

A Practical Guide to Glorifying God, Part 1

Luke 1:46-49

Well, as we turn to God's word this morning, we want to enter into the study here of Luke chapter 1. You can turn there in your Bibles. We're getting into a study of a very, very beautiful, joyful portion of Luke's Gospel. It's Luke 1:46, and perhaps the best way we can introduce this section of Scripture is just to start by reading the passage together, just let the words of this passage fill the air. So, starting in Luke 1:46, Mary's Song, here's what it says, "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, 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. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in

remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.'”

Keep your finger in Luke 1 and we'll come back there. But turn back to 1 Samuel, Chapter 2. 1 Samuel 2, verses 1 to 10, and that's another song. It's a song called Hannah's Song. The book of Samuel begins, well, kind of like Luke begins with a barren woman longing for a child; number of striking parallels that connect Samuel and Luke in their beginnings.

A thousand years separated these times, but the time of Samuel and the time of Hannah was very similar to Mary's time. The time of Samuel was the days of the judges, wide-spread corruption, every man doing what was right in his own eyes, same thing in Mary's time. The same darkness pervaded the land. It was also a time back then of prophetic silence, when “the word of the Lord was rare” in Israel, 1 Samuel 3:1, just like Mary's time. It was also a time of a corrupt and an inept priesthood, the weakness of Eli, the corruption of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Those two men used to lay with the women at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, 1 Samuel 2:22. They stole meat from worshippers who would bring their sacrifices to the temple. They would take the best portions for themselves, share it with their father, Eli. Very similar, again, to Mary's time, in which

non-Levitical priests controlled the temple. It was a political institution. They took advantage and made money off of people's sacrifices, and they took it to their own personal benefit.

Parallels between Samuel and Luke continue. Mary was visiting Elizabeth, it says in our text in Luke 1, in the hill country of Judea. Remember that? That was the same setting for 1 and 2 Samuel. That's where David is from, Judah. Most significantly in a parallel, the central focus of 1 Samuel, you know this, it's on the ascendancy of David to the throne of Israel. Luke is about David's son, Jesus, who is heir to the throne of his father, David. So, as we listen to Hannah's Song, keep in mind the child that she prayed for, Samuel, he was to be the prophet the Lord used to break the silence, to restore righteousness in the land, and to anoint David as king over Israel.

Mary sings her song in the presence of Elizabeth, just the two of them there. Zechariah was probably there, but remember he was in silence, couldn't hear what was being said. But Mary sings her song in the presence of Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's son also is going to break the prophetic silence, restore righteousness, prepare the way of the Lord, who is none other than the son of David, the king of Israel.

Like Elizabeth, Hannah had also been barren. She'd wept bitterly over her reproach. She prayed fervently for a child, even coming to the point of making a vow to give him back to the Lord if only he would grant her request. So when God finally gave her a baby, she fulfilled her vow. She raised him until he was weaned; she brought him to the Lord and then prayed this song of prayer.

Look at Samuel, 1 Samuel 2:1, "And Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.'" Stop there for a minute. Similar to Mary's opening line, isn't it? Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Notice the next verse, "There is none holy like the Lord; for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God." Again, Mary said, "The mighty one has done great things for me and holy is his name and his mercy is upon generation after generation to those who fear him." See the parallels? Praise for God's character, praise for his holiness and his strength.

And now comes this section in Hannah's prayer from verse 3 to the end of her prayer, which is very similar to Mary's focus, on God's opposition to the proud and his grace to the humble.

Again, note all the similarities here. Look at verse 3, “Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed, the bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap and makes them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the,” pillars of the Lord are the Lord, er, “pillars of the earth are the Lord’s and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of this faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder from heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.”

It’s powerful. So much in common these two songs; joy in the Lord for his personalized acts of mercy, rejoicing in God because of his holy character, because of his ways, because of his mercy for the poor, justice for the oppressed. Most

significantly, they're woven together in covenantal significance, prophetic fulfillment. When Hannah recited this prayer of song, that last line, "he will give strength to his king." What king? There was no king in Israel. That had yet to come. Both prophetic, both covenantal significance, Hannah's song before the coming of David and Mary's song before the coming of David's son, Jesus the Messiah. That's our God, isn't it? Weaving together history. How unsearchable are his ways.

You know what I love about Hannah's song, though? You know what I love about Mary's song? Both of these theologically rich, deep songs, both come from women. They both come from women. God recognizes the differences between men and women. He created the differences. He put them there. He made them male and female, and he, he gave them different roles, and he designed each of them with their different characteristics, their different strengths. Women, in a way that is different than men, they have a unique capacity for recognizing the tender mercies of God. Men are often busy, preoccupied, aggressively attending to the provision and protection of their families. But God has hardwired women for tenderness, for compassion. A trait that helps them notice the plight of the suffering, the struggles of those who are less fortunate, the pain of people who are in

need. Women have a tenderness for the oppressed, for those who are hurting.

Last week, Bret, Adam, and I went and visited the Resource Center for Pregnancy and Personal Health. The Resource Center provides pregnant women, many of whom are young, unmarried, frightened and pregnant, provides them with an alternative to the clinical barbarity of Planned Parenthood. I'm grateful it's there. As we walked around and took a tour, met different people, with the exception of a boyfriend who was there accompanying his pregnant girlfriend, we were the only men in the facility. The place was staffed entirely by women; women who had compassion for other women in need, other women in trouble. Not disparaging men here at all. Men care, too.

But we're so grateful for the women, we're so grateful for their concern, their compassion. We're grateful to God, to God for using these women, Hannah and then Elizabeth and Mary after her. He gave them these songs. God spoke through them. He showed us how he uses his power to demonstrate mercy, to demonstrate compassion for people. Our capacity for worshipping God because of this is so vastly enriched by hearing from these two women. One of the many features, one of the unique features of Luke's Gospel is its emphasis on women and their role in God's

redemptive plan. We get to enjoy this together as we work through Luke.

So go ahead and turn back to Luke 1:46 because there's something else that I want to point out there about Mary's Magnificat, just by way of introduction. A few weeks ago, we talked about the need in our church to reinforce the truth, one another, with one another. That's what we do in the local church, we speak about the truth with one another, we sing about the truth with one another, right? We look to one of the effects of the Spirit's ministry as the Holy Spirit fills us with God's word; singing comes flowing out of us, right? We sing, we are overjoyed because we are richly filled with Scripture.

Ephesians 5:19, "We speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing, making melody to the Lord with our hearts," right? As we unpacked that verse, we noted three basic patterns of music that we sing in the church and they're listed there, Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. Psalms come from the psalter, the Book of Psalms written by men like David and Asaph. Hymns are the doctrines of the Bible. They're written in poetic verse, put to music, sung in the church. Spiritual songs, those are expressions of our experiences, our reactions in walking with God. They're reactions that are emotional, they're

intimate, that at the same time, they're rooted in deeply and bounded carefully by Scripture. Remember that, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? Nod if you remember. Okay, good.

So let me ask you a question. What kind of song is Mary's song? What type is it? Is it a psalm, is it a hymn, spiritual song? Who says it's a hymn? Nobody says it's a hymn. Okay. Who says it's a psalm? Okay, I see one hand. I see that hand. I see that hand. Okay, two. Some people say it's a psalm. What about a spiritual song? Okay, more hands there. What about all the above? None of the above? I won't vote in church? All right. Think about your answer and let's take another look, all right? Since psalms are divinely inspired poetry set to music, and since we know that Mary's song is divinely inspired and it's written right here, right? We wouldn't be entirely wrong to see this as a psalm, would we? You find the same themes throughout the psalms. Many, many parallels between Mary's song and the psalms. So, even though it's not part of the psalter, it's clearly very psalm like, right?

What about a hymn? Is it a hymn? Nobody voted for a hymn, so your not calling it a hymn. But since hymns are doctrinal content, they're packaged in elevated language, they're set to meter and music; we have warrant to call this a hymn as well,

right. We could call it a hymn. Such strong theological content here. Deep, this is all about God. It's all about his sovereignty, his power, his salvation. This is about his strength, his holiness, his mercy. This song is about God's power to subdue the strong, the proud, the arrogant, to frustrate all their evil imaginations. This is about God's power to raise up the humble, the weak; his intent to fill his sovereign plan for Israel, so clearly we can see this is hymn-like as well, expressing deep theological truths in elevated language.

But what about that third category? We could see this as a spiritual song as well, couldn't we? In fact, I believe first and foremost, this is my vote, it's I believe, this is an excellent Biblical example of a spiritual song. A spiritual song is reactive. A spiritual song is an emotional response to the truths of God, and yet it's not an emotional response That's unrestrained. It's carefully, it's reverently hemmed in by Biblical truth. It's governed by Biblical truth; don't want to miss the emotion, it comes pouring out here in the very first word. Notice it there in verse 46, "My soul magnifies the Lord." And that word, magnifies, is the very first word in the Greek text, put up front for emphasis. It's the word *megalyno*, which means to exalt, to magnify, to glorify. And it's an attitude here of celebration. Literally, as it's written in the Greek,

she says, “Magnifies my soul the Lord.” Then the next phrase is “Rejoice, my spirit in God my Savior.” The emphasis is on the glorification of God, the joy of worship. Again, celebratory in tone.

Whether young or old, whether you’re in Mary’s age group or Elizabeth’s, we all have the capacity, the opportunity to celebrate God, to rejoice in glorifying him. What these two women show us, what their songs reveal, how their songs exhort us, we’ve got to know God deeply, if we’re gonna rejoice in him greatly. We’ve got to notice his working in our lives, his working in the world around us, and that means we’ve got to study his ways. We’ve got to learn to appreciate his character.

Notice the words, soul and spirit, there verse 46, 47. They’re parallel to each other here, so really, we should read them pretty much as synonymous. Some people try to make a, a radical distinction between soul and spirit, between the psyche or the *psyche* and the *pneuma*. There may be cause to notice a, a slight difference between the two terms, but, but not a radical one for sure. Point here is that Mary’s worship comes from deep within and from the entirety of her inner being. This is comprehensive. She is all in.

But if we had to decide between the two terms, you put a gun to

my head and say, make a distinction. Okay. Well, we could say, we may say that the soul is the immaterial part of us that makes us, us. It's, it's the, what makes us individually distinct.

It's maybe our personality, our emotional composition and make up. And we might identify the spirit as the immaterial organ of thought and decision. It's our will, it's our thinking. The spirit, the spirit finds its origin, its source, its life in God. God is the one who gave the spirit, who made the spirit, and that makes the spirit the point of contact with God. That's why Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, we're children of God."

Still, that said, it's virtually impossible for us to draw hard lines between soul and spirit. In fact, only God's word can divide between the two, right? Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, able to divide the soul and the spirit." Okay, he can do that, but we certainly don't have the ability to draw the lines.

Mary's not drawing lines here either. Those first two lines, they're parallel and they're the deep expression of her whole inner being, all that's within her. Those two terms encompass all that makes her, her, and she's bursting forth in praise. She's rejoicing, she's glorifying God. It's profoundly personal

here, too. Notice how many times the first person possessive pronoun shows up: my soul, my spirit, my savior. In verse 48, “From now on, all generations will call me blessed.” It’s extremely personal to Mary. Her song expresses deep emotion, intimate rejoicing because of intimate blessing. At the same time, all of those emotions, you notice, are bound tightly by Scripture. No stray emotions here, no errant feelings. Her emotions and her words are safely fixed up on truth, securely anchored into Biblical truth.

So while we can see these verses as a psalm or a hymn, I’m making the case that it’s a spiritual song. And, in fact I believe Mary’s song is the prototype for in Ephesians 5:19 spiritual song. Many of the choruses written today are so shallow by comparison, aren’t they? So far off the mark. So embarrassingly superficial. We would do well to pattern our own choruses, our own songs after Mary’s song to follow its excellence in structure to parallel its depth in Biblical thought. That’s exactly what we are trying to do right here in our church as well; always aiming for that.

As Mary enters into this magnifying of the Lord, as she enters into rejoicing in God her Savior, what she says here in this opening stanza gives us a really a practical guide for

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glorifying God. This is how we do it. So, we can do it ourselves this morning in our own hearts and minds, but then as we leave here to do it out there as well.