

## **Luke 1.18-38 Nothing is Impossible with God – WWC 09.17.23**

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Good morning, the Lord bless you and give you peace. We are continuing in our study from Luke, the beloved physician, as Paul calls him. Luke, as we will see in our study together, is a very gifted writer. His use of literary tools helps bring things to light that we may not have otherwise seen. We are struck, of course, by the contrast of a faithful priest who disbelieves the promises of God, and a faithful and humble young woman, who is struck by the power of what is being said of her. Have you ever experienced something, and your only response is, "I didn't see that coming!"? That is exactly the sentiment that rises from that text. How could a young woman with very little real-life experiences display such great faith, and why would such a great task as to be the mother of the Christ be given to her? And of course, as we have considered, Luke is doing it to contribute an orderly account of the life and death of Jesus Christ and in order to encourage the faith of a friend, most excellent Theophilus, as we see in **1:3-4**. It is a book, then, that should also encourage our faith and trust in the Lord. The chief testimony of encouragement that comes from this text is that nothing is impossible with God. He can cause an old couple to have the child they had given up on, and He can cause a virgin young woman to conceive. What act of grace awaits those who know Him and are seeking to serve Him within the contexts He has given them to serve?

As we considered Zechariah a little bit last week, Let's dive into the text and consider this person, Mary.

**.I. Mary. What do we learn about Mary?** Well, we are told in **verse 26** that Mary is from Nazareth of Galilee. **Verse 27** tells us that she was virgin, and that she was engaged to a man named Joseph. We are told that Joseph was a descendant of King David, and therefore we learn that her marriage would facilitate the eventual reign of her son Jesus Christ. It is interesting that it isn't until all of that is said that Luke introduces her name to us. It is as if he wants Theophilus to understand the key elements that distinguish Mary from any other normal historical figure that could have been written about. Certainly, it is that she would birth Jesus Christ, but more than that, that her pedigree, and her virginity would quantify not only the miraculous work of God in her, but also, Christ's rightful and indisputable claim to the throne of David.

But we learn more of her disposition both in the angel Gabriel's announcement and in Mary's response to him. Notice **verse 28**, "**Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!**" It may not seem like there is much here, but we learn that ultimately the reason for her favor is that the Lord is with her. I need to make an exegetical note for clarity here. The Greek literally reads, "be glad," or, "rejoice," (χαίρω) which is the word translated "hail." It is not unlike our formal greeting, like, "good morning." We use a favorable adjective to describe the disposition we desire for someone to experience. Be glad, "favored one," (κεχαριτωμενην from χαριτω [perfect/passive/nominative/feminine/singular/participle]). The conjugated use of this word translated "favored one," is in the perfect passive tense. In other words, she **has been** favored, and **it has been done** to her. ***This is very important because it focuses our attention on the reality that Mary is not a fountain of favor, or as it can also be translated, of grace. She is a vessel unto whom grace has been given.*** The favor comes from the presence of the Lord. The confusion on this term really seems to stem from the translation of the Greek into Latin. There it is translated "Ave gratia plena," which translates literally as "hail, grace full." We supply the English preposition "of." It is true that Mary was full of grace from God, but what the Latin doesn't give us is the perfect passive sense of the Greek, which underscores that this happened to Mary.

That doesn't take anything away from this young woman, but it does focus our attention on what God was doing through these vessels like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph. It also causes us to consider that the greatest gift that can be experienced in this life, and that which most dignifies us is that God should be with us. It may seem like a simple and religiously obvious thing, my friends, but do we really appreciate that communion, that experience of the presence of God through Jesus Christ and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. He is the gift. He is the prize. He is the joy. There is no one higher. There is no one holier. There is no one more

perfect or powerful than He. To give us Himself, then, is the greatest gift He can share. Do we believe that when the bills are past do, or the relationships are failing, or the diagnoses is life changing, or the kids are falling apart? **Do we really believe that He, of all that can be experienced and given, is the highest gift of all?**

**Verse 29** underscores something even more amazing of Mary's character and disposition. Unlike Zechariah's experience, Mary was troubled not at the experience of seeing an angel, but of how the angel spoke to her. How could a being as amazing as Gabriel be so captivated by being in the presence of Mary that he should greet her with such a greeting? There is such humility in this young woman! May God help us to see her example and live by it!

**Verse 30** underscores that the reason for the salutation is that Mary had found favor with God. She had found Karis (Xapris), grace with God. Is grace not what God promises to those who hold this kind of disposition?

**Psalm 51:17**, **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."**

We have to jump down to **verse 34** to apprehend something more of Mary. When she is told of the promise of conception, her response is not of questioning the veracity of the statement, but of the means through which that promise would be fulfilled. I say this because Zechariah is called out, as we see in **verse 20**, for his disbelief, and Gabriel does not do the same with Mary. Further, her response at the end of this section underscores her acceptance and belief that God was able to accomplish His word. But consider with me how the Greek reads in this section, because it puts emphasis on the reason Mary is having trouble understanding the means in which that promise would be fulfilled. The Greek construction is, **"How shall be this since a man I know not?"** The normal means of pregnancy being what they are, and the fact she was still engaged and had maintained purity in her relationship with Joseph and any other man, meant that she was not sure **how** this was to take place. But to underscore what Luke does here, we need to notice that by Mary's testimony and two more times in the text, he makes plain that Mary was a virgin, **verse 26, 27, and 34**. The biblical record is very clear to underscore her purity.

Her incredible disposition and character shines out even more brightly as we consider her response in **verse 38**. There she declares her submission to any direction God would desire of her. **"Behold, I am (the doulee) the slave of the Lord. Be it to me according to your word."** There was no griping, there was no negotiation of terms. She embraced what God had placed before her. And in that we can now consider what it was that she was actually believing. Ultimately, it is what Gabriel says in **verse 37**, ***that God can do the impossible***. The impossible is seen in **verse 35**. The Spirit of God would come upon Mary and create a child whose Father would be God. This language is Old Testament language. It is not language that emphasizes some sexual action. In the Old Testament, as in this passage, intimacy was described as knowing a person. In the proper context, knowing was euphemistic for sexual intimacy. ***But the overshadowing, or coming over, of the Holy Spirit is always language that communicates God's working in someone or something to accomplish a specific purpose, even if that purpose is simply praise.*** **Genesis 1**, the Spirit of the Lord hovered over the face of the waters. **Judges 3:10**, the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah. **Judges 6:34**, the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon. **1 Samuel 19:20**, the Spirit of the Lord came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. There are many more passages throughout the Old Testament that are similar. Ultimately, we are underscoring that there is nothing nefarious that is being communicated between God and Mary. God had chosen Mary for a task that would distinguish her throughout history, and it was God's absolute grace that accomplished that in her by His power, not her own!

And in this I think we can find hope. Our response of faith towards God in the plans He has for us, and acceptance of God's plans, even if we have to be corrected, as Zechariah was, is the response that opens the door of experiencing God's blessings and peace. It is also true that God's plans always produce joy in our lives,

though it may not be immediate, and these plans are always vindicating. Elizabeth was gifted a child and whatever reproach she bore from her culture was removed in such a way that everywhere the story of her pregnancy went, so did the story of why God had caused that void in her life. It was not out of judgment, but out of a desire to make Elizabeth a part of an incredible story of grace. What could be said then by those who may have been propellers of reproach? For Mary, her vindication would come when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, and the pain of watching her son brutalized was removed by the salve of seeing her Son, a conqueror of death. She was vindicated. As those who disbelieved her testimony, and I'm sure there were many, finally stood before God and were ushered away from heaven for rejecting Christ and all that is revealed about Him, she was vindicated.

We can learn a lot about Mary, but the central figure in this passage is not Zechariah, it is not Elizabeth, it is not John the Baptist, it is not Gabriel, or Joseph, or Mary, it is Jesus Christ. What do we learn about Jesus in these passages?

**.II. Jesus. What do we learn about Jesus.** The first significant clue is mentioned in reference to John the Baptist. Notice **verse 15-17**. John the Baptist was fulfilling the work of Elijah as prophesied in **Malachi 4**. He was going to prepare people before the great and awesome Day of the LORD came. The Hebrew word for LORD is Jehovah, the covenant God. The one whom John the Baptist, in the spirit of Elijah, was preparing for was the LORD, Jehovah. Six months later, Mary is told that what God was going to do was bring the Son of the Most High into this world through her. In **1:43**, Elizabeth, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit glorifies God that the mother of her Lord should come to her. She knew that Jesus was in fact Jehovah.

There are many groups that call themselves Christian that question the deity of Jesus Christ. But my friends, if Jesus is not God, then His work on the cross is insufficient. This is not a new issue. Anselm of Canterbury was concerned to give a defense for the Christian doctrine of Christ's deity. Beyond the titles that the Bible records for us, there is the issue that if Jesus was not God, then His sacrifice would be insufficient. The guilt of sin is a crime with eternal consequence against an eternal God. The guilt offering and arbitrator before God had to be eternal to satisfy the breadth of sin, and to arbitrate in all those areas that an eternal God was sinned against. Any religious organization, like Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses, that do not accept the deity of Jesus Christ are not Christian denominations, and they do not offer the hope of the Gospel that is taught in scriptures. Be careful, beloved, not to fall into their deception. If Jesus is not God, there is no certainty that can be had of our salvation, and that is exactly what Luke is underscoring.

And seeing that we are told in the text that He is called God's Son, we learn that God is Father. This is not the only thing we learn, but we learn that distinct from Son and Father is God the Holy Spirit working to accomplish the promises of God. All three of these, who are called God in various places in the scriptures, function individually, and yet function as one. This is where doctrine like the doctrine of the trinity finds its footing. We do not know how this relationship works, but we know enough that if we speak as if anyone in the Godhead were less than the other in essence and authority, we have spoken against the scriptures. He is at once the problem of the one and the many, the example in philosophy of singularity and diversity. It reaches back to the very creation of man in **Genesis 1:26-27** when God declares, "**Let us make man in our image.**" Who is a God like our God?

But what should amaze us even more than the ontology of God, the being and essence of God, so to speak, is the economy He chooses to reveal of Himself. When theologians talk about God in ontological terms, they are speaking about His essence. Who He is. It is sometimes called, theology proper. When theologians talk about how God works in this world and with what we are told in the Bible, how He works in heaven, we are talking about God's economy. They both go together, to be sure, but we can appreciate more of God ontologically because we apprehend something of God economically.

Let me explain. What was God's answer to the apostasy, to the disbelief, and sinful ways of the people of Israel as seen in [verse 17](#)? It was to send John the Baptist to prepare them by turning them back to God so that when Jesus came, they would turn to Him. In other words, ***economically we see God working to renew and redeem, and His answer for that renewal and redemption was to enjoin Himself to us through His Son, so that His Son might in His life, death, and resurrection, provide a way that we could be fully restored to God.*** John says it like this, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." We know salvation because we know Jesus, and we know Jesus because God chose to reveal the manifest glory of His goodness which at once proclaims His single identity as God, and His relationships within the Godhead. That incredible, amazing, no language to describe Him being, chose to provide a means of redemption for any who would come to Him, and He chooses to use those who have come as instruments of grace in His hands. Zechariah and Elizabeth, I'm sending you a son, and He's going to be incredible! Mary, I am doing something in you that declares that nothing is impossible for me, I am creating in you a Son by my own power and means, and He will be called the Son of the Most High. Is there any wonder that Mary says, "let it be done according to your word?" Ontologically, God is all powerful, and holy in every good attribute, that is perfect and the essence of every good attribute. What do we see here but distinguished love and mercy? Ontologically, He is perfect in mercy and all powerful, omnipotent. Economically, I get to touch Jesus and know I am His!

Dear friends, God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever ([James 1:17](#)). From [Genesis 1 – Revelation 22](#) He manifests His gracious and merciful nature towards all who come to Him and repentance. If this God can do the kinds of things we have just read about, what obstacles in our lives right now are robbing us of joy because we see no answers? Zechariah's testimony, as we saw last week, proves he had prayed for a child, and he was heard! The difference was that he was answered only when it was fitting for the plans and purposes of God. This brings to mind the reproof that James outlines to Christians in his epistle. We doubt God, and so He does not answer, [James 1:5-8](#). We ask for things, but they are asked to satisfy an unrighteous longing in our souls, and we prove by our lack of faithfulness that we are not committed to the beauty of Christian faith and virtue, [James 4:1-12](#). But if we are asking for things that honor God, for wisdom to fulfill what God has already called us to do, and for a disposition to enjoy things as God has created us to enjoy them, what is there that God will not do for us?

We must remember the words of Christ: [John 14:12–14](#) (ESV): 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

And [John 16:23–24](#) (ESV): "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

I've been asking in these messages how this kind of thing brings certainty. How much more certainty can we have then to know that the things that we see can only be answered by the reality of God who is engaged in our world? Dear friend, will you not rest in His grace? Stop running from Him! He is not seeking your destruction, but your life, and He gave His life to earn that for you! And for those who are following after God, be ready, God may at any moment stir in your heart to a specific service. How will you answer in that day?