

Belong to the People of Promise, Part 2

Luke 1:54-55

Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Luke's Gospel and we are in Luke 1:46-55, the Song of Mary. Follow along as I read Luke 1:46 and following, "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.'"

So, with all that in mind, let's get into our outline. Four promises. All God's people hope in these promises. All of us

depend on them. First promise: We believe the promise that God will help us. We believe the promise that God will help us. The basis of Mary's confidence and at the very foundation is what she says at the beginning of verse 54, "He has helped his servant, Israel." That's it. He's helped his servant Israel, and that is her confidence for the future. Good enough for her.

His servant Israel, that's a reference to the Old Testament, to the way in which God designated his covenant people. Mary references this Old Testament identity of the people of God, and there are a lot of references to this in the Old Testament. But let me highlight one very important text in Isaiah 41:8 to 9. God says, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farther corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off.'"

That's Isaiah 41:8-9. It's a very important verse because it identifies not just the children of Abraham, but the true children of Abraham. It says, "Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend." Not all of Abraham's descendants belong in that category. Not all of them are worthy to be called, my servant, Israel. Paul says, Romans

9:6 to 8, "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means, Paul says, "that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

By using this designation, my servant, Mary's being specific here. She is, in fact, following God's pattern of being specific. He says in the Old Testament, my servant David, my servant Jacob, even, Zerubbabel, my servant. In fact, in, in Isaiah 42:1, Jesus the Messiah is called, my servant. God says, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights." That designation, my servant, it belongs to those who do what a servant does. That make sense? Follow that logic? Those who obey the master.

What fundamental foundational pattern of obedience did Abraham set for all future generations? Genesis 15:6, "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." God imputed righteousness to Abraham because Abraham believed him, and his life produced works that were consistent with that faith. James 2:22 to 23 says, "You see that faith was active along with Abraham's works, and faith was completed by his works;

and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness,'" and get this, "and he was called," what? "The friend of God," right? The friend of God.

Those whom God has designated, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend, to them God extends power to help, power to help them, help. Mary may be thinking in her mind when she talks about God's help to his servant Israel, she may be thinking of passages like Isaiah 63:9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." Isn't that a beautiful picture of God? Racing to help those who cry out for him. Racing to those who are afflicted.

When God helps his people, look, he enters into their suffering. He enters into their pain and he leads them through it and he leads them beyond it. Know that for yourself. If you belong to this people that Mary is describing, like we do, God is in the fire with you. He's in the trial with you to lead you through it, to lead you to understand it in the context of his good purposes. This is talking about the sympathy and the empathy of God, his willingness and his ability to know what his

people to need because he's in it with them. No greater example of that than the Lord Jesus Christ himself, right? Who entered into all of our suffering and greater still.

No greater example than our Savior, the merciful High Priest, Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who is in every respect been tempted as we are, yet without sin." You know what? He understands more than you and I do the power of temptation. You know why? Because he never broke. Temptation visits us, and if God doesn't restrain his grace and if God doesn't keep the tempter at bay, that tempter will put enough pressure on us till we break, until we fall because we're just flesh.

Jesus, his human nature was bound to his divine nature, and just as a wooden stick that's bound to a titanium bar when the pressure comes upon it, the wood feels it, but the titanium doesn't let it break. Jesus felt that pressure, he felt temptation until he exhausted the temptation because he never broke. So, beloved, if you think Jesus hasn't gone through what you've gone through, he has. And far more. That's why we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He gets it all. God's help is in Christ.

And that had to be the same thought that prompted Isaac Watts to write, "Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come." He is our God; he is our hope. And, like Mary, we find great confidence in being numbered among God's people. Our connection to God's people united together in Christ, their history becomes our history. Their reason for hope and rejoicing becomes our reason for hope and rejoicing. The help God has given his people in the past becomes a solid foundation for our encouragement for the future. Well, that's the promise, okay? We believe God will help us.

Here's a second promise. Second promise: We believe the promise that God will remember us. God will remember us, verse 54, "He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy." Again, this is a promise for those who belong to God, to those who identify with his servant Israel, the redeemed, the chosen people of God. Isaiah 44:21, God says, "Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; you are my servant; O Israel you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you."

Often in Scripture, God's people plead with him to remember him, to remember his mercy to them. In Psalm 25, David says,

"Remember your mercy, O Lord and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old." Just like Mary, David says the same thing. Habakkuk, he's anticipating divine judgment, coming in the Babylonian invasion, and he made this simple plea of God, Habakkuk 3:2, "In wrath remember mercy." In wrath remember mercy. Are we not praying as God's people for that today, as America continues diving to the pit? "In wrath, Lord, remember mercy."

So when Mary said, "God has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy," she's referring to the times in history when God intervened to act decisively, immediately, showing mercy to Israel and there are so many examples in the Old Testament. The prototype though is in Exodus. We've mentioned it before. God promised Abram in Genesis 15:13, "Know for certain your offspring will be sojourners in a land that's not theirs, they will be slaves there, they'll be afflicted for 400 years." The entire time of their oppression, the entire time, God knew their suffering. He saw what they were going through in Egypt. He had not forgotten.

And in Exodus 2:23, it says, "The people of Israel groaned because of their slavery, they cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their

groaning, and," get this, "God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel," I love this line, "And God knew." God knew. He always knew, but now he's going to act. Remember, he heard, he remembered, he saw, he knew. It's just an unqualified affirmation of the limitless omniscience of God. God hears, he remembers, he sees, he knows. And in connection to his people, we benefit from his covenant faithfulness to those people, the covenant that he made with Abraham and his offspring; we've entered into that.

What does that teach us about God? It teaches us that he knows all things. He never forgets. He sees everything in your heart, in your mind, in your life and especially when it comes to what he promises, he is faithful to fulfill what he promised, he'll do. Does that encourage you? I sure hope so. That's what this is about. It's about great encouragement. The greatest instance of remembering mercy. We heard that mentioned in the text we quoted just a few minutes ago, Isaiah 44:21, "Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; and you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I blotted out your sins; I blotted out your transgressions like a cloud, I have gotten rid our sins like a mist. So return to me, for I have redeemed you."



We believe God will help us, don't we? We believe he'll remember us. Here's the third promise: We believe the promise that God will save us. God will save us. That is the great act of his remembering. That's the great act of his remembering, and that great act of his remembering his people in salvation is coming upon Mary in her time. It's coming upon Mary in her time.

Look at verses 54 and 55 again, "He's helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." And it referenced "To Abraham and to his offspring." That's a reference to the Abrahamic Covenant. We'll have to save a full exposition of the Abrahamic Covenant for another time, and you're thinking, thank you, Lord, thank you. But I do want to give you just enough to understand its significance. Okay?

God first called Abram when he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans. You know where that is? That is, you know before Iraq, before Kuwait, before any of those occupied the area, before the Babylonians, the Assyrians, Biblically, going way way back, the Chaldean people lived there in that part of the Persian Gulf up there at the top, and Abraham lived there. Abram lived there. God called him, told him to leave, Get up, get out, go, Genesis 12:1, "Go from your country, from your kindred, from

your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great so that you will be a blessing [...] in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." And that was just an introduction.

Fuller explanation came in Genesis 15, then again in Genesis, it was reiterated in Genesis 13, 17, 22. God, God had visited Abram in the land of promise, in the land of Canaan and as God unfolded the enormity, the magnanimity of that Abrahamic Covenant and all that it meant; it involved really, if we whittle it down, several key elements, three really. There were personal promises to Abraham, personal promises to Abraham; he'd be a blessing, he'd have a great name, he'd have many physical descendants, he'd be the father of a multitude of nations, and he'd have an everlasting possession in the land of Canaan. That's to Abraham personally, but there were also national promises to Israel.

Abraham's descendants would become a great nation. They would own and possess the land of Canaan from the river of Egypt to the river of the Euphrates. So this argument going on in the Middle East, solved right here, isn't it? God, who created the heavens and the earth, who owns all the land, specifically this land, he gave it to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Okay? I've solved the crisis in the Middle East, right there, just one word.

In addition, though, there was a universal promise to all people. A universal promise to all people; this is where we enter in. All the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham's physical line of descent, through his seed. We can summarize the promises that God made to Abraham; all those promises involved the seed, the land, the nation, and divine blessing. The Abrahamic Covenant is what we call a unilateral promise. That means Abram didn't have to do anything to earn it. He didn't have to fulfill any condition to get it. God just came to him and said, I'm going to do this. Abraham's like, Okay, that's it. I'm going to do it.

This was a promise, though, that was received by faith. Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed the Lord, he counted it to him as righteousness." So the imputation of righteousness, the reckoning to Abraham of a righteousness that was not his own, that resulted in justification by faith. Abram set the pattern for individual salvation for all the people of God throughout all time. This is how all the people of God enter into relationship with God, they take him at his word, they believe

him. And you know what God does? He imputes a righteousness to us that's not our own and he declares us righteous.

The fulfillment of every other promise God made to Abram, the seed, the land, the nation, the blessing; major storyline of the entire Bible, isn't it? That's the story. It starts in Genesis, it runs all the way to Revelation. Everything that God promised Abram in Genis, Genesis, by the time we get to Revelation, all fulfilled, everything perfectly consummated. And it all starts with individual salvation through the seed. Individual salvation, justification by faith, Abram believed the Lord, he counted it to him as righteousness. All who put their faith in God, like Abram did, become partakers of these promises as well.

And here's where it gets really interesting. The promise of salvation, the, the foundation of the Abrahamic Covenant, that promise predated Abraham. It came before Abraham. The first glimpse of what God would later promise to Abraham, of what God would fulfill through Jesus Christ, you know what? God didn't actually give that preview to a man. He didn't give that preview to a woman. God spoke the first promise of salvation to a fallen angel named Satan. In the Garden of Eden, right after the fall, God told Satan in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you

and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Theologians call that the *proto-evangelium*, the first Gospel, because it foreshadows the Gospel that would be fulfill, fulfilled and fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

We don't have the time to unpack it now, but that verse, Genesis 3:15, it contains some weighty Gospel themes, all in seed form. They're all there in the kernel. That promise in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel,” that involves the nature of the Redeemer, fully God and fully man. It contains the nature of the atonement as a, in, involving a vicarious suffering. It contains the theology of redemption by a sovereign, regenerating grace. It foretells the perpetual conflict between two peoples, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, those who are in Christ versus those who remain in Adam. Elements of the Gospel are all there in seed form as far back as Genesis 3:15, a long time before Abram.

So the offspring of Abram that Mary referred to, that predates Abraham. The theology of the Gospel goes all the way back to the curse on the serpent in the Garden of Eden. All the

doctrines of divine grace, which every Christian embraces, are as old as the beginning of time. God's intent to save sinners through the woman's seed, Genesis 3:15; through Abraham and his seed, Genesis 12, Genesis 15; through Mary's seed, Luke 1:42, this is not an afterthought. This was predetermined, it was orchestrated before time began. The plan of redemption was devised as Titus 1:2 says, "By the God who never lies, who promised it before the ages began."

Well, all that to say, we believe God will help us, God will remember us, God will save us. Those are mighty promises of God, and we have seen those promises fulfilled. In fact, it's the fulfillment of those three promises that give us confidence to believe and hope in the fourth promise. Notice in your outline we believe the promise that God will vindicate us. God will vindicate us. "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." Forever points to the future. Forever points to what is not yet accomplished, not, not yet consummated.

As I said at the beginning, it's remarkable that after receiving and believing what Gabriel told Mary back in verses 31 to 37, she barely said anything in her song about the divine

child growing within her womb. Very instructive to us, isn't it? Mary puts the entire situation in the context of God's plan for his covenant people. What God has done for Mary, it's ultimately not about Mary. The words God spoke previously to the fathers, the promises he made to Abraham and to his offspring, much, much bigger than Mary. Even her own salvation from sin, that's ultimately not about her. It involves her; it affects her, she's certainly eternally thankful for that salvation and how it benefits her; she's saved from eternal wrath; she receives eternal life in Christ. But all of this is ultimately about God, the fulfillment of his word.

This is about God and the final vindication of his character as a faithful God. That's why Mary magnifies the Lord. That's why she rejoices in God her savior because in her salvation, in what God was fulfilling by making her the Isaiah 7:14 Virgin who would, bear child, you'll call his name Emmanuel, God with us; God doing that with her, that was God demonstrating his faithfulness to fully and finally save his people. God's demonstrating his faithfulness to fulfill ancient promises that he spoke to Abraham and his offspring forever.

So ultimately Mary is rejoicing in the triumph of God's word, in the vindication of his faithfulness. She's magnifying

the Lord because he did what he said he would do. That's what causes all of us to rejoice in God ultimately, as our God is a promise-keeping God. It's not really about our individual trials and triumphs ultimately. It's about the revelation of God. It's about the vindication of his word. It's about the glorification of his character. We rejoice when he is made known.

Let me ask you a question. How does that inform the way you think about yourself, the way you think about your life, what you think about this church, the way you think about your job, your family, the way you think about your trials, difficulties you face in your life? Are you and your interests, your preferences are they at the center of your thinking? Or is it God and his glory that is the most important thing to you?

You know when you're growing in Christian maturity, when like Mary, God is at the center of all your affections, when he is the reason for all your joys, when he is the one who interprets all your trials, when he is the source of your triumphant boasts. When that is your mindset, everything is cause for praising God, everything, because he's being glorified. His word is being accomplished. He is being made known.



After singing this song, Mary stayed with her cousin or relative, Elizabeth for the remainder of the pregnancy. Mary remained with her about three months and then returned home. Some try to say that Mary left before John was born. I think that's ridiculous. Could you imagine a young excited girl like Mary, miraculously pregnant herself with a baby growing in her, and then her relative, Elizabeth, an older woman barren all of her life coming to the final stages of her pregnancy, and then Mary looking at her watch and saying, Poof! Time to go. I gotta get, get something on the stove back in Nazareth. No, she's going to stay there, she's going to see it. And she's there to see all the things that are going to be fulfilled in the coming text. That's for another sermon. We'll get to that next time. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this text, all the promises it contains, and the mindset, really, that it points us to. We pray that you would help us to learn a different mentality, the mentality of a heavenly people, your people. Help us to follow Mary's example and learn from her because that is exactly the way we need to think.

We pray, Lord, that you'd continue to give us your grace and help us to break free from the bondage of an American mindset

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that has the self at the center. And we pray that you'd help us to learn the mentality of your people, a people that have you at the center of their thinking and rejoice in you, giving all glory and honor and praise to you, and we do that even today. In Jesus' name. Amen.