

Luke 1:46-47

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Date: 16 December 1984

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the passage we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 1, and especially verses 46 and 47, beginning of what's known as Mary's song or the Magnificat.

And Mary said, My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. There are two opposite errors that the church can make at any particular time about any particular biblical teaching.

One is to overemphasize and therefore distort a particular emphasis in the Bible, and to distort it perhaps eventually into it becoming a heresy.

On the other hand, there is the equal danger of ignoring a particular teaching of the Bible, and therefore missing out on what God is teaching us in that particular part of the Bible.

Now I think this has probably happened with what the Bible teaches us concerning Mary. We know that the Roman Catholic Church has so emphasized Mary that it has distorted the truth of what the Bible says about her, and it has developed into a virtual worship of Mary, a viewing of Mary as the mediator between man and Jesus Christ.

[1 : 39] But as the Bible tells us, there is only one mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus Christ himself. But on the other hand, it's probably been true that in Reformed churches, we have steered clear of what the Bible says about Mary, for fear that we're going to trip into some kind of error concerning her.

Rather, I think we should look firmly and clearly at what the Bible has to say about her, and to see what we can learn from her example for ourselves, because after all, this is part of the biblical revelation we have through Jesus Christ.

Luke, in his gospel particularly, seems to rely quite heavily upon Mary's account of things. It seems that if Luke did not meet Mary, which is quite probable, at least he had access to some source that was directly from Mary, because he gives the account particularly of the birth and what led up to it, very much from Mary's point of view.

So this would encourage us to think about what we can learn from Mary, because obviously she played such a vital part, not only, of course, in being the mother of our Lord Jesus, but also in the way in which Luke's gospel came to us.

Let's then look at what we can learn from Mary, and first of all, think about her simply in the terms emphasized here, that she comes before us as a very ordinary Jewish girl.

[3 : 24] I use that against the emphasis that has so often been made of Mary being some kind of super saint, some kind of sinless or immaculate person.

The Bible in no way presents her as such. Now there are several ways in which we can see Mary's ordinariness. In the first one, we see that she was obviously worried by the angel's greeting in verse 29.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The greeting had been, Greetings, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you.

Now here we see a very ordinary reaction to the appearance of the angel and his words. The way in which any one of us might have reacted to a situation like that.

Here was someone who in no sense was extraordinary in her own spiritual awareness. She wasn't the kind of person that was quite familiar with angels popping up here, there, and everywhere.

[4 : 36] Rather, this was a very unique occurrence for her. And she was troubled by it. She was worried by what he was saying and wondering what on earth it was meaning for herself.

A very down-to-earth reaction. But then we read that she was amazed by the angel's message when he communicated why he was there and why in fact she was so highly favored.

In verse 34, she responded to the information that she was in fact to be the mother of the Lord Jesus in these words.

How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin? She was absolutely amazed that she should be chosen for this particular honor.

But also, she was completely confused and again worried by how on earth it could come to happen because she was a virgin.

[5 : 40] In other words, here again we see, in this particular case, Mary's ignorance, in the ordinary everyday sense of it, her ignorance of the plan and purpose of God.

She had no prior warning, no foreknowledge that in fact the Son of God was to be born into this world in this very special and particular way.

We may know from the Old Testament that there concerning the virgin bearing the child from Isaiah. But it would seem that Mary at this particular point, if she had known these words or was familiar with them, at least they didn't immediately spring into her mind.

Again, her reaction was very ordinary and everyday, the same kind of reaction as any young girl or woman here would have had to that kind of information.

So we see that she wasn't at all taking for granted what was being said to her, but rather she was amazed and puzzled by it all. But then also later on in the life of Jesus, we discover that she was astonished at Jesus and the kind of things that he did and said.

[6 : 57] Particularly, we can think about when Jesus was a boy and when he went up to the temple, you remember, and he was there discussing with the learned experts in the law.

And when Mary found out about this, she was amazed, she was astonished that Jesus was actually doing this. Now again, that betrays the fact that she again was very ordinary, an ordinary human being just like the rest of us, that any mother here would be surprised in a similar kind of way if her son suddenly at the age of 12 was engaged in that kind of activity.

This seemed to come as quite a surprise to her, although again we know that she knew the various promises that had been made at the time of his birth, and we're told that she pondered on these things in her heart.

Yet again, we see her ordinariness coming through later on in Jesus' life at that stage. There are other examples of that same kind of thing happening later in the life of Jesus, when perhaps Mary was expecting Jesus to do things that he didn't, or did things that she didn't expect, that kind of thing.

At one point, she comes with the rest of the family to see Jesus, and Jesus won't see them. He's engaged in teaching, and he says that, who are my mother and my brothers, and he points to the people there, the disciples who are listening to him, these are my mothers and brothers.

[8 : 33] In other words, this is my family. He was seeking at that point to try to distance himself from his own natural family, in one sense obviously for their own good, and for his concern for them, particularly for his mother, because he knew that in time she was going to suffer great hurt, she was going to suffer great sadness through, of course, his own death.

So in that way, he was seeking even at that stage to build up this kind of slight distance between them. But the point is that Mary really, at this point, didn't really understand, it would seem, exactly what was happening.

So there again we see, in another way, how she was astonished at Jesus and the things that he did, stressing again her ordinariness. But most clearly of all, we see her ordinary humanity in this verse 47 that we've looked at in particular.

She says, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. In other words, Mary realized that she needed a Savior just the same as everyone else.

She was just another Jewish woman who needed this long-awaited and long-promised Messiah.

[10 : 02] She needed God as her Savior, and she recognized that fact. Now even this verse in itself, if there was nothing else, this would give the lie to any kind of emphasis that Mary is someone who can intercede for us, come between us and God.

Rather, the emphasis here is that she needed a Savior just the same as we do. So then, there are these emphases in this passage and in other places in the Gospels concerning Mary, concerning what we've called her ordinariness, an ordinary Jewish woman.

Yet, we have to recognize, we have to stress, that in some ways, of course, she was extraordinary. Extraordinary in some ways, not in what she was herself, but of course in what happened to her.

Extraordinary also in herself, some of the ways in which she reacted to what happened to her. So let's look now at how she was extraordinary.

And of course, first we have to focus on the fact that she is unique in what happened to her. There is no other woman that can be compared to Mary in this way, in that she, and she alone, was, is the mother of our Lord Jesus.

[11 : 32] The mother, we may say to put it exactly, the mother of the human nature of the Lord Jesus. And so, the son that would be born to her, we're told here, would be called the son of the Most High.

And he would reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end. She was to be a means by which the eternal son of God was going to take flesh, to take a human nature, and come into this world.

Now there we see, not just the extraordinariness of Jesus, of Mary, but her uniqueness. No other woman has had this honor.

And that is why, in this passage, she is so honored. Look at the greeting of the angel. Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.

And then later on, we're told that Elizabeth, speaking under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

[12 : 38] And then she talks about her as the mother of my Lord. Now all that is biblical, and it's true, and it is right, and it's something that we should rejoice in together. With Mary, that in fact, she was singled out as the mother of the Lord Jesus.

So she was unique in, first of all, her being the mother of the Messiah, the mother of the long-awaited, the long-promised Christ, the Anointed One, who was, in fact, Son of God, coming into this world, taking to himself a human nature.

But also, unique, as part and parcel of that, unique, as the Virgin giving birth. And that's stressed in verse 27 and verse 34.

We're told, in verse 27, she was a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. And in verse 34, her response, How will this be, since I am a virgin?

And that's emphasized in Matthew's Gospel as well, and it's emphasized in the prophecy in Isaiah, that in fact, this was a supernatural birth.

[13 : 57] Now, there are other examples of birth, may in some senses be called supernatural in the Bible, in the sense that there were people who were barren or people who were old, like Sarah, whom it would not be expected would be able to bear children.

But, the uniqueness of the birth of the Lord Jesus is that there was no role of a human father whatsoever in his conception and in his birth.

And this is where the coming of the Lord Jesus and his entry into this world differs from any other. There may have been wonderful births in the Old Testament, but always they had the human agency of the father as well as of the mother.

In other words, they were natural conceptions and births in that sense. But when we come to think of the Lord Jesus, we are thinking of something absolutely unique, where, if you like, the genetic material of the flesh, the human nature of our Lord Jesus, came only from his mother, Mary.

And through the action of the Holy Spirit, this was constituted into a whole human being, a whole human nature. And so here again, we see the absolute uniqueness of Mary, not only in the fact that she was the mother of the Lord Jesus, but the particular way in which it happened.

[15 : 31] Now that again, has importance, not only as we think of the uniqueness of Mary, but it has importance as we think of the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it stresses that he is both God and man.

It also stresses, incidentally, it stresses the importance of the child before it is born, because we see that right from the time that Jesus was conceived in this miraculous way, he was, he was constituted as the Son of God having become flesh.

So that is true in his case, in this unique case, it is of course true in a lesser way, but it is true nonetheless of every human being, that a human before it is born, from the time of its conception. So then we see the uniqueness of Mary. But then we also see that she was extraordinary in the kind of example that she gives to us, because although we stress that Mary is an ordinary Jewish young woman, yet there is something extraordinary about what we may call her piety, or about her worship of God, or something extraordinary about her spiritual awareness of God and of his

dealings.

We've seen in some ways how she was ignorant of some things, how she was amazed and so on, just as an ordinary person would be, yet we see also that she sets us a great example of someone who is spiritually minded.

[17:11] We see this first in her response to the angel's message in verse 38. After she has expressed her amazement, after she has asked her questions, this is her final response.

I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered, may it be to me as you have said. Then the angel left her. Now here we see a very beautiful and very human emphasis.

We're not led to think that Mary just immediately received what the angel said without thinking, without needing to think it out for herself or to wonder at it at all.

We're told that she did. She was amazed. She wondered and she asked questions. How could it be and so on. But the point is that when her questions were asked and when answers were given to her satisfaction, this was her response.

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. In other words, her response was not on the one hand a total refusal to have anything to do with this revealed purpose of God.

[18:26] Nor on the other hand was it simply a resignation of saying, well, after all, God is God so we can do what he wants. But it was rather a willing response to what God had revealed.

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. In other words, she is wholeheartedly committing herself to this decision of God.

Now there we see a great example of everyone although none of us are in that kind of unique situation which many were. But a great example. On the one hand, as God reveals his will to us, we are not to refuse that will.

Nor are we simply to just resign ourselves and say, well, we don't need to do anything. But rather, we are asked in the Bible to respond willingly to what God has revealed.

God promises great things to us but those promises are conditional upon response, upon our responding willingly to what he says.

[19:37] There are promises that he will do in us and for us great things in this life and the life to come. But we need to respond in faith and to accept what he has said for ourselves.

And then secondly, we see in Mary a spontaneous excitement and a lack of sham humility. We see it particularly in the passage known as the Magnificat where she praises or magnifies the Lord verses 46 to 55.

She, in other words, she recognised the wonderful thing that God was doing in her and through her and accepted it joyfully.

There wasn't what I call this sham humility of trying to play down what was happening and trying to say, oh, it's nothing really very much. But rather, she was so happy that she wanted to sing about it, to share it with others and to accept joyfully that she, in fact, was blessed and favoured by God. She remembered, God remembered the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed. Now, there's nothing wrong in any conceited or proud way with any of what Mary is saying here.

[21:00] Rather, it is a statement of her joy and her thankfulness and her acceptance of what God has done in her and through her. Now, again, what happened to Mary was unique, but the same principles apply to ourselves.

God has great things to do in us and through us in the Christian life. And the same kind of reaction ought to come from us.

One that is a spontaneous excitement of what God is doing and has promised to do for us. And also, a right kind of humility, not the sham humility that we seek to play down anything that has happened in your own life or anything that God is doing in your own life, but rather an acceptance of it and a thankfulness that God is indeed at work within your life.

so often we perhaps don't have the right kind of biblical emphasis about humility. Humility, yes, is the opposite of conceit of someone being full of themselves and emphasizing themselves all the time, but it is also something that is the opposite of a sham or mock humility which is really trying again in a different way to draw attention to oneself because of not admitting what you really are and what God is doing for you.

So then, we see here a great example again from the Virgin Mary. But then also we see an example in the realm of knowledge.

[22 : 42] We've stressed already that there seemed to be some things that were surprising to her, that she seemed to be maybe ignorant at certain points, but also there is evidence of great knowledge concerning the purpose of God.

If we look at this song of praise of hers in verses 46 to 55, we see great evidence of her knowledge of the scriptures that are in this passage quotations from all of the psalms that we've sung this morning.

Appropriate quotations from them, fitting them in, seeing them relevant to her own particular case, this great coming of the salvation of God through herself.

So we see this great and detailed knowledge of what God had already promised in his word and her now being able to fit all these things together and express joy and thanks to God for what he was doing now, not just for her, but for all people everywhere.

And again here there's an example for us, an example to study God's word and to know these things, to think about them. There's perhaps evidence here that after the angel came to Mary she really started to think seriously about a lot of these things that maybe before she had learned them maybe as a child but perhaps they didn't have any terrible, great significance until suddenly this happened and she began to look at all these things, all these passages in the Old Testament and remembering things she'd learned perhaps as a child and suddenly they began to fit all together and she could see them in a wholly different light.

[24 : 28] How often it's been the case too for people who have learned things from the Bible in their young days and they perhaps didn't think a great deal about them but later on in their lives when they really came to know the reality of what God has promised in his word suddenly all these passages came alive and that's why it's so important that we teach our children the scriptures, teach them to read them and teach them to learn them so that they know these things so that later on these passages may very well come alive in a way in which they would never do if they had never learned them because there would be nothing to come alive if they had never known them.

So important that we follow this example of Mary's here in being familiar with God's word knowing it for ourselves but also we see an example of thoughtfulness from Mary in chapter 2 on verse 19 that Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart a very famous verse after the birth of Jesus, after the coming of the shepherds we're told that Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart.

She wasn't just someone who was excited, she was excited obviously as she poured forth her praise in the magnificat praising God for what he had done and was doing.

Also we see that she's very thoughtful, quietly pondering on what had happened, thinking about what all this meant, what the shepherds were now saying, confirming what had already been told her by the angel.

Here was another angelic appearance to the shepherds and they were talking about this being a saviour, being descended from David, being Christ the Lord, so on.

[26 : 23] All these things confirming again what she had already been told and so she thought through these things carefully. Again, a tremendous example for us because there is to be a balance in the Christian life between being excited, being really stirred up and joyful about what God has done for us and being thoughtful.

And these two things ought to be in balance. There ought to be a feeling of excitement about worshipping God and about serving him, but also there should be a thoughtfulness.

It shouldn't be a kind of empty excitement. Not on the other hand, should our thoughtfulness be sterile and dead. rather the two together should form a Christian way of thinking and way of action. We as Christians are called particularly to be thoughtful, to think out what God is saying to us in his word, and to think about the things that are going on in the world around us, and to bring these two together, seeing how God's word applies to ourselves in our own situation and to the world in which we live.

But then, the final point we want to look at is her relation to Jesus. Now, as we've stressed already, she has a unique relation to Jesus.

[27 : 49] After the flesh, she is his mother, the mother of the Lord Jesus. But, in her relation to Jesus, there is also an example for ourselves.

Remember, how at Cana, the wedding in Cana of Galilee, they ran out of wine. And Mary, it was, who comes to Jesus and simply says to him, they have no more wine.

And she kind of left it at that. She didn't try to perhaps suggest what he should do or anything like that, but simply she comes and makes known the problem to him.

and then leaves it with him. Now that shows us, I think, something of her growing, her developing awareness of who her son is and what he is able to do.

That kind of thing we see again as an example for ourselves. this was something that, as I've suggested, was growing with Mary.

[28 : 59] It was not something that she immediately realized. She didn't immediately recognize everything that Jesus was and everything he was going to do, but she grew into that awareness and that's something that, of course, we also need to grow in and it's something that we need to practice, taking our problems, our requests to Jesus and leaving them with him.

Not perhaps dictating as to what exactly he's going to do, what his purposes are going to be, but simply laying it before him and leaving it with him. And we see her dedication to her son even to the extent of following him to be present there at the cross when he died upon the cross.

Although the disciples had all forsaken him and fled, yet she was there with some of the other women beside Jesus when he died on the cross so that he was able to say to her that he was making provision for her.

Actually, one of the other disciples, John, had come back by that stage and Jesus said that he was committing her to John's care, that John was going to look after her as a son would in the place of Jesus who was now, of course, dying and eventually being taken away back to heaven.

So there we see how Mary in following Jesus to that extent, receives this great blessing and this great kind word from the Lord Jesus from the cross.

[30 : 37] And we see there a fulfillment of what she was referring to at the beginning of the Magnificat. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

throughout her life, she was beginning to grasp and finally did grasp that Jesus was her Savior and Jesus was the one through whom she would have forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

And that is the same thing that we all have to recognize and we all have to come to the Lord Jesus upon the same basis. In many ways, it must have been very difficult for her because she was coming to the one who was her son.

The one that she had seen growing up through all the ups and downs of their family life together.

Yet this was the one who she recognized now was perfect, was sinless.

He was the one who could take away sin. And that was why he was dying on the cross. And so Mary was to be found with the other disciples. In that time leading up to Pentecost, she was there with the early church as part of it because she came to see that indeed the Lord Jesus is the God appointed Savior.

[31 : 59] What had been revealed to her by the angel, it grew in reality in her own experience until it was fully and finally accepted. So then, we've got to recognize that any idea of placing Mary on some kind pedestal or worshipping her or seeking to come to God through her is totally wrong and unbiblical.

Yet, we have in Mary a great example set before us of spirituality, of someone who comes to a real spiritual awareness and understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and salvation through him.

And she rejoices in God my Savior. so we today are challenged by her to also rejoice in God our Savior today through his coming into the world and through his taking away our sin upon the cross. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.