

The Gospel Magnified and Amplified -
Luke 1:46-55
Psalm 23 Goodness and Mercy

The Maori are a fascinating people. It is one of the oldest Island nations in the world and they reside in New Zealand. During times of colonization, the Maori were able to stave off other cultures due to many factors but one stands out. It is the legendary Haka. The Haka is the war rallying cry of the Maori. They would use the haka to scare away conquering nations from the shores of the Island nation. The Haka was recited by young adults transitioning into adult members of the Maori. The same Haka is used at the beginning of every game by the most feared team in all of Rugby. The New Zealand All Blacks. At the beginning of the game, the team captain stands out, crouches down to bellow out the call and begin the Haka. It resembles a call and response where the captain starts a chant and the war cry is repeated by the team and by those in the stadium. This chant and song magnifies the greatness of the All Blacks and their Maori culture. The Haka impresses on opposing teams that they are up against not just a Rugby team but a larger culture.

John Piper once described magnification in two distinct ways. The first is a magnifying glass that allows us to search the depths of a given object in more clarity as we zoom in. We see more detail from something small. The second where magnification is like a telescope, it takes something seemingly small and allows us to see its grandeur and depth. It reveals true size and greatness. As I reflected on the text this week, I am intrigued by the idea that Mary's soul magnifies the Lord. This magnification falls more into the example of the telescope. Each layer of nuance adding depth and enormity for the Lord of life and the Lord of all.

This morning we will consider how God is magnified, how to see more of him and who he truly is in three ways. First, how he reveals himself to individuals, then how he reveals himself to the church collectively, and lastly how God is revealed and amplified through Christ in the flesh and incarnate for the world.

Let's pray.

The Lord's Mercy to You

We learned last week in Mason's text that Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel that she would carry the savior of the world and this child would be born while she is a virgin. Prior to that story, we learn that Mary's cousin Elizabeth is an older woman who has been barren and without the ability to conceive a child. Gabriel, the same angel who visits Mary, visits Elizabeth to tell her that she will also have a son who will make way for the Messiah. This is miraculous as God brings life where there was no ability and where Elizabeth was too old to support that life. While Elizabeth is pregnant, she goes away to her family home to await the birth of John and Mary visits Elizabeth. Elizabeth feels John leap inside her womb as Mary walks through the door to spend time with Elizabeth. Mary's song is a response of praise for what God is doing in her own life, Elizabeth's life, and the world at large through God's work. Remember, the people of Israel had not seen or heard from God in generations. Imagine the eagerness and response as God continues his redemptive plan to renew and restore all things by these two women and their families for the blessing of their own people and all nations of the earth.

Mary's Song is often called the Magnificat. Magnificat is Latin for is magnified and comes from the first words of this text in the Vulgate translation of the bible. This is a song that is often associated with Advent as we consider our expectation of Jesus's return. We start with (v.46), My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Mary's song begins with a comparison of Soul and Spirit. The two words used here correspond to the essence of her existence and then her desires. This can be quickly overlooked but it is

pointing out that Mary's existence and life is a mercy of God. I'm alive because he gave life and he enriches my life with his presence and applied mercies towards me; namely His provision, care, comfort, and blessing.

Why Mary? V.48 He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. Consider this context, Luke is a trained physician. He is a man of accuracy, science, and proof. He ascribes that his mission in Luke is to provide a detailed and authoritative narrative of the life, death, and resurrection events surrounding Jesus. In the middle eastern world, an account from a small town, teenage woman, who was unwed was near the bottom of an account for accuracy and credibility.

Why is Luke using this song as a credible and authoritative argument in the narrative to show the sufficiency, supremacy, and accuracy of the events around Jesus? Luke is leveraging a greater point of scripture that we see over and over, that God's mission is accomplished first by himself. His mission to save humanity, renew all things, even us, is accomplished by himself for His glory. He then invites and equips those of little to no credentials, those who need to be upheld, sustained and renewed even when our proclivity is to run the other way. He doesn't need the mighty, he seeks out and uses the humble and faithful. This is why he blesses those of low estate. Estate is everything. It's the family name, your culture, all access, all wealth, and assets. The lower the estate, the greater the need for an even more robust blessing.

Like Mary, we are of a Humble estate. We cannot bring life or sustain our existence. If we are honest, we have little control over lives and we are constantly seeking the meaning of our own lives. V.48 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. Notice that this is not saying that God rewards her for her good works or status. She is blessed by God. He does the work. Why? Because He is mighty, he has the ability to bring blessing. She points out that the Lord's goodness is His presence in her life. She sees more of him by recognizing her need for him and then observing the areas that he is good to her and all generations.

This year our family said goodbye to my grandmother who suffered from dementia for several years. Throughout these years, the disease riddled her mind and slowly eroded her memory for loved ones and left her in a state where she was unresponsive. Last Christmas, I sat next to my grandmother while gifts were being opened. She asked me who everyone was and if she was going to be okay. She was aware of her frailty but lacked an explanation. Back at her nursing home, we were told that while she could not remember those around her, there was one thing she had razor sharp clarity around until her last days. Her nursing home during the afternoons would have an attendant sing Hymns and my grandmother knew the words to these treasures of faith. Her nurse told us how Marie's voice grew loud and confident as they sang of the coming glory. These songs pointed her to her future, gave peace for the present, compounded together with other voices around her, these songs, served as a ministry to others in the home who did not have faith.

You see Mary's song wasn't just for her, it was for the Jews who had longed to hear the faintest melody of their God, and ultimately that melody would be made manifest in Jesus, the hope of all things.

The Lord's Mercy to His People

Let's zoom out to the Lord's Mercy to His People. We'll start with his beloved Israel and then look at the Lord's mercy to the church at large. V.50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. Mary is providing a hyperlink to the promise of Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through his offspring. This blessing has two parts. Let's explore the first offspring, the nation of Israel. The offspring of Israel is the nation that comes from

Abraham's obedience to follow God out of animism and become a patriarch in the lineage of a chosen people by God.

Mary points out a few applications of God's goodness in his mercy (v.50), his strength (v.51), and his exaltation of those in a humble estate (52). Mary points out humbly that without God there is no existence let alone life. We see this over and over that God is faithful to his people, not only in provision but also in correction. He doesn't leave Israel in their own destruction in their desire for a king other than God. He shows them the insufficiency of rulers who do not love Israel, as he does. Goodness can be both provision and discipline. Psalm 23 shows us that the Lord's presence, care, provision, correction is applied mercy for those whom He loves. Like a parent with a child, our God seeks that we would find our rest and satisfaction within Himself. As Piper once said, God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him.

His strength is seen throughout the Old Testament. We see this in scenes of the crumbling of Jericho, in the defeat of Goliath, and with the promises the Messiah would defeat Sin, Death, and Evil. Isaiah even points out that God refines Israel for his namesake in Isaiah 48:9-11.

"For my name's sake I defer my anger;
for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you,
that I may not cut you off.
10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tried[a] you in the furnace of affliction.

In the New Testament, we then see the folding in of the Gentiles and the church broadly who believe and accept the expected child of Mary. This baby, God in the flesh, humbly coming to rescue his people by living a perfect and sinless life, though tempted, serves as the all sufficient sacrifice to allow those outside of the nation of Israel, to now be joined together as one people of God.

From Pentecost where thousands are saved, to the faithfulness of God to bring up new churches through the ministry of Paul, a former persecutor of the church, to even a picture of the enduring Church in Revelation. We see over and over again, the Lord's mercy to raise up, to sustain, and to ultimately bring all nations, Israel and others, to himself. In Jesus's last words on earth, he says that "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." - Acts 1:8

In Jesus, we see that sin, death and evil could not act as a strong enough barrier to keep God from reconciling and bringing his people to himself because of his love for us and his glory. Paul comments on this in Romans 8: 38-39 "38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Gospel Amplified by Mercy Incarnate

Remember the text earlier to describe the offspring of Abraham and the blessing to Generation to Generation, we see who is the second offspring. Galatians comments on v. 55 in 3 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. Paul is pointing out that the promises, namely that the blessing for all nations would be found in the Messiah, in Jesus.

Let's recap, the crux of Mary's Song is that those who are humble realize a profound neediness and dependence on God. Neediness in that we do not exist without him first giving us life and dependence on him because our lives are sustained and live their most satisfaction in God himself. Paul uses the language in Colossians that in Him (Jesus) all things are held together (Colossians 1:17). Did you know that science, today, 2018 cannot explain what holds are positively and negatively charged atoms together? What keeps them from being bound together? I can barely keep my life together, what good news that Jesus holds all things together. .

V. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. Given our humble estate, we are then to look at the God who has mercy to uphold those who fear him. What? How are fear and mercy connected? That sounds harsh and brings images of oppression and totalitarianism. Mary is stating that fear is a precondition of God's mercy. Let's unpack this.

Fear is an acknowledgment of some truth and its relationship to some consequence or outcome. When we are children, we are taught to fear the stove because of its heat. I know that it is hot and if I touch the said stove, the heat of the stove will burn me. However, I shouldn't avoid the stove because it can burn me as the stove can also benefit me in providing heat for warmth and food. If I want heat, I need to understand both the benefit and consequence of the stove. We often call the acknowledgement of benefit and consequence of one thing wisdom. We are wise when we understand the benefit and consequences of something. Our wisdom is then measured by the effects of the benefits and consequence to us. I am considered wise or foolish depending on how I engage an object in spite of it's known consequences. Let's imagine a lottery. There is a unclaimed lottery of 1.5 billion dollars available right now. The benefit of winning the lottery is an incredible outcome and the consequence of losing lottery is the cost of the ticket. Imagine if someone bought 10 tickets to win the lottery. Their chances of winning are improved minimally but the consequence is still minor. What about the person who cashes in everything that they have, they empty the bank account, they sell everything, they even begin to spend money assuming that they win the lottery, we would consider that person foolish, because while there is a chance they win, there is a greater chance that they lose everything.

Fear of the Lord is understanding our need and dependency on God and his ability to meet those needs past, present, and for future flourishing. The implication of these two items then leads to if or why he would meet us in our need. If He doesn't bring his presence and mercy, then we are left to sustain our lives on our own effort and power. We know that this is insufficient and would leave us hopeless. We should be fearful of the consequence of his inaction towards us. Our hope then isn't in our efforts, it is by His action. Everything hinges on him to move. It's the lottery where we have nothing to bring and if we don't win, we lose everything. This is fear that God would turn away as our only hope and fear that we are left in a world with sin, death, and evil. However, Hope is the intersection of Fear and Mercy. Paul describes our hope in Ephesians 2:

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

This morning, Mary's song is simply saying that God being rich in mercy chose the person who had nothing, in order to bring her everything that she could need for everyone at large. We try to bank on our accounts, comforts, and temporal treasures. We try to believe that these good things are the ultimate things that our hearts and our lives long for. We are faced this morning with the reality that we have nothing that he has not first given to us. Would you fearfully

consider where He is good and where He has been good to you? The consequence and benefits of those questions are monumental.

When we meet the end of our capacity and ability, when cancer comes for a loved one, when we lose children in infertility, or when we lose our livelihood, we are keenly aware that we need outside help. We need a comforter to assure us that there is meaning and an outcome of suffering and we need a conqueror who is bigger than our circumstance. He is merciful because He shows us how He loves us in giving us our greatest need; himself.

To use the words of Jenny Allen, “if we are honest, we really want to just be awesome” and independent. In other words, we do not want magnification, we want projection. We want to project our independence, our namesake, our strengths, and rely on that image for comfort. We want to believe that those things are larger than we are and the larger they appear to be, the more solid and safe we should feel. When that world view is shattered, we want restoration to our own awesomeness, not rescue. We don’t want to acknowledge that we are truly in a constant state of need and we are under the care of a God bigger than us.

God’s blessings point to the giver of blessing even more clearly when we realize that we are desperately in need of God’s presence and his blessing. God brings mercy in himself and applies that mercy to us in his gifts of provision, care, and presence. God also brings mercy in correction where he allows for things to be taken away that would keep you from himself. He is building you and refining his beloved into a reflection of his glory. That is for your good, the church’s flourishing, and is a further reflection to the world of their need for him.

There is a world around us that desperately needs God’s presence and blessing in their lives. For those hungry in dependence and awareness of their need for Christ, there is nourishment, fulfillment, and salvation. In the same way, those who are satisfied in their independence and self-fulfillment, are sent away empty. The one in whom our soul finds rest, Psalm 62 is in the the incarnate God, the Messiah has come to renew and unite us and He is coming back to reconcile and renew us and all things.

Jesus is the mercy of God amplified for all. He is the embodiment of God’s character and care. Want to know God? Meet Jesus. Ask the spirit to enliven your desire to know Jesus. For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36

What or Whom Will We Magnify?

This week I was reminded of my humble estate as I was laid off from my most recent job. I work in earlier stage companies and this is always a risk. This experience reminds me that He is my provider and ultimately the one that I work heartily for. My role is to be a faithful steward of the gifts and domains of life - Marriage, Family, Church, and the marketplace. I can rest because, beyond my work, He is at work. I was reminded of David in Psalm 112 as a comfort,

6 For the righteous will never be moved;

he will be remembered forever.

7 He is not afraid of bad news;

his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.

8 His heart is steady;[b] he will not be afraid,

He has been faithful, he is present, and my future is in Him. I can work faithfully knowing he is before me, with me, and after me. Look at where He has been good, remind others in your community of his work and of the good He is doing in their lives. Take your time, talents, and treasures to Jesus and ask where He would use you to reflect Him in Austin and to the ends of the earth.

Our souls are more dependent than we often realize. We are not our own, self-made, and self-sustaining individuals. We are utterly dependent for yesterday, today, and tomorrow. As His beloved, we are dependent on God, interdependent as the church for the building up as the body and Christ's bride, this dependence relies on God's mercy. Our souls individually and collectively magnify the Lord and show the world the need and blessing of the messiah.

The question for this morning is what does or what will your soul magnify? Where are you going to for meaning and comfort? What are you expecting to come? Oh, that we wouldn't settle for just the knowledge of God, but that we would know Him. That He would show us more of himself and that He would be magnified in our lives, for His glory and our good.

Lord, would you help us be a people reminded of your goodness to us, for us as your church, and those around us. Be magnified in