

Belong to the People of Promise

Luke 1:54-55

August 30, 2015

Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Luke's Gospel and we are in Luke 1:46-55, the Song of Mary. We've been studying the Mary's Magnificat, and we've come to the final stanza of just what a wonderful, magnificent song that is. And we want to read the entire song one more time because when we read it today in its entirety, we're going to leave it behind as we go on next week. So, just to enjoy its beauty one more time, let's read it together. Follow along as I read Luke 1:46 and following, "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in 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

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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.'"

As we've said before, that passage right there is the perfect Biblical illustration of a spiritual song. Mary's Song is her response for what God had done for her, to her. It's full of her emotion. We've talked about that. It's full of her rejoicing, full of her gratitude for God's mercy and grace. But if you'll notice, the occasion that prompted the singing of this song, which is none other than the conception of the Son of God in Mary's virgin womb, where is that? Isn't it interesting that Mary says nothing explicit about the specific personal blessing she received? Isn't that fascinating?

Notice in verse 55, though, it's not until the final line of the final stanza that she even alludes to the particular reason for her song. It's a little subtle, maybe hidden in the context of God's mercy to Israel. But when Mary finally refers to the baby that's growing in her womb, it's in this way, "To

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Abraham and to his offspring," offspring, "forever." The offspring of Abraham, literally to his seed, it's talking about the seed of Abraham. That is a clear reference in a Jewish mind, clear reference to the Messiah. The coming of Messiah fulfilled the promise God made to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant. All the promises God made to Abraham were tied to the promise of the seed. And so as Mary ends her song, it is really on a triumphant note of the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. His entire redemptive plan is wrapped up in that one child. These are truths that really surpass Mary personally, and she wonders, she is amazed that she's been given an integral part of what God is doing on earth.

But, just push pause for a moment. Think about this because this is what we need to learn as well. Notice here, Mary's utter lack of individualism, individualism. Mary's sense of self as a distinct, unique personality standing on her own, autonomous and independent. That sense of self, so common among us Americans, is foreign to Mary. I'm not saying that she doesn't think of herself as an individual human being. Obviously, she, she does. We've, we've already pointed out how this is Mary's Song. She uses personal, pronouns to refer

to herself. She says, my soul, my spirit, God, my Savior. But the emphasis throughout on herself, the emphasis is muted. And especially so, as she starts referring to herself in the third person there in verse 48, "God has looked on the humble estate of his servant," literally, his slave.

When she sees herself having a role in this whole redemptive plan, it's not to acknowledge her independence, but her ownership, her total dependence. And from then on in this song, we hear a lot about God, a lot about others. She counts herself among the people with whom she identifies. In fact, if you just flow through the, through the song, the song there, she talks about all generations. She talks about those who fear him. She talks about generation to generation, those of humble estate, those who hunger, his servant Israel, our fathers, Abraham and his offspring. Those people are her people.

Her identity is only significant as one member among the rest of those. She rejoices in being owned by God her master, and she rejoices not in her, in her individualism, she rejoices in her belonging. Mary's sense of identity is found in her

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corporate identity, who she is as an individual, far less important to her than who she belongs to, than the people she belongs to. Mary belongs to God. Mary belongs to the historic line of faithful Israel. She is, she's numbered among those humble souls who fear the Lord, who hope in his promises, and that sense of identity was enough and everything she needed to satisfy every desire she had for significance and meaning in her life.

Listen, when we view ourselves like Mary did, when we view ourselves in light of God and who he is, in light of God's people, in light of what God is doing from Genesis to Revelation, you know what? It solves everything for us. Every trial and triumph of life is interpreted through that grid, and everything that happens to us, whether it's a difficulty or a challenge we're facing, or whether it's something we're really happy about, it's all part of God's unfolding plan that he determined from the beginning and will bring to its final consummation in the very end. And you know what? When we have that kind of confidence, when we have that kind of view of God, nothing can shake us, nothing can rock our world. Everything is

interpreted through that grid. And we have an anchor that holds our soul fast.

But that's not a very American way of thinking, is it? As a culture, we celebrate individuals, not groups. We follow with interest the lives of celebrated personalities, entertainers, musicians, athletes. Americans like to think of individual achievement, not corporate identity. In fact, we lose interest, our eyes glaze over a bit, we even regard with some level of suspicion the larger groups, the corporations, right? That sense of individual identity, that sense of individualism is assumed in our culture. It's assumed in the fabric of our DNA as a society. It's even embraced. It's celebrated, and it's also celebrated in the evangelical churches all over the country.

It entered the church not through Scripture, but through American cultural and political ideals. Our political system of representative democracy, power to the people, that's how many Christians think about the church. Every individual member has his say. Every individual member has a vote. Every individual member's interest needs to be satisfied, even catered to. Those

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cultural sympathies may be part of our American DNA, but they're not a part of our heavenly DNA. That mentality is precisely what we need to unlearn as Bible believing Christians. We are learning a new culture, a culture that is revealed to us from heaven given to us in this book we received from God. And as we grow in the knowledge of the truth, our individual and our corporate identities come into proper alignment, conforming to God's design, conforming to his desire, his intention, his plan.

And once again, we just can't help but recognize Mary's, how she's exemplary in modeling for us the right mentality. This is how believers ought to think. She's just a young girl. So, it doesn't matter about our age, it doesn't matter if we're old, we're young, or anywhere in between; doesn't matter our life circumstance, we need to think like Mary. Her explicit example showing us how we need to glorify and rejoice in God is really an implicit lesson on how we need to think about ourselves. She was understandably overjoyed at what God had done for her personally as an individual, obviously. But her individual joys were somewhat eclipsed by what God was accomplishing for his glory, what he was doing for his entire people. She was not an isolated unit; she was part of a whole fabric of God's design.

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What's made our task more difficult, our task of unlearning our American individualism, is that our emphasis on the self has become so deeply ingrained in our thinking, even in the church, we've learned that we are to be catered to, appealed to, satisfied. It's a hard mentality to overcome, especially when we've spent half a century believing in the sovereignty of the self.

Let me show just one example of what I mean. There are many examples of this, but I just want to show you one. Back in the early 1900s, there was a man named Jarrell Waskom Pickett. J. Waskom Pickett. Mr. Pickett went to India and he was sent there as a Methodist missionary in 1910, and he soon became interested in the sociology of church growth. He started studying conversion rates and church growth rates among castes and social groups in certain parts of India. He made observations about common traits among groups and groups that seemed to have higher conversion rates than others, higher rates of church growth and according to Pickett's observations, the Indian people, they liked to remain within their own caste.

You understand the Indian caste system, how you didn't go above and below. You had the Brahman caste and you had all these others castes in descending order below it down to the beggar caste and everything else. Indians liked to stay within their caste, within their own social strata, when they converted to Christianity. They wanted to remain within those groups, maintain those castes even in the church. It's kind of like just accepting cliquishness and just making a place for it.

So Pickett published his findings in a 1933 book called *Christian Mass Movements in India*. That book had a profound influence on another missionary also working in India. A man named Donald McGavran was making some of the same observations about the growth of Christianity in India, and Pickett's book was a catalyst for his thinking. In fact, he said, Quote, "I lit my candle at Pickett's fire." McGavran continued to study the causes and barriers to church growth, but he took Pickett's work even further. He wanted to identify principles that, get this, could guarantee higher rates of individual conversion and higher rates

of church growth. He was looking for something that was reproducible, guaranteeing conversions, guaranteeing rates of church growth.

The Bible tells us those things belong firmly in the domain of the sovereign will of God. But McGavran's theology emphasized human choice, not divine sovereignty. McGavran's theology emphasized man's will. Man, not God, was the determining factor in conversion and church growth. So, in McGavran's mind, if you could find principles that would influence man's will, if you could incorporate those principles and if they're reproducible, well, this would become a catalyst for an unprecedented spiritual revival. His principles held forth the promise of mass conversions and massive churches. His key principle, McGavran's key principle of, of church growth and what earned him the title, The Father of the Church Growth Movement, was a principle he called The Homogenous Growth Unit Principle. The Homogenous Growth Unit Principle, that is the heart of the church growth movement. That's what has come to shape the face of evangelical churches all across America and also around the world.

Here's what it means: A homogenous unit is just a fancy way of referring to a group within a society in which the members share common characteristics. Okay? So it's just a group that likes to be together or is defined the same way because they do whatever they do together. So you could say cowboys are a homogenous unit; athletes, homogenous unit; College students are a homogenous unit, so on and so forth. Basically, the Homogenous Growth Unit Principle says, "People," and this is his quote, "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers." I'll read that once again. "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers."

So, from that thinking, McGavran was trying to find a way for people to become Christians without changing, without any change. If you want to reach cowboys, package the Gospel in cowboy terms. If you want to reach athletes, package the Gospel in athletic terms using athletic metaphors and analogies. If you want to reach college students, well, appeal to them as students. And on and on it goes.

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When McGavran brought the Homogenous Growth Unit Principle back to America, you can understand, it was an easy sell. Americans were used to being marketed to, and the atmosphere of American theology was already permeated by individual choice, personal preference, personal autonomy, and the sovereignty of self. McGavran's principle didn't smell any different to Americans than the air they were already breathing. Don't force people to cross any barriers, keep them as comfortable and as untroubled as possible, and you'll see better results in evangelism and church grown. And you know? That worked. People flocked to churches operating by that principle.

Father McGavran produced his offspring, and that offspring is called the Seeker Movement. We've all seen the results. It has taken deep root all throughout our country and even around the world. That's why there are so many ministries, outreaches, support groups for every kind of interest, every kind of life situation. Almost every circumstance you can think about has a group for it. By appealing to individual self-identity, people remain fixed in their old identity rather than embracing a new identity in Christ. You see how problematic that is? For these people, Christianity is about individual self-expression rather

than learning a new culture and belonging to a new people. For them it's about continuing to worship the God of self rather than worshipping the God who created them and called them to be a part of a new people.

Well, this thing spread far and wide. McGavran resigned his missionary post in 1961, and he found the Institute for Church Growth in Eugene, Oregon. Four years later, in 1965, he moved his institute to the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission in Pasadena, California. Together with C. Peter Wagoner, Ralph Winter, and other popular missiologists, McGavran taught ministerial students the foundational principles of church growth theory, and those early students put that principle into effect in their churches. They saw massive growth, massive numbers. The most successful among them became evangelists for the Church Growth Movement, the seeker-sensitive movement. You know who they are; you know their names because their books have lined the shelves in Christian bookstores for decades.

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Struggling pastors not sure about how to grow a church grabbed onto those books like a lifeline. And they imbibed those teachings and they tried to put them into effect in their own churches. Yes, it worked, more people coming, bigger churches. But, listen, it was a Trojan horse. What looked like a gift actually carried a massive plague, the plague of self-worship, the plague of personal autonomy and those churches are now filled with people who've been taught, it's all about you, it's all about you. You see how far we've drifted from the humble simplicity, the unassuming piety of this young girl, Mary? What we read in this song, the deepest, clearest, most honest expression of Mary's heart, it's really pretty foreign to the American way of thinking. Isn't it? Listen, I'm a part of this. Like you, I grew up in this, and I'm trying to pull my way out. We need to do that together.

When is the last time you saw a Christian like Mary, someone who cares nothing about personal preference, who cares nothing about individual self-expression, someone whose identity is completely and totally in God, someone considering herself in the relationship of slave to master? When was the last time you heard of a Christian who is rejoicing in God, but not at all in

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connection with some personal, individual blessing or triumph, but rather in connection with what God is accomplishing among his people throughout all history and what he's going to do in the future? When was the last time you met a person like that? When you do meet people like that, don't they make you feel a bit uncomfortable? They don't fit in our churches.

Mary's remarkable, isn't she? But on, on another sense, she shouldn't be remarkable, she should not be remarkable at all. This should be the mentality of every single believer, caring more about God and his interests, quick, racing to defer to others in their preferences, more interested in how God is fulfilling his promises to Abraham and to his offspring forever. Far more interested in that than how God finds, for us, a parking space at the grocery store and how he makes our lives just a little bit easier, a little bit more tolerable, a little bit easier to cope with.

Folks, like Mary, we need to think of ourselves as those who belong to something greater than ourselves. Folks, that's escape. That is freedom. That is true joy when we find God

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greater than ourselves, when we find all our identity wrapped up in him and him alone, wrapped up in people who are like him, who we can see from the beginning of time all the way through the history of the Bible; we see them now, we identify them this way. These are our people. By God's grace, we've been grafted into these people. We've been grafted into a new people. We now belong to the people of promise. And what is most important is not us. What's most important is the promise of God and what that promise teaches us about the God who gave it.

As we've already seen, Mary has rejoiced in God as her sovereign Lord, as her merciful savior. Mary has learned about God. She's experienced his nature first-hand. He is a mighty, holy, merciful God. She knows God by observing his ways, by how he opposes the proud and he gives grace to the humble. That's all in this song. God frustrates the arrogant among men. He subverts the ambitions of the powerful. He disappoints the expectations of the rich, and for Mary that is a cause of great rejoicing since she's not proud, she's not mighty, she's not wealthy. Mary counts herself among the humble, the hungry. She considers herself content to be among those who are lowly before God. She hungers and thirsts for righteousness that she herself

does not possess. Those are her people, a people totally and utterly dependent on God. And as she says in verse 50, "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."

It was enough for her to be counted among those people. The ground of her hope for the future was laid down way in the past when God spoke. Mary looked forward in confidence because she knew her history. She knew the history of who God was, what he'd said, and how he'd dealt with his people. She knew that history, so she felt and held deep convictions about her place among God's chosen people and about God's plan for the future.

The commentator Joel Green gets it exactly right when he says this, quote, "All these operative words in verses 54 to 55, servant, remember, mercy, promise, ancestors, and Abraham, point backward to God's history with Israel to their election, to their covenantal relationship. In fact, these terms and especially mercy, point even further back to the nature of God himself. The God Mary praises is the covenant-making God, the God who acts out of his own self-giving nature to embrace men and women in relationship. God remembers and acts." End Quote.

Mary belongs to this people, the people of the promise. The people who build their hope on whatever comes out of God's mouth. In fact, the central line in the final stanza of Mary's song is in verses 54 and 55, It's that line right there, verse 55, "As he spoke to our fathers." The emphasis is on God's spoken word, which comes to Mary and to us as a promise. It's a promise. The word of God, the promise of God, what God has said, knowing his word from the past gives us a deep conviction, a confident hope about the future. It gives us a grid through which to think about our entire life, every challenge, every frustration, everything that can be the, the provocation for impatience, sadness, trouble. It's all wrapped up right here, this kind of thinking.

And that's what I want you to see this morning. As we move through just these final couple of verses of Mary's song, if we consider ourselves with Mary, if we belong to the people to whom Mary belonged, then this last stanza of her song is going to give us four reasons for encouragement and confident hope for the future. Four reasons, and they're there in your bulletin in the outline.

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If our eyes are on ourselves and on our individual situations, if our identities are completely self-centered, if, if we're completely wrapped up in self-focus, in personal preference, in individual self-expression, you know what? We are setting ourselves up for all kinds of disappointment. We're setting ourselves up for a lack of contentment.

In fact, every time Melinda looks through a catalogue, I tell her, that's an exercise in discontent right there; stop doing that. It just makes you discontented to look at the catalogue. You have what you need. Am I not enough? Am I not more to you than...than ten sons! And she keeps flipping through the catalogue! But listen, in all seriousness, discontentment, it gives birth to other temptations, doesn't it? Like grumbling and complaining. As we read from Psalm 90, God judges that.

God's not happy with grumbling and complaining. He judges it. If our eyes, though, are on God's historic dealings with his people and his future plans for his people, then our individual concerns are eclipsed by God's greater work. We belong to a

greater story something way bigger than ourselves. We belong to a people of promise, and our hope is in a God who always keeps his promises.

So, with all that in mind, let's get into our outline. Four promises. All God's people hope in these promises. All of us depend on them. First promise: We believe the promise that God will help us. We believe the promise that God will help us. The basis of Mary's confidence and at the very foundation is what she says at the beginning of verse 54, "He has helped his servant, Israel." That's it. He's helped his servant Israel, and that is her confidence for the future. Good enough for her.

His servant Israel, that's a reference to the Old Testament, to the way in which God designated his covenant people. Mary references this Old Testament identity of the people of God, and there are a lot of references to this in the Old Testament. But let me highlight one very important text in Isaiah 41:8 to 9. God says, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its

farther corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off.'"

That's Isaiah 41:8-9. It's a very important verse because it identifies not just the children of Abraham, but the true children of Abraham. It says, "Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend." Not all of Abraham's descendants belong in that category. Not all of them are worthy to be called, my servant, Israel. Paul says, Romans 9:6 to 8, "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means, Paul says, "that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

By using this designation, my servant, Mary's being specific here. She is, in fact, following God's pattern of being specific. He says in the Old Testament, my servant David, my servant Jacob, even, Zerubbabel, my servant. In fact, in, in Isaiah 42:1, Jesus the Messiah is called, my servant. God says,

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"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights." That designation, my servant, it belongs to those who do what a servant does. That make sense? Follow that logic?

Those who obey the master. What fundamental foundational pattern of obedience did Abraham set for all future generations? Genesis 15:6, "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." God imputed righteousness to Abraham because Abraham believed him, and his life produced works that were consistent with that faith. James 2:22 to 23 says, "You see that faith was active along with Abraham's works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness,'" and get this, "and he was called," what? "The friend of God," right? The friend of God.

Those whom God has designated, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend, to them God extends power to help, power to help them, help. Mary may be thinking in her mind when she talks about God's help to his servant Israel, she may be thinking of passages like Isaiah

63:9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." Isn't that a beautiful picture of God? Racing to help those who cry out for him. Racing to those who are afflicted.

When God helps his people, look, he enters into their suffering. He enters into their pain and he leads them through it and he leads them beyond it. Know that for yourself. If you belong to this people that Mary is describing, like we do, God is in the fire with you. He's in the trial with you to lead you through it, to lead you to understand it in the context of his good purposes. This is talking about the sympathy and the empathy of God, his willingness and his ability to know what his people to need because he's in it with them. No greater example of that than the Lord Jesus Christ himself, right? Who entered into all of our suffering and greater still.

The verb translated, help, is used throughout the Old Testament. It's a summary term for all that God has done for Israel, but when you unpack that term, you find out what he has

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helped his servant, you find out what that really means. First, help means compassion. It means compassion. The word is used to describe compassionate, practical help as in 2 Chronicles 28:15, where it talks about compassion, practical help for captives of war, clothing the naked, dressing wounds, feeding, putting the feeble on donkeys and helping them.

Second, help, means aid, it means assistance. It describes even the practical, logistical help the Levites provided for the overwhelmed priests. Priests in 2 Chronicles 29:34, that is they sk, there were so many burnt offerings to sacrifice, the, the priests were overwhelmed, and so the Levites stepped in and gave them help. What did the help mean? It meant skinning and cutting up animals. A pretty, you've dressed a deer, some of you. It's pretty hard work, pretty bloody work, pretty messy. They stepped in, in that way. God helps that way, too. God gives practical aid to accomplish all that he commands us to do. He doesn't just command us and leave us there to suffer and squirm and struggle. He steps in with help, practical help, to help us accomplish what he commands us to do.

Third thing, help means, rescue from danger. Help means, rescue from danger. It describes the Lord, the Lord's help for David when he helped David escape from the hand of Saul. You remember those stories? But in Psalm 18, David describes that in verse 35, he says, "You've given me the shield of your salvation and your right hand supported me." That's the word help. "Your right hand helped me...Your gentleness made me great." In Psalm 118 verse 13, it says, "I was pushed hard so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. He lifted me up." More instances all throughout scripture, in the Old Testament of this, than we have time to recount. But David constantly found God to be his help.

Fourth thing: Help means support. Help means, support, compassion, aid, rescue, also support. God supported David, Psalm 41:13, "But you have upheld me because of my integrity and set me in your presence forever." That's the word helped. He lifted him up with God at his back, with God as his support; no one could thwart God's will to exalt David and keep him upheld.

Fifth: Help means preservation. Preservation, it described what David sees in the Lord's mercy, Psalm 40 verse 11, "As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me," that's the

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word help. "It'll keep me and preserve me forever." He, he wasn't in the moment of need only then. He was in need of help from start to finish, and God was there to visit him with help, to help him persevere to the very end. Beloved, we have that promise, don't we?

What Mary summarized with one, just one short sentence there, is God's abundant help for his servant Israel illustrated all through the Old Testament. She's talking about his compassion for the weak, injured, and needy. She's talking about his practical assistance to help accomplish what he commands to do. His messiah, talks about his rescue from danger, physical or spiritual. Talks about his support for those who love him, his power to keep and preserve over time. What does this teach us about our God? Does it cause you to rejoice because he is our helper, he is our compassion, he is our compassionate God, he's our great strength. As we said, when God helps his people, he enters into that suffering and pain.

No greater example than our Savior, the merciful High Priest, Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high

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priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who is in every respect been tempted as we are, yet without sin." You know what? He understands more than you and I do the power of temptation. You know why? Because he never broke.

Temptation visits us, and if God doesn't restrain his grace and if God doesn't keep the tempter at bay, that tempter will put enough pressure on us till we break, until we fall because we're just flesh. Jesus, his human nature was bound to his divine nature, and just as a wooden stick that's bound to a titanium bar when the pressure comes upon it, the wood feels it, but the titanium doesn't let it break. Jesus felt that pressure, he felt temptation until he exhausted the temptation because he never broke. So, beloved, if you think Jesus hasn't gone through what you've gone through, he has. And far more. That's why we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He gets it all. God's help is in Christ.

And that had to be the same thought that prompted Isaac Watts to write, "Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come." He is our God; he is our hope. And, like Mary, we find great confidence in being numbered among God's people. Our connection to God's people united together in Christ, their

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history becomes our history. Their reason for hope and rejoicing becomes our reason for hope and rejoicing. The help God has given his people in the past becomes a solid foundation for our encouragement for the future. Well, that's the promise, okay? We believe God will help us.

Here's a second promise. Second promise: We believe the promise that God will remember us. God will remember us, verse 54, "He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy." Again, this is a promise for those who belong to God, to those who identify with his servant Israel, the redeemed, the chosen people of God. Isaiah 44:21, God says, "Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; you are my servant; O Israel you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you."

Often in Scripture, God's people plead with him to remember him, to remember his mercy to them. In Psalm 25, David says, "Remember your mercy, O Lord and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old." Just like Mary, David says the same

thing. Habakkuk, he's anticipating divine judgment, coming in the Babylonian invasion, and he made this simple plea of God, Habakkuk 3:2, "In wrath remember mercy." In wrath remember mercy. Are we not praying as God's people for that today, as America continues diving to the pit? "In wrath, Lord, remember mercy."

In fact, look at the similar theme, just flip ahead in your Bible one, probably one page, Luke 1:68-75, similar theme comes up in Zechariah's song. Luke 1:68, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteous before him all our days."

Did you catch that there in verse 72? "To remember his holy covenant." Remember. Same concept. Those references there in Zechariah just unfolded, salvation from enemies, mercy promised to the fathers, an oath to father Abraham, deliverance from enemies. You know what those are? Those are declarations of God's faithfulness to his people, the fact that God will not let his word fall to the ground. He will uphold it. He will keep it.

Sometimes you'll see in Scripture, "God remembered such and such." You remember those references? Like Genesis 8:1, "God remembered Noah" there in the ark. Genesis 9:16, "God will see the rainbow in the sky and he will remember the covenant he made with mankind never to destroy the earth in flood again." Genesis 32:22, "God remembered Rachel and he opened her womb." Pretty common phrase, but it's not here that God forgot anything; like, Oh, yeah, Noah, he's over there in an ark. I better get him out of that thing. Got to drain the world of the water. Boy, I got a lot to do. It's not that. He doesn't need reminding; got an excellent memory. These are just instances of anthropomorphism. All right? Just ascribing to God human characteristics, and it's for the sake of illustration.

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What happens when you and I, when we remember something suddenly? We jump into action, don't we? Oh, I've got to go get the kids from school! Oh, where are the keys? I've got to jump in the car! Right? It immediately drives us into action.

Remembering prompts decisive action, and that's the same thing that's being communicated here. Whenever the Bible describes God remembering something, when God says he remembered, it's a picture of him suddenly taking action. Something he's mindful of all along, but now is the time for action, immediate action.

So when Mary said, "God has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy," she's referring to the times in history when God intervened to act decisively, immediately, showing mercy to Israel and there are so many examples in the Old Testament. The prototype though is in Exodus. We've mentioned it before. God promised Abram in Genesis 15:13, "Know for certain your offspring will be sojourners in a land that's not theirs, they will be slaves there, they'll be afflicted for 400 years." The entire time of their oppression, the entire time, God knew their suffering. He saw what they were going through in Egypt. He had not forgotten.

And in Exodus 2:23, it says, "The people of Israel groaned because of their slavery, they cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and," get this, "God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel," I love this line, "And God knew." God knew. He always knew, but now he's going to act. Remember, he heard, he remembered, he saw, he knew. It's just an unqualified affirmation of the limitless omniscience of God. God hears, he remembers, he sees, he knows. And in connection to his people, we benefit from his covenant faithfulness to those people, the covenant that he made with Abraham and his offspring; we've entered into that.

What does that teach us about God? It teaches us that he knows all things. He never forgets. He sees everything in your heart, in your mind, in your life and especially when it comes to what he promises, he is faithful to fulfill what he promised, he'll do. Does that encourage you? I sure hope so. That's what this is about. It's about great encouragement. The greatest instance of remembering mercy. We heard that mentioned in the text we quoted just a few minutes ago, Isaiah 44:21, "Remember

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these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; and you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I blotted out your sins; I blotted out your transgressions like a cloud, I have gotten rid our sins like a mist. So return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

We believe God will help us, don't we? We believe he'll remember us. Here's the third promise: We believe the promise that God will save us. God will save us. That is the great act of his remembering. That's the great act of his remembering, and that great act of his remembering his people in salvation is coming upon Mary in her time. It's coming upon Mary in her time. Look at verses 54 and 55 again, “He's helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” And it referenced “To Abraham and to his offspring.” That's a reference to the Abrahamic Covenant.

We'll have to save a full exposition of the Abrahamic Covenant for another time, and you're thinking, thank you, Lord, thank you. But I do want to give you just enough to understand

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its significance. Okay? God first called Abram when he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans. You know where that is? That is, you know before Iraq, before Kuwait, before any of those occupied the area, before the Babylonians, the Assyrians, Biblically, going way way back, the Chaldean people lived there in that part of the Persian Gulf up there at the top, and Abraham lived there. Abram lived there. God called him, told him to leave, Get up, get out, go, Genesis 12:1, "Go from your country, from your kindred, from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great so that you will be a blessing ... in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." And that was just an introduction.

Fuller explanation came in Genesis 15, then again in Genesis, it was reiterated in Genesis 13, 17, 22. God, God had visited Abram in the land of promise, in the land of Canaan and as God unfolded the enormity, the magnanimity of that Abrahamic Covenant and all that it meant; it involved really, if we whittle it down, several key elements, three really. There were personal promises to Abraham, personal promises to Abraham; he'd be a blessing, he'd have a great name, he'd have many physical

descendants, he'd be the father of a multitude of nations, and he'd have an everlasting possession in the land of Canaan. That's to Abraham personally, but there were also national promises to Israel.

Abraham's descendants would become a great nation. They would own and possess the land of Canaan from the river of Egypt to the river of the Euphrates. So this argument going on in the Middle East, solved right here, isn't it? God, who created the heavens and the earth, who owns all the land, specifically this land, he gave it to Abraham and to his descendants forever. Okay? I've solved the crisis in the Middle East, right there, just one word.

In addition, though, there was a universal promise to all people. A universal promise to all people; this is where we enter in. All the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham's physical line of descent, through his seed. We can summarize the promises that God made to Abraham; all those promises involved the seed, the land, the nation, and divine blessing. The Abrahamic Covenant is what we call a unilateral

promise. That means Abram didn't have to do anything to earn it. He didn't have to fulfill any condition to get it. God just came to him and said, I'm going to do this. Abraham's like, Okay, that's it. I'm going to do it.

This was a promise, though, that was received by faith. Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed the Lord, he counted it to him as righteousness." So the imputation of righteousness, the reckoning to Abraham of a righteousness that was not his own, that resulted in justification by faith. Abram set the pattern for individual salvation for all the people of God throughout all time. This is how all the people of God enter into relationship with God, they take him at his word, they believe him. And you know what God does? He imputes a righteousness to us that's not our own and he declares us righteous.

The fulfillment of every other promise God made to Abram, the seed, the land, the nation, the blessing; major storyline of the entire Bible, isn't it? That's the story. It starts in Genesis, it runs all the way to Revelation. Everything that God promised Abram in Genesis, Genesis, by the time we get to

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Revelation, all fulfilled, everything perfectly consummated. And it all starts with individual salvation through the seed.

Individual salvation, justification by faith, Abram believed the Lord, he counted it to him as righteousness. All who put their faith in God, like Abram did, become partakers of these promises as well.

And here's where it gets really interesting. The promise of salvation, the, the foundation of the Abrahamic Covenant, that promise predated Abraham. It came before Abraham. The first glimpse of what God would later promise to Abraham, of what God would fulfill through Jesus Christ, you know what? God didn't actually give that preview to a man. He didn't give that preview to a woman. God spoke the first promise of salvation to a fallen angel named Satan. In the Garden of Eden, right after the fall, God told Satan in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Theologians call that the *proto-evangelium*, the first Gospel, because it foreshadows the Gospel that would be fulfill, fulfilled and fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

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We don't have the time to unpack it now, but that verse, Genesis 3:15, it contains some weighty Gospel themes, all in seed form. They're all there in the kernel. That promise in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel," that involves the nature of the Redeemer, fully God and fully man. It contains the nature of the atonement as a, in, involving a vicarious suffering. It contains the theology of redemption by a sovereign, regenerating grace. It foretells the perpetual conflict between two peoples, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, those who are in Christ versus those who remain in Adam. Elements of the Gospel are all there in seed form as far back as Genesis 3:15, a long time before Abram.

So the offspring of Abram that Mary referred to, that predates Abraham. The theology of the Gospel goes all the way back to the curse on the serpent in the Garden of Eden. All the doctrines of divine grace, which every Christian embraces, are as old as the beginning of time. God's intent to save sinners through the woman's seed, Genesis 3:15; through Abraham and his seed, Genesis 12, Genesis 15; through Mary's seed, Luke 1:42,

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this is not an afterthought. This was predetermined, it was orchestrated before time began. The plan of redemption was devised as Titus 1:2 says, "By the God who never lies, who promised it before the ages began."

Well, all that to say, we believe God will help us, God will remember us, God will save us. Those are mighty promises of God, and we have seen those promises fulfilled. In fact, it's the fulfillment of those three promises that give us confidence to believe and hope in the fourth promise. Notice in your outline we believe the promise that God will vindicate us. God will vindicate us. "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." Forever points to the future. Forever points to what is not yet accomplished, not, not yet consummated.

As I said at the beginning, it's remarkable that after receiving and believing what Gabriel told Mary back in verses 31 to 37, she barely said anything in her song about the divine child growing within her womb. Very instructive to us, isn't it?

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Mary puts the entire situation in the context of God's plan for his covenant people. What God has done for Mary, it's ultimately not about Mary. The words God spoke previously to the fathers, the promises he made to Abraham and to his offspring, much, much bigger than Mary. Even her own salvation from sin, that's ultimately not about her. It involves her; it affects her, she's certainly eternally thankful for that salvation and how it benefits her; she's saved from eternal wrath; she receives eternal life in Christ.

But all of this is ultimately about God, the fulfillment of his word. This is about God and the final vindication of his character as a faithful God. That's why Mary magnifies the Lord. That's why she rejoices in God her savior because in her salvation, in what God was fulfilling by making her the Isaiah 7:14 Virgin who would, bear child, you'll call his name Emmanuel, God with us; God doing that with her, that was God demonstrating his faithfulness to fully and finally save his people. God's demonstrating his faithfulness to fulfill ancient promises that he spoke to Abraham and his offspring forever.

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So ultimately Mary is rejoicing in the triumph of God's word, in the vindication of his faithfulness. She's magnifying the Lord because he did what he said he would do. That's what causes all of us to rejoice in God ultimately, as our God is a promise-keeping God. It's not really about our individual trials and triumphs ultimately. It's about the revelation of God. It's about the vindication of his word. It's about the glorification of his character. We rejoice when he is made known.

Let me ask you a question. How does that inform the way you think about yourself, the way you think about your life, what you think about this church, the way you think about your job, your family, the way you think about your trials, difficulties you face in your life? Are you and your interests, your preferences are they at the center of your thinking? Or is it God and his glory that is the most important thing to you?

You know when you're growing in Christian maturity, when like Mary, God is at the center of all your affections, when he is the reason for all your joys, when he is the one who interprets all your trials, when he is the source of your

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triumphant boasts. When that is your mindset, everything is cause for praising God, everything, because he's being glorified. His word is being accomplished. He is being made known.

After singing this song, Mary stayed with her cousin or relative, Elizabeth for the remainder of the pregnancy. Mary remained with her about three months and then returned home. Some try to say that Mary left before John was born. I think that's ridiculous. Could you imagine a young excited girl like Mary, miraculously pregnant herself with a baby growing in her, and then her relative, Elizabeth, an older woman barren all of her life coming to the final stages of her pregnancy, and then Mary looking at her watch and saying, Poof! Time to go. I gotta get, get something on the stove back in Nazareth. No, she's going to stay there, she's going to see it. And she's there to see all the things that are going to be fulfilled in the coming text. That's for another sermon. We'll get to that next time. Let's pray.

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Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this text, all the promises it contains, and the mindset, really, that it points us to. We pray that you would help us to learn a different mentality, the mentality of a heavenly people, your people. Help us to follow Mary's example and learn from her because that is exactly the way we need to think. We pray, Lord, that you'd continue to give us your grace and help us to break free from the bondage of an American mindset that has the self at the center. And we pray that you'd help us to learn the mentality of your people, a people that have you at the center of their thinking and rejoice in you, giving all glory and honor and praise to you, and we do that even today. In Jesus' name. Amen.