

My Soul Magnifies and My Spirit Rejoices

The Glory of God and the Joy of His People

Introduction

The Text

⁴⁶ And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” ⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (Luk 1:46–56)

The Outline

- A. Let me give you where we’re going up front.
 - 1. I’m going to camp on the first 2 vv. (vv. 46-47) at the start as I feel the principle that emerges here sheds light on the text as a whole.
 - 2. From there we will move through the text in 2 stages: (1) We will look first at vv. 48-49 and God’s dealings with Mary in a personal way; (2) Then we will look particularly at vv. 50-55 as the personal dimension opens up into the corporate and we see how God’s dealings with Mary illustrate for us the way God will deal with all His people.

(1) The Glory of God and the Joy of His People (vv. 46-47)

How Do You Handle Encouragement?

- A. In an attempt to connect us back into the narrative of Luke’s gospel, let me begin by asking a question: How do you handle the encouragement or honor you receive from others in the church?
 - 1. Maybe you’re already saying, “Nick, I never receive encouragement from the members of this church!” If that is the case, I’m so sorry! O how I am going to labor that that not be so! I want us to be a church that is quick, almost reflexive, to highlight the ways we see God at work in each other. I want the church culture that Paul was aiming at with the church in Rome: “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10).

- a. Tonight, I'm holding a Leaders' Appreciation Dinner at my house for some of the central leaders of this church. And it's my goal to outdo them in showing honor—I want to thank, encourage, honor them for the work that they've done in this church. But what do you do with that?

“My Soul Magnifies the Lord”

A. O that we, would do what Mary does!

- 1. Listen again with me to how Elizabeth honors Mary: “^{42b} Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb... ⁴⁵ And Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (1:42b, 45). She is honoring Mary for the work of God's grace in her life.

- a. And now, moving towards the fringes of our text, Mary responds: “My soul magnifies the Lord!” (v. 46b).

- i. She's not puffed up by the encouragement—“Tell me more!”; nor is she threatened by it—“Don't say that about me, I'm just a loser”; she knows how to handle it, where to take it—“My soul magnifies the Lord!”

(1) “If you see something good in me, it's because of something good in Him!”

- 2. We encourage and honor one another, and we receive that encouragement and honor, in such a way that it is God who is magnified, not us.

“And My Spirit Rejoices”

A. We say, “Wait a minute! We take the encouragement and honor, and send it upward to God? That doesn't sound fun. I want to savor it for myself, pull it into the dark recesses of my heart and stroke it for a little while.”

- 1. It's like we get all these carrots dangled in front of our faces. People are encouraging one another and building each other up, and then, before we can bite into them, we have to pass them up to God for Him to enjoy? “I want the carrot. That's my carrot! Why's He got to take my credit, steal my joy!”

B. But if we think that way, we don't yet know God as we should. We don't yet know God as Mary does. Follow with her into v. 47: “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” “My soul magnifies...and my spirit rejoices in...” Him!

- 1. His glory is not contrary to my joy but the source and object of it! The greater He gets the happier I am!

“In God My Savior”

A. But how does this work? Why is this the case?

1. These 2 ideas, God’s glory and my joy, are held together by a single word in this opening statement: my “Savior.”
 - a. He is not just great somewhere out there, somewhere above me. “Savior” means He takes that greatness and directs it towards me in goodness. Therefore, the greater He is, the more safe, secure, and satisfied I am.
 - i. This is what Paul is after in [Rom 8:31b](#)—“If God [the great and glorious God] is for us, who can be against us?” His greatness is harnessed by His goodness and is, therefore, exercised not to destroy me but to save me!

- B. We spoke last week of all things existing for the glory of God. On that point, I had wanted to read something I came across by J.I. Packer but there wasn’t time for it. His words fit just as well into the point I have been making here: “God’s goal is His glory, but this needs careful explanation, for it is easily misunderstood. It points to a purpose not of divine egoism, as is sometimes imagined, but of divine love. Certainly, God wants to be praised for His praiseworthiness and exalted for His greatness and goodness; He wants to be appreciated for what He is. But the glory that is His goal is in fact a two-sided, two-stage relationship: it is...a conjunction of (a) revelatory acts on His part whereby He shows His glory to men and angels in free generosity, with (b) responsive adoration on their part whereby they give Him glory out of gratitude for what they have seen and received. In this conjunction is realized the fellowship of love for which God’s rational creatures were and are made, and for which fallen human beings have now been redeemed. The to-and-fro of seeing glory in God and giving glory to God is the true fulfillment of human nature at its heart, and it brings supreme joy to man just as it does to God (cf. [Zeph 3:14-17](#))” (Concise Theology, p. 59).
 1. Packer references [Zeph 3:14-17](#) at the end of this quote as an illustration of His point. Let’s go there now and we’ll bring all this together: “¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: ‘Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. ¹⁷ The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing’” ([Zeph 3:14–17](#)).
 - a. God rejoices in showing us His great goodness and we rejoice in the great good God we are shown! Here is the “to-and-fro” Packer is talking about. Here is the way His glory does not threaten or undermine my joy but sources and secures it! He is “a mighty one”, and He uses that might to “save” sinners like me!

The Form Reinforces the Content

- A. As we prepare now to step more fully into our text with this opening principle in mind, allow me to make one final note: the form of our text actually serves to reinforce its content.

1. It is widely understood by scholars that what we have here in vv. 46-55 is a hymn, a hymn of praise. Your Bible's probably set the text off to indicate this. Mary is singing!
 2. Now here's why I say the form of this text (hymn) reinforces its message (God's glory is our joy).
 - a. A hymn of praise is directed towards God in praise of who He is and what He's done (His glory).
 - b. But a hymn of praise is at the same time a song, an expression of the singer's joy. I sing about Him because He makes me happy!
- B. There is something so right, so profound in the act of singing praise to God. For in our songs we are letting the good that He has done for us lead us back to Him as the source of it all.
1. We aren't taking the good He's given and running off from Him in our idolatry. We are taking the good and returning to Him in our worship!
 - a. It is quite a bit like a child that wanted something for Christmas and the parents, delighting to delight their little boy, give it to him. Only when he tears off the paper and finds the thing he so desired, though he is enamored with the gift, he leaves the toy on the floor straightaway, runs, and jumps into His parents' lap. "Thank you! You guys are so awesome!" Then, later, when he does want to play with the toy, he asks mommy and daddy to join in! He doesn't run off with the good gift and forget about his parents. The good gift causes him to run back towards His parents!
 - i. That is what is happening when we sing praise to God! It is so healthy, so re-humanizing, so right. We are finding our ultimate joy in His glory!
- C. Now we will take this principle that has been firmly established by the first 2 vv. and explore how it works out first in the personal dimension and then, after it has broadened, in the corporate dimension.

(2) In the Personal Dimension (vv. 48-49)

- A. A close read of vv. 48-49 will uncover the fact that Mary gives us here a string of ground clauses—3 reasons for her magnifying and rejoicing in God her Savior. These are delineated clearly in the English text by the word: "for." Let's look at each of these briefly in isolation:

(1) "For He Has Looked..." (v. 48a)

- A. The first grounds for her hymn of praise is given in v. 48a: "For he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant."

1. Think about the image that is being invoked here. I'm down here. I can't do it. I'm looking up. And He, in mercy, looks down!
 - a. This is the critical posture for any true Christian. It begins the Christian life and it marks it on into eternity. C.S. Lewis would say: "As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you."
- B. Do we have Mary's posture? You have to look on me or I'm dead. Or do we spend all our time trying to self-save. "Whether God looks or not, I'm getting out of this mess. I'm climbing up. I'm saving."
 1. No! He won't look at such a person. He's not enamored like the world is at all our efforts, but at our faith! "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:2).

(2) "For...All Generations Will Call Me Blessed" (v. 48b)

- A. We are given the second grounds in v. 48b: "For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed."
 1. Mary knows that people will call her blessed, as Elizabeth has just done, and this is an awesome thing. But Mary also knows that it is not what she has done that is the decisive factor in this, but what God has done for her!
 - a. Because "He has looked upon [her]" (v. 48a)—or below: because "He...has done great things for [her]" (v. 49a)—"generations will call [her] blessed" (v. 48b).
- B. Those of us who are concerned with our legacy ought to lean in at this point. Do you want to be remembered in future generations? Mary provides us with the secret: tremble at and believe in God's word to you! It wasn't her ambition, or her prowess, or even her holiness, it was her faith: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word" (v. 38).
 1. It doesn't matter if you're Nelson Mandela or Michael Jordan, the only legacies that will make it through the judgment day of Christ will be those that were forged in humble reliance upon His greatness and power: "Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward" (Matt 10:42).

(3) "For He Who Is Mighty Has Done Great Things for Me" (v. 49a)

- A. She gives us the third grounds for her magnifying and rejoicing in the Lord in v. 49a: "For He who is mighty has done great things for me."

1. Here again is just a summary of all that we've said already. He who is mighty, uses that might to do great things for me! In the Greek, the word "magnify" is related to this word "great". The idea is this: because He has done great things for me, I want to make Him known as great with all my soul!

"Holy Is His Name!" (v. 49b)

- A. Now how Mary comes out of all this is awesome! She looks at all He has done for her and lets out another note of praise: "Holy is His name" (v. 49b).
 1. "All generations may know my name and call me blessed, but His lifting me up has been done in such a way that His name still shines brightest. I start to shine not because of who I am in and of myself but because of who He is and what He's doing for me."
 - a. And this is what makes God's name so holy, set apart from any other.
 - i. While we're all competing, fighting to make a name for ourselves over and against one another, God makes a name for Himself by making a name for me. He comes to the humble, the lowly, the weak, the sinful, and He builds them up. No one does that! But God does! "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "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" (Isa 57:15).

(3) In the Corporate Dimension (vv. 50-55)

From Holy Name to Corporate Scope

- A. Mary takes God's dealings with her and draws conclusions about His name. And it's actually at this point in her hymn that the scope starts to broaden.
 1. And this makes sense. For the name of God stands as a synonym for His glory or, even more, for His person, His character.
 - a. What God has done for Mary in particular indicates something about who He is in general. And that means that what He is doing with Mary is but a mere illustration of what He is ready to do for so many more! The personal is moving towards the corporate.
- B. This is important because Roman Catholicism has tried to move in precisely the opposite direction. They separate Mary, assuming God is dealing with her in a unique way because of her purity and holiness—she was born without sin and was so pure she didn't die but was assumed into heaven.

1. But such a move is not only contrary to where Jesus goes with her in [Luk 11:27-28](#), it is contrary to where Mary herself goes in this hymn. She sees the grace shown to her as illustrative of the grace God is ready to show to all His people.

The Great Reversal

A. Let's read vv. 50-55 again: “⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

1. Mary realizes that the merciful reversal of fortunes that she's experienced at the hand of the Lord is held out to all who would fear Him and give up their pursuit of joy in their own glory to find it in His.

B. There are 2 sides to this great reversal that she sings of:

1. On the one hand are the proud whom God will scatter; the mighty whom God will bring down; and the rich whom God will empty.
2. And on the other hand are the humble whom God will exalt; the lowly servant whom God will help; the hungry whom God will fill with good things.

From Gen 11 to Gen 12

A. There are many places we could go with this, but seeing that all of this reversing activity is grounded in what God spoke particularly to Abraham (v. 55), perhaps an interesting place to focus for our purposes here is in the transition from [Gen 11](#) to [Gen 12](#), where God first starts to deal with Abraham. Here is where we actually see these vv. illustrated for us in quite a profound way.

1. For in [Gen 11](#), fallen man is consumed with activity, but it's all energized by self-aggrandizement, vainglory: “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves...” (v. 4). God comes down, sees their pride and He brings them down from their exalted state and scatters them over the face of the earth.

a. Here is the first side of that reversal illustrated.

2. And then, amazingly we come to [Gen 12](#), where we first meet Abraham and we read this: “¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing’” (vv. 1–2). The very ambition of the tower builders in [Gen 11](#)—a name—is the very thing given by grace to the childless Abraham.

- a. Now the second side of that reversal comes into view. And the difference is this. In the first the men were attempting to make that name for themselves over and against God. In the second, Abraham was ready to let God do His miracle in Him. Though he was childless, He trusted God to make of Him a great nation, to make for Him a great name.
- B. We have to beware then of this same sort of thing going on around us and in our own hearts. We may be busy trying to build up, but if it is not with God, under God, we will find we are losing in the end, going down, being scattered. It's miserable to live in [Gen 11](#). You work so hard and you go nowhere. Your name will just be forgotten in the end.
- 1. But if we are willing to let Him have His way with us, if we put ourselves in His hands, giving our name to Him, we will find that He is ready to build us up, even giving us a name within His name.
 - a. Here are those who have stopped trying to impress others or even God and have started being impressed by God!

The Offspring of Abraham and the Fruit of Mary's Womb

- A. And of course the only way to ever reach such a place is to follow Jesus from Bethlehem to Calvary and watch the Son of God, Abraham's offspring, the blessed fruit of Mary's womb ([v. 42b](#)), rot on that cross under the wrath of God for sinners.
- 1. Jesus is the real subject of this hymn. He is the real object of Mary's praise. He is the One who will accomplish the great reversal. And He will do it by bringing both sides together in Himself at the cross.
 - a. At the cross is where, if God would grant us eyes to see it, the high are brought low, as we perceive in His wounds the penalty they deserve from a holy God.
 - b. At the cross is where the low are brought high, as we perceive in His wounds the full payment of our ransom!
 - c. I am low and I am high, I am poor and I am rich, I am sorrowful and I am full of joy; I am orphaned and I am adopted, I am dead and I am alive, at one and the same time in Christ!
- B. The cross of Jesus Christ is both the climactic expression of God's greatness and God's goodness. He has overcome Satan, sin, and death, and He has done it to save a wretch like me. ⁴⁶ "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"