

Why Is this Granted to Me?!

The Surprising Joy of the Supporting Cast

Introduction

The Text

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Luk 1:39–45)

A Big Name or Bit-Player?

- A. I assume we’ve all at one time or another gone looking for a movie that we might want to watch with our family or friends. We’re scrolling through Netflix or Redbox and looking at all the covers.
1. One way we try to discern whether the movie might be good or not is by looking at who’s in it. And the producers help us out. Though there’s often 100s of people acting to some capacity in a given movie, they put the names of the big stars on the front cover.
 - a. These are the actors that most everyone knows. These are the ones that, if the movie wins an Oscar or something, they get to come up and give a speech, and the world leans in to listen. These are the ones that when they go out to eat, cameras are flashing and fans are swooning.
 2. And when you’ve finished the movie, their names are highlighted in the credits at the end. There’s this single line, big font, look at who’s in this movie. And then its time to give the 100s of other actors some love right? So they break out the double column, tiny font, hyper-speed scroll, where you could barely read their names even if you were playing it in slow-mo.
- B. So let me ask you something: How would you feel if you were just one of the 100s?
1. You want be on the cover right? You want to be front and center. You want to feel like your life means something. Like you’ve made it.

2. But you're not on the cover. You don't even get invited to the Oscars. And when you go out to dinner, you order your food, pay your bill, and go back home to your apartment. No one recognizes you.
 - a. You're just a bit-player, just supporting cast. You help prop up the glory and fame of another. You're like the curtain boy at a theater. You're just back there in the shadows. No one knows you, and no one cares. "Just open that curtain already so we can see the real star!"

The Surprising Joy of John and Elizabeth

- A. In our text, here's the piece that struck me deepest:
 1. For John and Elizabeth it's not a drag to be the bit-players, the supporting cast, the curtain boy for Christ. Rather, it is a high privilege and joy! They find overwhelming joy in passing the mic, in pulling the curtain for Him! "Wait until you hear Him! Wait until you see Him!"
- B. As we move through our text, we will look at: (1) The Grace of Another Greeting; (2) The Joy of Surrender; and (3) The Prerequisite of the Spirit.
 1. But I have one significant hope and prayer in all of this. With the New Year approaching, this is often a time when people are already in a bit more pensive of a mood—reflecting on the previous year and looking forward to the year ahead. I'm praying that John and Elizabeth will serve us in our evaluating, planning, and goal-setting.
 - a. Forget your goals about losing a couple pounds, making a couple more bucks, moving up a couple more rungs on the corporate ladder.
 - b. Let's make it our aim to take everything we've been given by Him and write it back into His story, where it belongs, where He's the Big Name. Your relationships, your work, your money, your ministry, your life all for Him—for His glory and your joy!
 - i. Let's let John and Elizabeth lead us into the 2016.

(1) The Grace of Another Greeting

The Meet and Greet

- A. We begin with Mary. She just received word from Gabriel back up in v. 36 that her "relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son," so, naturally, when the angel has departed we read now in vv. 39-40: "³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth."

1. This meeting constitutes a very significant moment in the narrative. For, up to this point, we've been given the stories of John and Jesus in parallel but separate accounts, but now the two sons and their mothers first interact.
- B. And it is no small coincidence, I think, that in our narrative all this emphasis is placed on the greeting that Mary gives to Elizabeth.
1. For we recall from last week that it was the greeting of grace given to Mary by Gabriel that caused her so much trouble (vv. 28-29). "Why should a woman like me receive such a greeting of grace from a God so holy and above me?!" But troubling grace gives way to amazing grace as she receives God's words to her by faith.
 - a. The greeting of grace starts to spread, starts to go viral!
- C. When the greeting of grace comes to us in Christ, don't we find ourselves suddenly compelled to go out to the highways and byways and give it away to others?! "Get into the King's banquet. I don't care if you're poor, crippled, blind, or lame, His invitation is for you!" (Luk 14:21-23).
1. I wonder if you realize that this greeting of grace is coming to you this morning—through my lips from God. There is grace for you in Christ this morning if you would only turn from your sin and receive Him.

(2) The Joy of Surrender

- A. And now, at v. 41, things start to get particularly amazing. We see the fires of joy set ablaze by this greeting of grace, in both John and Elizabeth.

John's Leap for Joy

- A. John appears in the narrative first: "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb (v. 41a). And we know from v. 44 that this is a leap "for joy."
1. John is beginning to fulfill the ministry that was prophesied of him back up in vv. 14-17, even from the womb. He's a prenatal prophet!
 - a. V. 14: "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth..." Here, even in the womb, joy is starting to make its appearance.
 - b. V. 15b: "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." This is a prenatal prophet here. He is ministering by the Spirit from the womb.
 - c. V. 16: "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God."
 - i. Elizabeth later explains that she knew Mary was the "mother of [her] Lord"... "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to

my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy (v. 44). In other words, John's leap for joy turned her towards the Lord.

- d. V. 17: "He will go before Him (the Lord)..." John, the forerunner, 6 months older than Jesus at this point, is going before Him, and preparing the way for Him.
 - e. Beyond this, there is a link between John's leaping for joy in the womb here and the leaping for joy that was prophesied in connection with his forerunning ministry back in Mal 4:2: "The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."
 - i. Even from the womb, Christ is shedding light. And, even from the womb, John is leaping for joy in the warmth of His rays!
- B. I feel there is something we must mention in light of the dark days in which we live. For, if I'm reading the data correctly, in the great majority of states in this country, John the prenatal prophet, 6 months old in his mother's womb, could literally have his joy crushed under the pressure of a doctor's forceps. His legs would be ripped off first, then his body. Then they'd suction out his brain and skull. His joy, his ministry, over!
- 1. Brothers and sisters the Scriptures are clear: personhood begins in the womb. Don't let cultural orthodoxy move you from biblical orthodoxy: murder is murder no matter how you euphemize it.
- C. Now, returning to our text, here's the intriguing thing: this joy that John finds is sourced not in his own greatness, but in the greatness of another.
- 1. There are 2 miraculous sons here. And John is saying, "The older will serve the younger. You will be far greater than me. And I love it! I'm leaping for joy because of it! I get to be a curtain boy for my King! He's heading to the Oscars, and I get to be the nobody that rolls out the red carpet!"
 - a. He already feels this way in the womb, and he continues to express such sentiments many years later: ²⁶ And they [John's Disciples] came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness [Jesus]—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease" (Joh 3:26–30).

Elizabeth's Loud Cry for Joy

- A. It is actually with Elizabeth that this idea of the surprising joy of the supporting cast really started to make an impression upon me.

1. For think with me about where she's been for a moment. Because of her barrenness, she's most certainly suffered reproach from others most of her life. This was a bitter thing. And she spent much through the years in the way of prayers and tears.
 - a. And then, wonder of all wonders, in the twilight of her life, God grants that she conceive! "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people" (v. 25).
 - i. Don't you think that child would be her pride and joy? Wouldn't you be prone to make that child everything to you?

- B. And yet, when news comes to her of another son who will be greater than her own, and another mommy who will be more highly honored than her, she rejoices! She's not threatened by this. She's not ready to compete. She doesn't go all out mommy wars on Mary and Jesus. She rejoices: "⁴²She exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!...[and later]...⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.'"
 1. Just get this into your life for a moment and think about it. Your boy is gonna be better than mine. You're the one that's gonna get that bumper sticker on your car: "Proud parent of an honor roll student." My child's gonna get straight C's. Average. Your child's gonna need a separate cabinet to hold all his little league trophies. My child's gonna be the water boy. Your child will be greater than mine in every way. And I love it!

- C. Her question in v. 43 takes us even deeper into the surprising joy of the supporting cast: "Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"
 1. Here, we might say, Elizabeth is troubled, not by the fact that Mary or Jesus might be more highly honored than her or John, but by the grace shown her that she should be included in God's story at all! "Who am I to even be in the presence of my Lord and His mom?!"

This Is God's Story

- A. Both John and Elizabeth have caught on to one all-important truth: This is God's story. His name is on the outside of the cover. He's not supporting cast in our feature film, we are to be supporting cast in His.
 1. John doesn't take the ministry, the disciples that God's given him, and run off to try to make a name for himself. He happily surrenders it all to the Name above all Names.
 2. Elizabeth doesn't take the new family that God's given her and run off to try to make a name for herself. She happily surrenders it all to the Name above all Names.

- B. And though such a surrendering might initially feel like a death to us, we come to find that giving ourselves fully to the Lord is a lot less like dying and a lot more like coming alive! It's a lot less like sorrow, and a lot more like joy!

- 1. We come into our own when we come back under Him!

All Things through Him and for Him

- A. John and Elizabeth illustrate for us what ought to be true for all reality: “¹⁶ For by him [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17).

- 1. You, I, and everything exist for Him! But in the human heart there's been massive rebellion at this very point. And it is the reason for all of our sorrow.

- B. Christmas is all about rescuing us from ourselves, and bringing things back into order in our lives and in the universe so that we can stop dying and truly live.

- 1. This is really what we see in the Christmas scene: (1) Jews, the Shepherds running in; (2) Gentiles, the magi coming and lowering before Him; (3) Angels, songs filling the heavens; (4) Cosmos, a star rising and leading.

- a. Everything is being brought back from it's straying and into the story of God.

Where Are We?

- A. But where are we in all of this...at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016. The Jew, the Gentile, the angelic, the cosmic, John, Elizabeth all are shown at Christmas returning to their proper place in God's story, but are we?

- 1. Are we still thinking that joy is found, not in submitting all to the Son, but in competing with Him? Are we overjoyed to be the supporting cast in His story, or are we still trying to write our own name in the lights? Is this still about me? Or in whatever I'm saying or doing, wherever I may find myself, am I happy to be the curtain boy for my King?

- B. Consider:

- 1. Where are we with the relationships God has given us? Are we writing them back into His story? God has put people in our lives that we might connect them to Him. But am I trying to spin them in such a way that everyone orbits around me, sees me, loves me?

- a. Are my words and deeds like the dropping of bread crumbs that lead those in my life to the foot of the cross?

2. Where are we with the work God has put our hands to? Are we writing it back into His story? God has given you a calling on this earth, whether you are in the office with your associates, or the family room with your children.
 - a. If you're in the office, are you posturing and politicking to climb the corporate ladder? Or are you working as if unto the Lord, with integrity and concern for others, so that He is seen?
 - b. Or if you're a mommy, are you pouring yourself out for your kids so that others see how great a parent you are, or so that your kids and others see how great Jesus is?
3. Where are we with the money & possessions God gives us? Are we writing them back into His story? When I get that Christmas bonus, do I even pray about what to do with it? Or does it just go right into funding my own feature film—get me a new car, a new suit, something to get others to notice me.
 - a. Does [2 Cor 8:9](#) even cross our minds? *“Though he was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.”* Maybe, if I give some of this away, they would see, not me, but Him!
- C. O how we rob ourselves of joy when we try to take the stage! The world needs to see, we need to see, more of Him. It's an anxious business, pretending to be a star! How freeing to lay it down, to surrender our lives to *“the bright Morning Star”* ([Rev 22:16](#)), the Name above all Names, to write our story into His!

(3) The Prerequisite of the Spirit

We Can't Do It

- A. Now, it is important to note that, what I've just pleaded for us to do—surrender all things in our lives to God for His glory and your joy—we can't do it.
 1. By nature we live these imploding lives, unable to see past our own naval. If we are ever to get out of our own stories and into God's He must pick up His pen and do it in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- B. This truth is made plain in our text here. For Elizabeth's joyful exclamation, this loud cry of praise for Mary and her child, erupts from her heart only after she is *“filled with the Holy Spirit”* (v. 41b).
 1. Without the influence of the Spirit, we would neither seek God's glory nor find joy in it. And we certainly wouldn't call, as Elizabeth does, Jesus Lord of our lives: *“No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit”* (1 Cor 12:3b).

This Filling Anticipates the Outpouring

- A. This Spirit-filling here with John and Elizabeth is an anticipation of the great outpouring of the Spirit that would happen after Christ's work on the cross.

1. These Christmas events are but a foreshadow of what He would accomplish fully in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The proper order of creation that was lost at the fall, is regained in redemption.
 - a. Jesus is being put back on center stage where He belongs: “¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:18–20).

- B. This is how God is going to get you and me back into His story.
 1. He would take on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. And, as a man, He would live the life we should’ve lived—surrendering all things to the will of His Father, to the very end: “Not my will, but Yours be done!” (Luk 22:42).
 2. And though He followed that will perfectly, it led Him not first to a throne but to a cross. For though He lived the life we should’ve lived, it was His Father’s will that He die the death we should’ve died—suffering under the wrath of a holy God for our sin, not His.
 - a. And though all things should rightfully be subject to Him, He subjects Himself to all things:
 - i. The celestial bodies that should orbit around Him, go dark on that day;
 - ii. The angels that exist to serve Him are held in abeyance;
 - iii. While the Jews and the Gentiles rage against Him with all manner of depravity.
 - b. We tried with all our might to kick him off the stage, to write Him out of our story. But while we were writing Him out of our story, He was writing us back into His! He was “making peace by the blood of His cross” (Col 1:20b). He was bringing us back into order.

- C. He rises from the dead, ascends to His Father’s right hand, and pours out His Spirit upon us, taking up residence within us, and living His life again, only now in and through us, conforming us more and more into His image. And now, by His grace, His glory has become my joy!

- D. And even though He’s the star of this story, He’s the Big Name, when He puts His Spirit within me, He also puts His name upon me (Rev 22:4). He’s taking me to be with Him where He is, to see His glory.
 1. At the end of the age, there’s going to be a grand unveiling. And O how you're gonna want to be a curtain boy on that day. So let's start now, 2016.