

Why God Is Great, Part 2

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. Luke 1:46. We're going to continue our study of Mary's Magnificat. We'll read it together again as we get started this morning. While you're turning there, in Psalm 113, the psalmist asks one of the best rhetorical questions in all of Scripture. Psalm 113 verse 5, the psalmist asks, "Who is like the Lord? Who is like the Lord our God?" Answer: No one. God is seated on high, as we read in Psalm 33 this morning. He's seated on high; he's looking far down on the heavens and the earth below him. He's the sovereign enthroned high above his creation, holy, set apart, distinguished from all he created.

And in Psalm 113, the psalmist continues speaking about his power to act, his power to do. God "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home making her the joyous mother of children. Praise

the Lord.” Praise the Lord, indeed! That’s exactly what we’re seeing in Luke chapter 1. And that’s exactly the theme of Mary’s song, and she praises God for precisely the same reasons.

So, with that in mind, let’s look at Mary’s Magnificat again starting in verse 1:46, “And Mary said, ‘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.’”

Let’s get into the third stanza, verses 51 to 53. Who God is leads to what he does. His character is the fount of all his actions. Not only do we glorify God for who he is, but also point two: We glorify God because of what he does. Because of what he does, okay. There are going to be two sub-points

underneath this. This is the third stanza of Mary's song, and it runs from verse 51 to verse 53. You can see there it's kind of a staccato statements about God. She is here reciting the ways of God, how God constantly deals with the human race.

Now, just a couple of things to point out before we read those verses again and get them before us. First thing, the verbs in this section, they are all in the aorist tense. "He has scattered," "he has brought down," so it's looking behind, right? She looks backward into history. Mary looks backward, reciting what she knows to be true about God, what she's learned from the Bible, what she's learned and meditated on from Scripture. And at the same time what she's reciting about God's dealings with people, they're not just true for the past, they're true for all time. These terms and the tenses of these verbs really talk about how these have been God's ways, always, and they will be God's ways always.

Now, second thing, notice as we read in, in recounting God's ways here in dealing with people, notice that God is binary in his thinking. Okay, computer geeks will understand what I'm saying. Binary, it means either this or that. In computer language, I think it's zeros and ones. Right? It's either a zero or it's a one, it's a string of those zeros and

ones and help us to actually read websites and things like that. Don't ask me how it works; it's a mystery of God's common grace to give us that kind of knowledge. I don't get it and I think there's stuff floating through the air right now, as people are dialing things up. But look, God is binary in his thinking. It's either this or it's that. No middle ground. No gray areas whatsoever.

Another way we could say this is that God is antithetical in his thinking about humanity. For every individual human being, God considers each one as belonging to one of only two sides, belonging to one of just two camps. There are only two kinds of people, the proud and the humble. Based on that designation, God treats each individual in one of two starkly opposite ways. He opposes the proud on the one hand; he gives grace to the humble on the other.

Lets' look at verse 51. Mary begins there with a general statement, "He has shown strength with his arm." He's shown strength with his arm and as she proceeds, she unpacks that general statement by elaborating how God has shown strength with his arm. Take a look at verses 51 to 54, how has he 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, he's exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy." Now let's stop there.

We're just going to look at verses 51 to 53 for now, but that poetic structure of these verses, it runs through that whole deal from the scattering of the proud to the helping of Israel. There are parallels there. "He has scattered the proud," "he has brought down the mighty." See how those are parallel thoughts? They're also contrasts. "He has brought down the mighty," "He has exalted the humble." "He has filled the hungry," "He has sent away the rich." Remember, he has two and only two orientations to mankind, opposition to the proud and grace to the humble, hostility or friendship, antipathy or affinity. And we're all on one side of that equation or the other. There's nothing in between.

Just one more point before diving into the details here. Notice that Mary puts the humble and the hungry at the center of her poetic structure. Those are God's People. There's a chiasm here. That's a poetic structure in Hebrew poetry. There's a chiasm and the central phrases there's stanzas that go one, two, three, four, five, it would be number three. The central one that has

the focus. Those are Mary's people, the humble and the hungry. Those are our people too, aren't they? As believers, we belong to that family. So, let's divide verse 51 to 53 for our purposes in two categories, okay? God's categories, the way God deals with the proud first and then how he deals with the humble.

So first sub-point, let's look at the proud. We glorify God because of what he does. First, because he opposes the proud. He opposes the proud. In fact, God always opposes the proud. He never favors the proud no matter what it may look like on the surface. He knows their hearts. He's always keeping score; and he opposes the proud, if you'll notice there, first by frustrating the arrogant, second by subverting the powerful, and third by disappointing the rich. Okay, starting in verse 51, God frustrates the arrogant. "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts."

It's one thing to watch what the arrogant are doing on the outside, to see their selfish ambition come out in what they do and how they act. It's quite another to see the pride that's hidden away in the human heart. No man can do that. It's God's territory, the heart. Mary considers the omniscient gaze of God. He sees the heart; he knows the motives. It says in Proverbs 20:27, "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all

the innermost parts.” Look, what is entirely dark to us, the inner man, the thoughts of the heart, what we can’t see inside of each other that’s like a bright spotlight shining for the Lord on all the secrets, exposing all the thought life.

Now, I know all of us struggle with pride, right? It’s not a question of if you have pride, but where it is and how much. Right? We all have it. We all struggle with pride, but if we’re believers, we fighting against pride. We see it as a sin we want to flee from. So, Mary isn’t talking about us here, fighting from pride. If we’re proud before God, he may chastise us. There may be some similarities to how he treats us, opposing us, frustrating our plans. But his entire orientation is toward us, mercy. His entire orientation toward the proud, those who are characterized by the sin of pride, those who are given to it, who have given themselves over to it, he opposes them.

The word arrogant, it’s a word, *huperephanos*. *Huperephanos*, which comes from two words, *huper* meaning above and *phanomai*, meaning to shine. These people want to outshine everybody, always to find a reason to brag, to boast about themselves. These are the people who are chasing wealth, power, prestige, fame. They’ll roll over their own grandmother to get ahead. That’s these people. It’s a desire to dominate, to exercise

power, control over others. You see this so often in political ambition, and it's ugly, it's fueled by a lust for power, for self-serving authority. But God scatters those people. He scatters them.

There's a word that means scatter, disperse, divide, this is that word, but it's intensified. And, so it doesn't mean just to scatter them, it means to squander them, to waste them. God wastes the proud, he squanders the arrogant of heart. Powerful stuff. Don't want to be on the receiving end of that. Not only that, but notice that verse 52, God subverts the powerful. He subverts, he overturns the powerful. "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones." Again, intensified word, it means to tear down, to cast down, to throw down the mighty.

The same word is used of God, but this mighty one here is just a human might. It's one who possesses ability, strength, they're the strong ones among us, the ones with superior ability, superior strength. Personal strength here has enabled the, the mighty to reach out for what they want, thrones, authority. Whether by physical force or by mental force, they want to dominate, use their superiority, their superior strength, to rule, to oppress. The mighty here don't fear God at all. In fact, they reject the idea they'll ever have to give an



account for how they've used their talents, how they've used their strength, their ability. They're proud, trusting in their own might, their own ability.

Again, God isn't worried about that one bit. He's going to unseat them. He's going to throw them down. He's going to cast them down, not just before himself, but before the humble, before the weak, before those without ability. You see, God subverts, he overthrows, he overturns their expectation of ruling forever over others not only by taking away their authority, but also by putting them under the authority of the humble. He has exalted those of humble estate.

Finally, look at verse 53, God disappoints the rich. God disappoints the rich. "The rich he has sent away empty." The rich here, they're the fat cats, they're the supremely contented. These are the people who are always satisfied, never hungry, never in want, never worried about anything regarding money. They're stuffed. They're gluttoned. They're sated with wealth and riches. James paints a picture of the rich as ruthless people, merciless people, greedy.

James 2:6 says, "Are not the rich the ones who oppress you? Are they not the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?"

James is rebuking their tendency to cuddle up to the rich, to favor the rich and give them the best seats. Why do you do that? James says. Later in chapter 5, James pronounces a woe upon the rich. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you."

The treasure that those rich people have laid up on earth that kind of currency is utterly worthless in heaven. The rich on earth, they're used to having their own way, right? Money opens up all doors. Money buys off all opposition. Money buys plenty of friends, provides access to every place they want to go. But you know what? God does not care about money. Their money doesn't open any doors with God. It doesn't buy any favor with him. It doesn't buy his friendship. God sends them away, and when he sends them away, it says he sends them away empty. Empty.

According to one commentator, it says, "the image here is of a court. According to oriental custom, the rich come with gifts into the court and receive even greater gifts from the monarch who does not want to be outdone in generosity. The poor are set aside. It's not like that with God. The rich think that everything is owed to them, but he sends them away empty." It's a word here that means having nothing, like possessing nothing.

It could also mean resulting in nothing. It's the same word as futile, futility, useless. The rich has amassed his wealth thinking he can buy his way into or out of absolutely anything. But when he comes to heaven's gate, he's going to find that his earthly riches are useless. God sends him away empty. Futility. So, God opposes the proud, he frustrates the arrogant, he subverts the powerful, he disappoints the rich. Beloved, that's a demonstration of God's justice, isn't it? To recompense the arrogant, the mighty, the rich.

As Abraham told the rich man in the story that Jesus told us about the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16, "Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner, bad things; but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish." Those who humble themselves now will not only avoid the excruciating agony of hell; they're going to find the comfort of God in everlasting life.

Well, not only does God oppose the proud, the good news is that he, we glorify God because of what he does, secondly, because he gives grace to the humble. He gives grace to the humble. Again, the humble, the hungry, they have the central place here in Mary's poetic structure, central place. God's mercy toward the humble, this is the high point. This is the

crescendo of her song. Take a look at verse 52, God lifts up the lowly, "He has exalted those of humble estate." Mary uses the same word here translated, humble estate, back in verse 48, when referring to herself.

She said, "God has looked on the humble estate of his servant." Mary identifies the recipients of God's favor here as humble, as lowly, as insignificant people, those whom the world would easily pass by, roll over, ignore, and even despise. Spiritually, the humble are those who recognize their poverty before God, their utter lack of resources. They're not arrogant. They're not self-assured, they're not the mighty, they're not able to muscle their way into heaven, they're not able to think their way into heaven and outsmart God.

These aren't the wealthy relying on earthly riches to buy their way to a heavenly reward, not at all. The humble are those who realize they have absolutely nothing, nothing to favor God with. They have their hands out, their head bowed down, their hearts directed toward heaven in prayer. And their only plea, the tender mercy of God. Trusting him to reach down in pity and in mercy to save them. You know what? God listens. He listens.

He is not only pleased to show mercy, he rejoices, passionately to lift them up. He lifts us up very high.

Ephesians 2:4-7 says God lifts up the humble. As it says there, “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together in Christ [...] he raised us up with him, he seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show to us the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Wow. God is immeasurably wealthy in mercy and in grace. And he lavishes the humble with his riches, he drenches them in the mercies that are new every morning. God fills the humble with grace to do his perfect, his joyous will. Isn’t that awesome?

Not only does God lift up his people, Mary rejoices because, look at verse 53, he fills the hungry. God fills the hungry. “He has filled the hungry with good things.” Notice Mary doesn’t say he’s filled the hungry with food. There are two words he could, he, could be used here, that Mary could use here for food, but she uses the word, good, goodness, good things. It shows that Mary’s primary thought here is not about physical sustenance. She’s not thinking about those that don’t have enough to eat. She’s not thinking about eradicating world hunger or anything like that.

Mary is talking here about spiritual sustenance. Those who hunger spiritually are those whom God will fill. He'll sustain them; he'll satisfy them with good things, good things. Lowly, hungry, these are the descriptions of the humble, those to whom God shows mercy. Lowly and hungry, those who are the humble belong to the generations of people who like Mary fear God, revere him, honor him, worship him. They're the ones who receive mercy, and they'll receive every good thing.

Just turn, as we close, quickly over to Luke chapter 6. Luke records one of Jesus' sermons there, it's Sermon on the Plain. It sounds remarkably similar to the Sermon on the Mount, but it is different. In Luke 6 verse 20, Jesus "lifted his eyes up on his disciples and he said this, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you who are hungry now for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh. Blessed are you who hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.'"

Look, the poor, the hungry, the mourners, the hated, the despised, the reviled, the spurned, those are Mary's people.

Those are her people. They're ours too, aren't they? They're ours, too. Those are the ones who receive mercy from God. They know him. They bow before him now, and now they find, in humility, they find mercy. That's why God chose the poor of this world, James 2:5, "to be rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom to which he promised to those who love him." And we would rather identify ourselves with those who are the poor of the world, the despised, the lowly, because they're the ones who know God. He's the greatest treasure which the world, the rest of the world completely misses.

The world's blind to the glory of God, his almighty power, the beauty of his holiness, the goodness of his mercy. The world is blind to all of that. Why? Because it's too busy fulfilling proud ambitions, too preoccupied with fighting for might and influence, for chasing wealth and money, distracted by the gods of gold and silver. Sad, isn't it? But God has intentionally hidden the treasure of himself from them. He's frustrated their ambitions; he's confounded their so-called wisdom; he's subverted their power, and he's revealed himself to us, to babes, people like you and me. Our boast is not in ourselves.

Look at us. Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble. There are a few among us, who are wise, mighty and noble. I know

a couple of you. But there are a few who among us are wise, noble. It doesn't say no one wise, but says a few. No one mighty, just a few. But the world considers most of us to be foolish, to be weak, insignificant. And most of us, because of our adherence to Christ, are despised and rejected, and you know what? That's okay. It's exactly as it should be because that's how God gets all the glory. All of it. Our boast is entirely in God and in God alone.

Jeremiah 9:23 to 24, "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this,' the what? "That he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,' declares the Lord." No one like him. Amen.

Father, we give our hearts to you once again in praise and worship. We want to glorify you, rejoice in you, and cause you to be known in this earth. So many blind, so many distracted. Let us not be among them, Father. We give all glory and honor and praise to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.