will be focused on Christ.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Zechariah speaks to the newborn child who is lying there ready to be circumcised. It is on this day that this son will be made a true child of Abraham. IT is on this day that he will have his name. This newborn was already filled with the Holy Spirit. Zechariah is also filled with the Spirit. Jesus will be filled with the Spirit without measure. Luke is highlighting the central and pivotal role the Holy Spirit plays in the life God's people and the ministries of the church.

Zechariah's son will prepare the way of the Lord (v.76). He will fulfill the prophecies of Malachi, and others. He will be the one to announce the gospel of kingdom. He will prepare the way for the Messiah. His ministry is a sure sign that the Messiah is here. This boy when grown to a man will minister in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Zechariah's son will proclaim the words of the Lord (v.77-80). His ministry of preaching and prophesying will break the long silence. Gabriel came with private messages. This son will come with public preaching. He will illuminate the darkness of silence with the light of kingdom preaching.

The Seclusion that Prepares for God (v.80)

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

His growth as a person, in physical and spiritual maturity. This prepares him for the hard and difficult ministry he will enter. He was secluded away, living in the wilderness.

Reflect and Respond

What is the Lord showing us through these responses to God's promise-keeping work?
How does Luke want us, the Lord's church, to respond?

God will humble the proud.

God will raise up the humble.

God blesses us because of His promises in Christ and out of the riches of His love, mercy and grace.

Believing God's promises looks like obedience.

Real worship of God can only come when we know the truth about God.