**My Soul Glorifies the Lord**

December 3, 2017

Luke 1:26-56

Key Verse 1:46b-47 “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...”

Ephesians 5:18,19 says that one of the marks of a Spirit-filled life is speaking in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Whenever a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, he or she sings a song of praise. Today, we see Mary and Elizabeth sing songs of praises. In the next passage, Zechariah sings a song of praise. Our souls can rejoice when we have God in our hearts and when God includes us in his work. Many people ask, “What is God’s will for me? How can I know God’s will?” The motivation for their question usually comes from their fear that God will drastically alter their lives. They think that God will ask them to go to Amazon jungle as a missionary and die as a martyr. But God works through our ordinary lives. What is God’s will? John 6:40 says, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” So God’s will is that we may have eternal life by believing in his Son. In order to save people from their sins, God had to send his Son to this world. For that, he needed a young woman to bear his Son and give birth. God did not drastically alter Mary’s life. She still married to Joseph. It was surely difficult to be the mother of Jesus. But when Mary accepted God’s mission, she rejoiced that she was able to participate in God’s work. May God bless each of us to rejoice when we participate in God’s work.

Mary was an ordinary country girl who had an ordinary desire to get married. But God chose her to be the mother of Jesus Christ. In the past, whenever God appeared to people, his very first word was “Don’t be afraid.” It makes sense because when a sinful man meets the holy God, his first reaction is that of fear. In order to make God accessible to man, he came to this world as a baby in the manger. In order to do so, he had to choose a virgin. But it required a great sacrifice from Mary. God’s mission for Mary was to bear the baby Jesus and deliver him before her marriage. What a difficult mission it was for her! Her engagement to Joseph would be jeopardized. Her community could hardly be expected to overlook an unmarried pregnant teenager. How could Mary accept this mission? Accepting this mission meant giving up her beautiful wedding, which she had been dreaming about all her life. Furthermore, she might lose Joseph. Her bond of love with Joseph would be broken to pieces. How could Mary explain her situation to Joseph? Mary lived in a rigid, traditional Jewish society. Those who became pregnant before marriage were supposed to be stoned to death. If her stomach begins to stick out, the village people would misunderstand and think that she was an adulterous woman who should be stoned to death. God’s mission might bring on unbearable shame and punishment. Mary would have to bear such shame alone. But she decided to obey God’s will absolutely.

After being convinced, Mary’s soul inclined to hear the angel’s message. But Mary had a scientific question. Look at verse 34. “‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’” Mary was not negative. Her question shows a positive response. The angel taught her in verse 35: “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” When the angel expounded that Mary’s pregnancy was the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary accepted the angel’s message. The angel continued: “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail” (36,37). The angel convinced Mary that nothing is impossible with God.

In verses 31-33 the angel introduces who Jesus is and what his kingdom is like, for Mary needed this knowledge of Jesus in order to accept God’s mission, and so do we. Look at verse 32a. “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” Many people have said many things about the greatness of Jesus as a philanthropist, a poet, a teacher, a man of deep humanity, a man of sorrows, and so on. Indeed, there is no one in the world as great as Jesus. But the greatness of Jesus does not rest on his human qualities or achievements, but on the fact that he is the Son of the Most High God.

Our human ancestor is Adam. This one man Adam sinned against God by disobeying the holy command of God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because of his disobedience, sin came into the world. And sin makes man very sick spiritually, with no remedy, and eventually death. Many people worry about getting cancer. But sin-sickness and death are 100% mortality rate. Death takes away all our hope and dreams. Many people place their hope in temporary things that are sure to disappoint, like a good job, or an early retirement. Many live without hope. But the Bible gives us a sure hope. We find hope in the Kingdom of God, a permanent kingdom that never ends; a glorious kingdom of righteousness and peace. Jesus is our eternal king. Look at verse 33. “…and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” How is this possible? Because Jesus is not a descendant of Adam; he is the Son of God who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” The Son of God is great because in him all mankind will be made alive. Though he is the Son of the Most High God, he came down to this world as a baby in a manger to save men from their sins. Jesus, though he is the Son of the Most High God, gave up the power and glory of his kingdom and humbled himself to the level of a servant. While on earth, Jesus cared for all kinds of needy people as their friend and shepherd. He planted the hope of the kingdom of God in people’s hearts. Finally he died for men’s sins as a ransom sacrifice in obedience to God’s will. Jesus is truly great.

When Mary heard this, she realized that God had a high purpose for her life and wanted to use her in his great salvation work. She had to choose between the destiny of being an ordinary woman as Mrs. Joseph or a woman of God. She simply chose to do the will of God and said in verse 38, “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” How could she choose to do the will of God, giving up her marriage? It is impossible for anyone. But it was possible for her because she had the fear of God. In other words, her love and respect for God was true. When she had the fear of God she was not an ordinary woman; she was an extraordinary woman of God.

When Mary made a decision to obey God’s will, she had many obstacles to overcome. She had to figure out how to explain her situation to Joseph. Humanly speaking, she was not in God’s favor, but in deep trouble. If she were a worldly woman, she might have visited Joseph first and cried many tears for his human sympathy, saying, “Please do not misunderstand.” But Mary did not go to Joseph. Instead, she decided to visit Elizabeth to see the work of God in her, as the angel had said. This was an act of faith. But it was not easy for Mary to visit Elizabeth. What if Elizabeth would not believe, and condemn her as an unwed mother? It was a moment when Mary could have felt sorry for herself and fallen into self-pity, saying, “O Joseph, Joseph.” She could have been frightened by the intimidation of Satan and remained frozen. But she did not sit down only to cry. Instead, she began to fight the spiritual battle. Here we learn a universal truth: Even a country girl must fight a spiritual battle. Otherwise, she is doomed to be the prey of Satan. How nice it would be to get an A without any study. How nice it would be to do God’s work without any hindrance of Satan. But when we want to do God’s work, Satan is right there to hinder us. But with God’s help, she won the battle before fighting. God gave her strength to visit Elizabeth in that situation. How easy it is for all sinful people to go to Joseph, forgetting all the words they had learned. But Mary remembered the word of God through the angel’s message. God is with those who are holding on to the word of God.

Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth. It was an act of faith. One act of faith is better than knowing 10,000 theological arguments. Her faith enabled her to accept herself as the most blessed one, not as an unlucky woman. With God’s help, Mary finally knocked at the door of Elizabeth’s home. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb. In other words, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb welcomed Mary first. Then Elizabeth welcomed her. Look at verses 42-45. “In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me...Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” Elizabeth did not say, “It is good to carry out God’s mission, but I feel sorry for you.” Instead, she counseled Mary prayerfully until Mary was convinced that her pregnancy before marriage, becoming the mother of Jesus, was the will of God and that it would be done as God had promised. Elizabeth counseled her to follow God’s will even if it meant endless suffering. It is not easy for anyone to counsel others spiritually. We end up sympathizing with others and make them weak. But those who follow spiritual counseling bear the good fruits God wants.

Look at verses 46,47. “And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’” When Gabriel first said to her, “You will be with child,” she was afraid. But now she was convinced that God was doing a great work in her life to use her as the mother of Jesus. When God’s word was confirmed by Elizabeth’s encouragement to believe what the angel had said, Mary burst into a song of praise. This song is known as the Magnificat. It is very similar to Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel. Do you notice the parallel expressions and ideas? For example:

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| **Hannah (1 Samuel 2)** | **Mary (Luke 1)** |
| 1. My heart rejoices in the Lord; I delight in your deliverance | 46 My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. |
| 2 There is no one holy like the Lord. | 49 Holy is his name. |
| 4 The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.  | 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has lifted up the humble. |
| 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. | 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty. |

The parallels are not word for word; Mary is not quoting the Old Testament. Instead Mary is so full of the word of God that when she breaks out in praise, the words that come naturally to her lips are the words of Scripture. Being a young woman, she probably loved the stories of the Old Testament women of faith like Sarah, Deborah, Hannah, Ruth, and Abigail. What an admonition to us all, both women and men (young and old—Mary probably was not over 15): to be filled with the words of God day and night so that the words and thoughts of Scripture fill our mouths as naturally as they did Mary’s.

Mary said in verses 46b,47, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” There is in these words a twofold act--she glorifies God and she rejoices. Her fountain of joy was her soul; it was not her feelings or thinking. When she was pledged to be married to Joseph, her soul did not rejoice. Instead, she enjoyed the dream of marriage and talked to herself, “Joe, O Joe, I want to see you just one more time.” This kind of joy is an emotional and temporal one. Such a joy has no guarantee after marriage. Through this we learn that those who have God in the center of their hearts have true joy. Otherwise, human beings are doomed to be miserable all the time, even if they eat gourmet food every day.

Look at verse 48. “For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.” Here, a personal testimony from her very soul comes pouring out. Mary was very humble. She was nothing but a poor country girl. She was no more than an unworthy, ordinary woman. She wondered why God’s eyes should have fallen on her, and why God favored her. She exclaimed, “From now on all generations will call me blessed,” deeply realizing God’s favor by choosing her to do his work. Mary had the assurance of being a blessed one. God’s blessing was to carry out a mission to be the mother of Jesus. But her blessing involved her to watch all the suffering of her beloved son. Finally she had to stand beneath the cross of Jesus to watch crucified Jesus. Mary had already experienced the pain of a broken relationship with Joseph. Mary had to pay the high cost of being the mother of Jesus. But she was happy, so happy that she praised God from her soul. People’s concept of blessing is to have a little better husband, a little better house, and to live an easy and comfortable life. In history, there may have been no one who suffered more than Mary as a woman. But no one calls her a woman of sorrow, or an unfortunate woman. Down through generations, people were abundantly comforted, even to think of the beauty of Mary and they call her the most blessed woman. Why? Because she accepted God’s mission. Some people think that God’s work is burdensome, saying, “Why me?” But Mary did not say, “Why me?” Instead, she thought she was the most blessed. May God give you this wonderful assurance, “I am the most blessed one!”

In this passage we learn that those who have God in their hearts can be truly happy. They can sing songs of praise from their souls. May God help us to participate in God’s work so that we may rejoice in God our Savior.