

Why God Is Great, Part 1

Luke 1:49-53

Let's get into the word of God this morning. As we come to our time in God's word you can open your Bibles to Luke Chapter 1 and verse 46. 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in the 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.'

As we see here, and we're going to look at this morning, Mary finds five reasons to glorify God here. And we're going to unpack those reasons today. Five reasons to glorify God, or we

could say five reasons to rejoice. Either one because the two are intricately connected; they are inextricably connected. You cannot separate the two. Glorifying God is rejoicing in him and on the other hand, rejoicing in God is glorifying him. The one leads to the other, vice versa.

Now, two things I want to make clear right up front as we enter into this little study. First, there's a spiritual principle that is woven into the fabric of our being and it's this principle: You become like what you worship. You become like what you worship. If you worship idols, Psalm 115 verse 8, "Those who make them become like them as do all who trust in them." So, if you're filling your mind with sentimental, silly, superficial, pabulum that saturates our modern world especially through our media, then you're going find it very hard to escape that mentality of sentimentality, silliness, superficiality.

It's, we become like that. We become hollowed out. But if your mind is full of God, if you're constantly renewing your mind, Romans 12:2, then 2 Corinthians 4:16, "Though our outer self decays, though it wastes away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." You will be transformed. You will be filled up. You will be conformed to the image of God. You become like what you worship, just as Mary did. Have you ever seen a teenage

girl with such strength? Have you ever seen a teenage girl of such substance? Mary is an example to all of us.

The second thing I want to point out as we get going here, glorifying God, rejoicing in God, you must know that pursuing this course is not going to score you any points with the people of this world. The unbelieving world doesn't care one bit about glorifying God. It's too busy rejoicing in sin, pursuing pleasure, amassing wealth, consolidating power. To glorify God and rejoice in him you're going to have to be comfortable identifying with someone of Mary's stature, someone who's humble and lowly, someone who's despised and scorned in the eyes of the world, someone who is poor, needy.

All of us who are satisfied in God, all of us who are contented in God, who rejoice deeply in him, all of us who want more than anything to glorify him with our lives, you know what? We worship a despised and rejected Christ. We worship a crucified savior. We worship a man whom the world rejected, despised. It was not popular on that day to be a follower of Christ. We believe a Gospel that is foolishness to those who are perishing. The world thinks we are crazy. And they wonder what we are doing here on a Sunday morning. This makes no sense.

We're not cool. We're not powerful. We're not envied. But listen, it's exactly the way God wants it.

As we look into verses 49 to 53, the two central stanzas in Mary's song, we find five reasons for glorifying God here. I'd like to organize those five reasons in to two main points. Two main points, each one followed by some sub-points. First main point: We glorify God because of who he is. That's simple, right? We glorify God because of who he is. Look at verses 49 to 50 again. Mary says, "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."

Now, you may not have noticed it, but in rapid succession, Mary has mentioned the power of God, the holiness of God, and the mercy of God. If we restate those three things in theological terms, we're talking about God's omnipotence, his holiness, and his benevolence. Omnipotence, holiness, benevolence that's the theology, each one of them is an attribute of the divine character, and we're going to consider each one as a separate sub-point, okay?

So here come the sub-points, three of the reasons. Sub-point number one: God is almighty. God is almighty. He is all-powerful, he is omnipotent. As verse 49 says, "He who is

mighty,” or literally, “the mighty one has done great things for me.” The mighty one, it’s the word *dunatos*, or the verb *dunamai*. We get the word dynamite from this word. And this, this word refers to ability. This, this is talking about possessing the ability to act, to do something. The mighty one, he’s characterized, he’s characterized by having the power to act. He has the power to do. None can stop him, and this one, this the mighty one, he’s done great things. This is someone who possesses all ability, possesses limitless power to do whatever he wants.

Take a look at verse 51, as Mary meditates on the power of God in history, she says, “He has shown strength with his arm.” Strength with his arm. The word she uses there about strength means limitless power. It’s the Greek word *kratos*, and it refers to unstoppable strength, unconquerable strength. The word is ascribed in the New Testament only to God, because only God has unstoppable strength. This is a dominating strength. This is an ability to assert your will, to subjugate anyone and anything, to bring it under your will. No one can withstand the *kratos* of God. He’s mighty, as Mary said. And he’s exclusively mighty. No one is mighty like him. He’s omnipotent, he is almighty. No one possesses the power of God, able to do absolutely whatever he wants. That’s power. That is might.

And notice in verses 49 to 50, his almighty power serves two other attributes here. His power defends his holiness, and his power extends his mercy. Holiness and mercy, verse 49 to 50, "Holy is his name, and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." So, we worship God for who he is because he's mighty, that was the first sub-point, but also because, sub-point number two, God is holy. God is holy, that's why we worship him, because he's holy. As Mary says, "His name is holy." Now when the Bible refers to the name of somebody, like "baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Spirit," "giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," "do everything whether word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus," when the Bible speaks about the name of somebody, it refers to everything that stands for that person. Everything that stands for that person.

That's why we do not take the name of the Lord our God in vain. Not just treating it casually, treating it like a curse word, like a throwaway word, that's not all taking his name in vain means. Taking his name in vain means to claim it and you don't live it. Taking all he is and claiming that that is who you are and that's who you follow and that's who you worship, and yet not living that way. You're taking his name in vain.

Serious, serious thing. The name is what designates a person, like your name, like my name, designates us.

But in ancient Near Eastern culture, this was extremely important, the naming of a person, because the name represented the sum total of a person's character, the entirety of a person's attributes, the whole of his being. A child was known by the name that he had, by his father's name, by his family name. His character was judged on the basis of who he was connected to.

Well, the sum total of God's entire being, holiness. Holiness. When God introduced himself to Israel, making that people into a, this fledgling nation, making himself known to them, he distinguished himself from all of the other gods, from all the other idols they'd worshiped and served before with one simple proposition, "I am holy." Leviticus 11:44, "I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am holy." Next verse, Leviticus 11:45, "I am the Lord God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You should therefore be holy, for I am holy." Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

Getting the point? Leviticus 20:26, "You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the

peoples, that you should be mine." Leviticus 21 verse 8, "I, the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy." "I the Lord am holy," it's so often repeated in Leviticus that this book is known as the holiness code. It's about what it is to be consecrated to the Lord, set apart to him. When God says, "I am holy," he means he is set apart. He is unlike any other, unlike us, unlike any other god. He is transcendent; he is far above his creation; he is infinitely high. We see this when God allowed Isaiah to have a vision of him in the throne room, the very throne room of God. Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah approached and he saw a terrifying picture of divine holiness, one that really terrified him.

Isaiah 6:1 to 4, he records the scene there, "In the year that King Uzziah died," and, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. And above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with his glory!' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke." Wow! Glory! Majesty! Seraphim, literally the burning ones. They're on fire. And they're flying through the air, this flaming fire is flying through the air with this thundering



refrain, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" There's fire, there's smoke, there's shaking.

And what was Isaiah's response? I can tell you what he didn't do. He didn't run up to the throne, jump into God's lap and give him big old hug. He was terrified. Verse 5, "And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost," literally, it's I'm undone, I'm disintegrated, "for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

It's only after one of the seraphim picks up a piece of fire from the alter with the tongues, cauterizes his lips, cleanses him from his impurity and Isaiah feels comfortable to say, "Here I am! Send me." The holiness of God in its full force, it has a disintegrating effect on us. The glory of the holiness of God, it causes us to be undone, to pronounce a woe upon ourselves. We become immediately aware of our utter sinfulness before God, immediately conscience of our uncleanness. We're ashamed, afraid to stand in his presence.

I recently saw a quotation from John Flavel. Tim Challies had it posted on his website and John Flavel said this, "They that know God will be humble and they that know themselves cannot be proud." How true. The more clearly you see the

holiness of God, the more it will humble you before him.

Initially, a clear vision of the holiness of God has a repelling effect. We want to turn away. We want to run. The higher we see God, the lower we see ourselves.

That may not feel good at the moment, it may not give us goosebumps and a warm, easy feeling inside, but getting a vision of the holiness of God is a good thing; it's a healthy thing. We see God in the perfections of holiness and it causes us to revere him. It causes us to glorify him. We also see ourselves in the imperfections of our sinfulness, and it causes us to cry out for him in mercy. When that happens, when that happens, God hurries to us. He visits us with grace and salvation. He draws near to us in compassion and comfort. It's been my experience, and I know it's been the experience of everyone who believes, all of you, but we need to keep moving.

Beyond the holiness of God, God's mighty, he's holy, and also, sub-point number three, third reason for glorifying God, God is merciful. God is merciful. I just mentioned it. Mary connected holiness and mercy here. "Holy is his name and," coordinating conjunction, "and his mercy is for those who fear him." She wants us to keep those things connected in our minds. We have to; otherwise, we're undone and left despairing without

hope. But together, we have hope. Over in Isaiah 57:15, there's a close connection again between God's holiness and his great mercy, and it helps us track, really, with Mary's thinking here.

This is what it says, Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy." What does Isaiah have in mind there? Throne room experience, right? High and lifted up, inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. What does the high and holy one say? "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." Isn't that interesting? God dwells in two places, high, separate, lifted up, transcendent, unreachable, that's only one place; the other place, he dwells with the lowly, the humble of heart, those who have humbled themselves before him.

The holiness of God, like I said, has a compelling effect and a repelling effect. His holiness is compelling, drawing sinners close, gazing at the splendor of the high and holy one, but as they draw near, they're immediately repelled by his holiness. They back off because the bright glare of his absolute purity reveals the blackness of human sin. Sinners feel uncomfortable in his presence, vulnerable, naked and exposed,

ashamed, dismayed. And those who hold onto their sin, those who remain fixed in their pride, they keep themselves at a safe distance from a holy God. Like all of Israel, Don't make us come near, don't make us come near. You go, Moses, you go.

But those who humble themselves before God, those who are of a contrite and lowly spirit, you know what? God acts on their behalf with power. He draws near with power. While maintaining his absolute holiness, God draws near to the penitent in mercy. As Mary says there in verse 50, "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." That's a concept that comes from Psalm 103:17-18, "The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments."

God is kind and compassionate. God is benevolent and merciful and yet, he never compromises his absolute holiness. He never drops for one instant his standards to accommodate the sinfulness and the weakness of men. Rather, in mercy and by grace he lifts them up, doesn't he? He lifts them up. That's the beauty of the truth of our union with Christ, and that's the beauty of our union with him is that we belong to him. And in Christ we fully attain what we could never attain on our own,

ultimate perfection, absolute perfection being united with him. We can never get that on our own, but God gives it to us as gift, right?

Now, we want to acknowledge that God is merciful to all, and his common grace extends to all and to everyone without exception. God created the whole world. He cares for everything in the world. He sustains all the world through Christ Jesus by the power of his word. And God, as Matthew 5:45 says, "God causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and he sends his rain to fall on the just and the unjust." So there's a common grace.

But Mary isn't here magnifying God for his common grace; she's glorying and praising God for his particular grace, for his mercy toward particular people. Notice verse 50 again, "His mercy is for," whom? "those who fear him from generation to generation." That phrase, from generation to generation, it just demonstrates the magnanimity of God's mercy. His mercy is everlasting, it never runs out. It's an infinitely deep well, he continues to draw from it. God has this infinite capacity for showing mercy, and because of his almighty power, he has an infinite capability to accomplish his mercy. There's no lack of

mercy in his storehouse. There's no lack of his ability to carry it out and no lack in his will to do that for his people.

The phrase, generation after generation, not only does it show the magnanimity of God's mercy, it also shows the continuity of his mercy. The continuity of his mercy, however, the continuity of mercy is not based on blood or birthright. It's not based on the transfer of power or nobility. It's not based on privilege or inheritance. The continuity of his mercy from generation to generation is based on spiritual affinity, spiritual kinship, a spiritual connection. What do I mean by that? Well, it means that those who fear God, those people are members of the same spiritual family. They are connected that way. It's those who fear God and only those who are the recipient of God's particular redemptive saving mercy.

Every single one of us has to reckon with God on his own, on her own. Like Isaiah did, each one of us, we have to come to that experience of being undone before the holiness of God, to be driven to our knees for mercy, to embrace him in faith. Take it from me, I was raised in a loving Christian home, lots of Bible teaching, lots of exposure to the Bible, but that didn't save me. My spiritual heritage didn't save me. My grandma's prayers in and of themselves, didn't save me. Boys and girls,

young men, young women, students, please listen to me, the piety of your parents will not get you into heaven. The ungodliness of your parents doesn't keep you from heaven. That's good news too.

You have to discover the fear of God for yourself. You have to learn to revere God, to come face to face with his holiness for yourself because when you stand before God on judgment day, no one else is there with you. Just you and God, face to face with his holiness. So reckon now with your sinfulness. Fly to him for mercy, salvation from his judgment, because he will grant it, if you repent and believe. God's mercy is magnanimous and it's continuous. There is a historical continuity from generation to generation of people who are marked by fearing the Lord. That's us, right? God is mighty. God is holy. God is merciful. That's who he is.