

Why God Is Great

Luke 1:49-53

August 23, 2015

Let's get into the word of God this morning. As we come to our time in God's word this morning, you can open your Bibles to Luke Chapter 1 and verse 46. Luke 1:46. We're going to continue our study of Mary's Magnificat. We'll read it together again as we get started this morning. While you're turning there, in Psalm 113, the psalmist asks one of the best rhetorical questions in all of Scripture. Psalm 113 verse 5, the psalmist asks, "Who is like the Lord? Who is like the Lord our God?" Answer: No one. God is seated on high, as we read in Psalm 33 this morning. He's seated on high; he's looking far down on the heavens and the earth below him. He's the sovereign enthroned high above his creation, holy, set apart, distinguished from all he created. And in Psalm 113, the psalmist continues speaking about his power to act, his power to do. God "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the

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barren woman a home making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord." Praise the Lord, indeed! That's exactly what we're seeing in Luke chapter 1.

And that's exactly the theme of Mary's song, and she praises God for precisely the same reasons. So, with that in mind, let's look at Mary's Magnificat again starting in verse 1:46, "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in the 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 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.'"

Four main stanzas in that song, four main verses. One stanza is about God's mercy to Mary. Then two about God, and the fourth stanza is about God's mercy to Israel. The theme is God's

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mercy through and through, his power, his mercy. But the central focus of Mary's song is God; who God is, what God has done occupies the central place in her poetic structure here. In the way it's structured, if I could show you the guts of Hebrew poetry and the Hebrew thinking, which is what this is based on, you'd see the central focus: the aim is on God.

Another way to say that, the song Mary sings, and remember she's in the company of her relative, Elizabeth, the two of them, they are rejoicing in God, and the song she sings is fundamentally theocentric. It's God-centered and because of its theocentricity, because of its God-centeredness, Mary is filled with joy, that comes through, all through this song. God designed us to glorify him, and so it makes sense we are most joyful when we are bringing glory to him. Does that make sense? If we're designed by our creator to give glory and honor and praise to God, well then, when are we going to be most happy? When we are giving honor and praise and glory to God. When we are doing what we are designed to do. When we do what we're not designed to do, like sin, no happiness. Fleeting happiness. Empty happiness.

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As we see here, and we're going to look at this this morning, Mary finds five reasons to glorify God here. And we're going to unpack those reasons today. Five reasons to glorify God, or we could say five reasons to rejoice. Either one because the two are intricately connected; they are inextricably connected. You cannot separate the two. Glorifying God is rejoicing in him and on the other hand, rejoicing in God is glorifying him. The one leads to the other, vice versa.

Now, two things I want to make clear right up front as we enter into this little study. First, there's a spiritual principle that is woven into the fabric of our being and it's this principle: You become like what you worship. You become like what you worship. If you worship idols, Psalm 115 verse 8, "Those who make them become like them as do all who trust in them." So, if you're filling your mind with sentimental, silly, superficial, pabulum that saturates our modern world especially through our media, then you're going find it very hard to escape that mentality of sentimentality, silliness, superficiality.

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It's, we become like that. We become hollowed out. But if your mind is full of God, if you're constantly renewing your mind, Romans 12:2, then 2 Corinthians 4:16, "Though our outer self decays, though it wastes away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." You will be transformed. You will be filled up. You will be conformed to the image of God. You become like what you worship, just as Mary did. Have you ever seen a teenage girl with such strength? Have you ever seen a teenage girl of such substance? Mary is an example to all of us.

The second thing I want to point out as we get going here, glorifying God, rejoicing in God, you must know that pursuing this course is not going to score you any points with the people of this world. The unbelieving world doesn't care one bit about glorifying God. It's too busy rejoicing in sin, pursuing pleasure, amassing wealth, consolidating power. To glorify God and rejoice in him you're going to have to be comfortable identifying with someone of Mary's stature, someone who's humble and lowly, someone who's despised and scorned in the eyes of the world, someone who is poor, needy.

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All of us who are satisfied in God, all of us who are contented in God, who rejoice deeply in him, all of us who want more than anything to glorify him with our lives, you know what? We worship a despised and rejected Christ. We worship a crucified savior. We worship a man whom the world rejected, despised. It was not popular on that day to be a follower of Christ. We believe a Gospel that is foolishness to those who are perishing. The world thinks we are crazy. And they wonder what we are doing here on a Sunday morning. This makes no sense. We're not cool. We're not powerful. We're not envied. But listen, it's exactly the way God wants it.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:26 and following that there are "not many called who are wise, not many mighty, not many noble, but," get this, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that," purpose statement, "no human being might boast in the presence of God." He ends that section saying, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." Amen to that.

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God rejoices in subverting the expectations of mankind. He rejoices in overturning the structures of human power. On the one hand, God opposes the great and the mighty and the powerful. And on the other hand, he exalts the lowly; he cares for the needy; he enthrones the weak. That's his way. And it's, it's also one of the chief marks of his almighty power. Who's going to stop him? He does whatever he wants. And that is what thrills Mary. I hope it thrills you.

But this morning we're going to learn from Mary, this young virgin girl, this godly girl and also, like us, a fellow fool in the eyes of the world, a fellow weakling, someone who is like us, lowly and despised. We're going to learn from her how to boast in the Lord. We're going to find some good reasons to boast in the Lord, to glorify him, to rejoice in him. Are you ready? Let's get started.

As we look into verses 49 to 53, the two central stanzas in Mary's song, we find five reasons for glorifying God here. I'd like to organize those five reasons in to two main points. Two main points, each one followed by some sub-points. First main

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point: We glorify God because of who he is. That's simple, right? We glorify God because of who he is. Look at verses 49 to 50 again. Mary says, "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."

Now, you may not have noticed it, but in rapid succession, Mary has mentioned the power of God, the holiness of God, and the mercy of God. If we restate those three things in theological terms, we're talking about God's omnipotence, his holiness, and his benevolence. Omnipotence, holiness, benevolence that's the theology, each one of them is an attribute of the divine character, and we're going to consider each one as a separate sub-point, okay?

So here come the sub-points, three of the reasons. Sub-point number one: God is almighty. God is almighty. He is all-powerful, he is omnipotent. As verse 49 says, "He who is mighty," or literally, "the mighty one has done great things for me." The mighty one, it's the word *dunatos*, or the verb *dunamai*. We get the word dynamite from this word. And this, this word

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refers to ability. This, this is talking about possessing the ability to act, to do something. The mighty one, he's characterized, he's characterized by having the power to act. He has the power to do. None can stop him, and this one, this the mighty one, he's done great things. This is someone who possesses all ability, possesses limitless power to do whatever he wants.

Take a look at verse 51, as Mary meditates on the power of God in history, she says, "He has shown strength with his arm." Strength with his arm. The word she uses there about strength means limitless power. It's the Greek word *kratos*, and it refers to unstoppable strength, unconquerable strength. The word is ascribed in the New Testament only to God, because only God has unstoppable strength. This is a dominating strength. This is an ability to assert your will, to subjugate anyone and anything, to bring it under your will. No one can withstand the *kratos* of God. He's mighty, as Mary said. And he's exclusively mighty. No one is mighty like him. He's omnipotent, he is almighty. No one possesses the power of God, able to do absolutely whatever he wants. That's power. That is might.

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Now, God showed that kind of power to Mary. He showed her, as it says here, "the strength of his arm." We realize, strength of his arm, that's figurative language. God is spirit, so he has no physical forms, body parts, literal arms and all that. But figurative does not mean imaginary; it does not mean unreal. God has real power, and it produces real effects. Just take as an example Mary. God didn't ask Mary's permission, did he, when he decided to fulfill in her the promise of Isaiah 7:14? He didn't consult with her before doing an unprecedented thing, causing a virgin to be with child. He just acted. He just did what he wanted to do.

The arm of the Lord stands for the power of God to act, to do mighty deeds, to subdue the powerful, to rescue his people. Isaiah 40:10 says, "God comes with might, and his arm rules for him." Isaiah 52:10, "The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations." Isaiah 59:16, "God saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no one to intercede; so his own arm brought salvation for him."

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Just to show you how real, how devastating the arm of the Lord can be, back in Deuteronomy 11:2, Moses, before entering into the, having the children of Israel enter into the Promised Land, he's preparing these children of the ones who escaped Egypt; remember the parents didn't go into the promised land because of unbelief, so God scattered their bodies in the wilderness, and the children of those parents grew up, not having known or seen these things in great detail, so Moses reminds the children of Israel of God's power, because he wanted them to be full of courage.

He wanted them to be full of confidence, as they entered into the land of Canaan. So Moses says, "Consider today ... the discipline of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, his signs and his deeds that he did to Egypt to Pharaoh, to the king of Egypt, into all of his land, and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you and how the Lord has destroyed them to this day." Remember when Israel escaped Egypt, humanly speaking, they were nothing but a bunch of runaway slaves. They weren't warriors; they weren't mighty; they had no military training.

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Israel certainly, as a people, was not ready to take on the Egyptian empire, the sole superpower in the world at that time.

But that's a minor issue to God. This is not about Israel's power, Deuteronomy 7:7, "It wasn't because you were greater than any other people, but the Lord set his love on you and chose you. You were fewest of all the peoples." You were small. God chose Israel, turning an idolatrous rabble of slaves into a nation. The only ancient people group, get this, that still remains. Run into any Hittites lately? Ammonites? When God flexed his arm, the entire Egyptian army, gone, decimated. It was a decapitation strike of all decapitation strikes, not just the head, but the body as well. All of it buried under the Red Sea.

When God acted, he brought a complete end to Egyptian power. And he threw that civilization into a decline, a spiraling decline that it would never fully recover from. He turned those slaves, though, into a nation that will one day rule the world, and it will rule the world with Christ as the head seated on the throne of David as king. That's power. That's

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might. The entire account of the Exodus, running from Exodus 7 to 14 shows how utterly unstoppable God's power is. That's *kratos*, that's the kind of power Mary speaks of in her song. God is almighty, he is omnipotent.

And notice in verses 49 to 50, his almighty power serves two other attributes here. His power defends his holiness, and his power extends his mercy. Holiness and mercy, verse 49 to 50, "Holy is his name, and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."

So, we worship God for who he is because he's mighty, that was the first sub-point, but also because, sub-point number two, God is holy. God is holy, that's why we worship him, because he's holy. As Mary says, "His name is holy." Now when the Bible refers to the name of somebody, like "baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Spirit," "giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," "do everything whether word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus," when the Bible speaks about the name of somebody, it

refers to everything that stands for that person. Everything that stands for that person.

That's why we do not take the name of the Lord our God in vain. Not just treating it casually, treating it like a curse word, like a throwaway word, that's not all taking his name in vain means. Taking his name in vain means to claim it and you don't live it. Taking all he is and claiming that that is who you are and that's who you follow and that's who you worship, and yet not living that way. You're taking his name in vain. Serious, serious thing. The name is what designates a person, like your name, like my name, designates us.

But in ancient Near Eastern culture, this was extremely important, the naming of a person, because the name represented the sum total of a person's character, the entirety of a person's attributes, the whole of his being. A child was known by the name that he had, by his father's name, by his family name. His character was judged on the basis of who he was connected to.

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Well, the sum total of God's entire being, holiness. Holiness. When God introduced himself to Israel, making that people into a, this fledgling nation, making himself known to them, he distinguished himself from all of the other gods, from all the other idols they'd worshiped and served before with one simple proposition, "I am holy." Leviticus 11:44, "I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am holy." Next verse, Leviticus 11:45, "I am the Lord God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You should therefore be holy, for I am holy." Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

Getting the point? Leviticus 20:26, "You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine." Leviticus 21 verse 8, "I, the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy." "I the Lord am holy," it's so often repeated in Leviticus that this book is known as the holiness code. It's about what it is to be consecrated to the Lord, set apart to him. When God says, "I am holy," he means he is set apart. He is unlike any other, unlike us, unlike any other god. He is transcendent; he is far above his creation; he is infinitely high. We see this when God allowed Isaiah to have

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a vision of him in the throne room, the very throne room of God. Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah approached and he saw a terrifying picture of divine holiness, one that really terrified him.

Isaiah 6:1 to 4, he records the scene there, "In the year that King Uzziah died," and, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. And above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with his glory!' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke." Wow! Glory! Majesty! Seraphim, literally the burning ones. They're on fire. And they're flying through the air, this flaming fire is flying through the air with this thundering refrain, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" There's fire, there's smoke, there's shaking.

And what was Isaiah's response? I can tell you what he didn't do. He didn't run up to the throne, jump into God's lap

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and give him big old hug. He was terrified. Verse 5, "And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost,'" literally, it's I'm undone, I'm disintegrated, "for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

It's only after one of the seraphim picks up a piece of fire from the alter with the tongues, cauterizes his lips, cleanses him from his impurity and Isaiah feels comfortable to say, "Here I am! Send me." The holiness of God in its full force, it has a disintegrating effect on us. The glory of the holiness of God, it causes us to be undone, to pronounce a woe upon ourselves. We become immediately aware of our utter sinfulness before God, immediately conscience of our uncleanness. We're ashamed, afraid to stand in his presence.

I recently saw a quotation from John Flavel. Tim Challies had it posted on his website and John Flavel said this, "They that know God will be humble and they that know themselves cannot be proud." How true. The more clearly you see the holiness of God, the more it will humble you before him.

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Initially, a clear vision of the holiness of God has a repelling effect. We want to turn away. We want to run. The higher we see God, the lower we see ourselves.

That may not feel good at the moment, it may not give us goosebumps and a warm, easy feeling inside, but getting a vision of the holiness of God is a good thing; it's a healthy thing. We see God in the perfections of holiness and it causes us to revere him. It causes us to glorify him. We also see ourselves in the imperfections of our sinfulness, and it causes us to cry out for him in mercy.

When that happens, when that happens, God hurries to us. He visits us with grace and salvation. He draws near to us in compassion and comfort. It's been my experience, and I know it's been the experience of everyone who believes, all of you, but we need to keep moving.

Beyond the holiness of God, God's mighty, he's holy, and also, sub-point number three, third reason for glorifying God, God is merciful. God is merciful. I just mentioned it. Mary

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connected holiness and mercy here. "Holy is his name and," coordinating conjunction, "and his mercy is for those who fear him." She wants us to keep those things connected in our minds. We have to; otherwise, we're undone and left despairing without hope. But together, we have hope. Over in Isaiah 57:15, there's a close connection again between God's holiness and his great mercy, and it helps us track, really, with Mary's thinking here.

This is what it says, Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy." What does Isaiah have in mind there? Throne room experience, right? High and lifted up, inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. What does the high and holy one say? "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." Isn't that interesting? God dwells in two places, high, separate, lifted up, transcendent, unreachable, that's only one place; the other place, he dwells with the lowly, the humble of heart, those who have humbled themselves before him.

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The holiness of God, like I said, has a compelling effect and a repelling effect. His holiness is compelling, drawing sinners close, gazing at the splendor of the high and holy one, but as they draw near, they're immediately repelled by his holiness. They back off because the bright glare of his absolute purity reveals the blackness of human sin. Sinners feel uncomfortable in his presence, vulnerable, naked and exposed, ashamed, dismayed. And those who hold onto their sin, those who remain fixed in their pride, they keep themselves at a safe distance from a holy God. Like all of Israel, Don't make us come near, don't make us come near. You go, Moses, you go.

But those who humble themselves before God, those who are of a contrite and lowly spirit, you know what? God acts on their behalf with power. He draws near with power. While maintaining his absolute holiness, God draws near to the penitent in mercy. As Mary says there in verse 50, "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." That's a concept that comes from Psalm 103:17-18, "The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments."

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God is kind and compassionate. God is benevolent and merciful and yet, he never compromises his absolute holiness. He never drops for one instant his standards to accommodate the sinfulness and the weakness of men. Rather, in mercy and by grace he lifts them up, doesn't he? He lifts them up. That's the beauty of the truth of our union with Christ, and that's the beauty of our union with him is that we belong to him. And in Christ we fully attain what we could never attain on our own, ultimate perfection, absolute perfection being united with him. We can never get that on our own, but God gives it to us as gift, right?

Now, we want to acknowledge that God is merciful to all, and his common grace extends to all and to everyone without exception. God created the whole world. He cares for everything in the world. He sustains all the world through Christ Jesus by the power of his word. And God, as Matthew 5:45 says, "God causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and he sends his rain to fall on the just and the unjust." So there's a common grace.

But Mary isn't here magnifying God for his common grace; she's glorying and praising God for his particular grace, for his mercy toward particular people. Notice verse 50 again, "His mercy is for," whom? "those who fear him from generation to generation." That phrase, from generation to generation, it just demonstrates the magnanimity of God's mercy. His mercy is everlasting, it never runs out. It's an infinitely deep well, he continues to draw from it. God has this infinite capacity for showing mercy, and because of his almighty power, he has an infinite capability to accomplish his mercy. There's no lack of mercy in his storehouse. There's no lack of his ability to carry it out and no lack in his will to do that for his people.

The phrase, generation after generation, not only does it show the magnanimity of God's mercy, it also shows the continuity of his mercy. The continuity of his mercy, however, the continuity of mercy is not based on blood or birthright. It's not based on the transfer of power or nobility. It's not based on privilege or inheritance. The continuity of his mercy from generation to generation is based on spiritual affinity, spiritual kinship, a spiritual connection. What do I mean by

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that? Well, it means that those who fear God, those people are members of the same spiritual family. They are connected that way. It's those who fear God and only those who are the recipient of God's particular redemptive saving mercy.

Every single one of us has to reckon with God on his own, on her own. Like Isaiah did, each one of us, we have to come to that experience of being undone before the holiness of God, to be driven to our knees for mercy, to embrace him in faith. Take it from me, I was raised in a loving Christian home, lots of Bible teaching, lots of exposure to the Bible, but that didn't save me. My spiritual heritage didn't save me. My grandma's prayers in and of themselves, didn't save me. Boys and girls, young men, young women, students, please listen to me, the piety of your parents will not get you into heaven. The ungodliness of your parents doesn't keep you from heaven. That's good news too.

You have to discover the fear of God for yourself. You have to learn to revere God, to come face to face with his holiness for yourself because when you stand face to face before God on judgment day, no one else is there with you. Just you and God,

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face to face with his holiness. So reckon now with your sinfulness. Fly to him for mercy, salvation from his judgment, because he will grant it, if you repent and believe. God's mercy is magnanimous and it's continuous. There is a historical continuity from generation to generation of people who are marked by fearing the Lord. That's us, right? God is mighty. God is holy. God is merciful. That's who he is. We glorify him because of who he is.

In fact, as they were for Mary, those attributes for us are the cause of deep, deep rejoicing. Why? Because as we humble ourselves before God, contrite and lowly, humbly asking for mercy, he draws us near to himself to find mercy. He, not us, he crossed that great divide, sending his son Jesus Christ to bring us to him. The transcendent God becomes the eminent Savior, and that is a very good reason to glorify God, to rejoice in him.

Well, let's get into the third stanza, verses 51 to 53. Who God is leads to what he does. His character is the fount of all his actions. Not only do we glorify God for who he is, but also point two: We glorify God because of what he does. Because of

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what he does, okay. There are going to be two sub-points underneath this. This is the third stanza of Mary's song, and it runs from verse 51 to verse 53. You can see there it's kind of a staccato statements about God. She is here reciting the ways of God, how God constantly deals with the human race.

Now, just a couple of things to point out before we read those verses again and get them before us. First thing, the verbs in this section, they are all in the aorist tense. "He has scattered," "he has brought down," so it's looking behind, right? She looks backward into history. Mary looks backward, reciting what she knows to be true about God, what she's learned from the Bible, what she's learned and meditated on from Scripture. And at the same time what she's reciting about God's dealings with people, they're not just true for the past, they're true for all time. These terms and the tenses of these verbs really talk about how these have been God's ways, always, and they will be God's ways always.

Now, second thing, notice as we read in, in recounting God's ways here in dealing with people, notice that God is binary in his thinking. Okay, computer geeks will understand

what I'm saying. Binary, it means either this or that. In computer language, I think it's zeros and ones. Right? It's either a zero or it's a one, it's a string of those zeros and ones and help us to actually read websites and things like that. Don't ask me how it works; it's a mystery of God's common grace to give us that kind of knowledge. I don't get it and I think there's stuff floating through the air right now, as people are dialing things up. But look, God is binary in his thinking. It's either this or it's that. No middle ground. No gray areas whatsoever.

Another way we could say this is that God is antithetical in his thinking about humanity. For every individual human being, God considers each one as belonging to one of only two sides, belonging to one of just two camps. There are only two kinds of people, the proud and the humble. Based on that designation, God treats each individual in one of two starkly opposite ways. He opposes the proud on the one hand; he gives grace to the humble on the other.

Lets' look at verse 51. Mary begins there with a general statement, "He has shown strength with his arm." He's shown strength with his arm and as she proceeds, she unpacks that general statement by elaborating how God has shown strength with his arm. Take a look at verses 51 to 54, how has he 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, he's exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy." Now let's stop there.

We're just going to look at verses 51 to 53 for now, but that poetic structure of these verses, it runs through that whole deal from the scattering of the proud to the helping of Israel. There are parallels there. "He has scattered the proud," "he has brought down the mighty." See how those are parallel thoughts? They're also contrasts. "He has brought down the mighty," "He has exalted the humble." "He has filled the hungry," "He has sent away the rich." Remember, he has two and only two orientations to mankind, opposition to the proud and grace to the humble, hostility or friendship, antipathy or

affinity. And we're all on one side of that equation or the other. There's nothing in between.

Just one more point before diving into the details here. Notice that Mary puts the humble and the hungry at the center of her poetic structure. Those are God's People. There's a chiasm here. That's a poetic structure in Hebrew poetry. There's a chiasm and the central phrases there's stanzas that go one, two, three, four, five, it would be number three. The central one that has the focus. Those are Mary's people, the humble and the hungry. Those are our people too, aren't they? As believers, we belong to that family. So, let's divide verse 51 to 53 for our purposes in two categories, okay? God's categories, the way God deals with the proud first and then how he deals with the humble.

So first sub-point, let's look at the proud. We glorify God because of what he does. First, because he opposes the proud. He opposes the proud. In fact, God always opposes the proud. He never favors the proud no matter what it may look like on the surface. He knows their hearts. He's always keeping score; and he opposes the proud, if you'll notice there, first by

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frustrating the arrogant, second by subverting the powerful, and third by disappointing the rich. Okay, starting in verse 51, God frustrates the arrogant. "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts."

It's one thing to watch what the arrogant are doing on the outside, to see their selfish ambition come out in what they do and how they act. It's quite another to see the pride that's hidden away in the human heart. No man can do that. It's God's territory, the heart. Mary considers the omniscient gaze of God. He sees the heart; he knows the motives. It says in Proverbs 20:27, "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts." Look, what is entirely dark to us, the inner man, the thoughts of the heart, what we can't see inside of each other that's like a bright spotlight shining for the Lord on all the secrets, exposing all the thought life.

Now, I know all of us struggle with pride, right? It's not a question of if you have pride, but where it is and how much. Right? We all have it. We all struggle with pride, but if we're believers, we fighting against pride. We see it as a sin we want

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to flee from. So, Mary isn't talking about us here, fighting from pride. If we're proud before God, he may chastise us. There may be some similarities to how he treats us, opposing us, frustrating our plans. But his entire orientation is toward us, mercy. His entire orientation toward the proud, those who are characterized by the sin of pride, those who are given to it, who have given themselves over to it, he opposes them.

The word arrogant, it's a word, *huperephanos*. *Huperephanos*, which comes from two words, *huper* meaning above and *phanomai*, meaning to shine. These people want to outshine everybody, always to find a reason to brag, to boast about themselves. These are the people who are chasing wealth, power, prestige, fame. They'll roll over their own grandmother to get ahead. That's these people. It's a desire to dominate, to exercise power, control over others. You see this so often in political ambition, and it's ugly, it's fueled by a lust for power, for self-serving authority. But God scatters those people. He scatters them. There's a word that means scatter, disperse, divide, this is that word, but it's intensified. And, so it doesn't mean just to scatter them, it means to squander them, to waste them. God wastes the proud, he squanders the arrogant of

heart. Powerful stuff. Don't want to be on the receiving end of that.

Not only that, but notice that verse 52, God subverts the powerful. He subverts, he overturns the powerful. "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones." Again, intensified word, it means to tear down, to cast down, to throw down the mighty. The same word is used of God, but this mighty one here is just a human might. It's one who possesses ability, strength, they're the strong ones among us, the ones with superior ability, superior strength. Personal strength here has enabled the, the mighty to reach out for what they want, thrones, authority.

Whether by physical force or by mental force, they want to dominate, use their superiority, their superior strength, to rule, to oppress. The mighty here don't fear God at all. In fact, they reject the idea they'll ever have to give an account for how they've used their talents, how they've used their strength, their ability. They're proud, trusting in their own might, their own ability.

Again, God isn't worried about that one bit. He's going to unseat them. He's going to throw them down. He's going to cast them down, not just before himself, but before the humble, before the weak, before those without ability. You see, God subverts, he overthrows, he overturns their expectation of ruling forever over others not only by taking away their authority, but also by putting them under the authority of the humble. He has exalted those of humble estate.

Finally, look at verse 53, God disappoints the rich. God disappoints the rich. "The rich he has sent away empty." The rich here, they're the fat cats, they're the supremely contented. These are the people who are always satisfied, never hungry, never in want, never worried about anything regarding money. They're stuffed. They're gluttoned. They're sated with wealth and riches. James paints a picture of the rich as ruthless people, merciless people, greedy.

James 2:6 says, "Are not the rich the ones who oppress you? Are they not the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the

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ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?" James is rebuking their tendency to cuddle up to the rich, to favor the rich and give them the best seats. Why do you do that? James says. Later in chapter 5, James pronounces a woe upon the rich. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you."

The treasure that those rich people have laid up on earth that kind of currency is utterly worthless in heaven. The rich on earth, they're used to having their own way, right? Money opens up all doors. Money buys off all opposition. Money buys plenty of friends, provides access to every place they want to go. But you know what? God does not care about money. Their money doesn't open any doors with God. It doesn't buy any favor with him. It doesn't buy his friendship. God sends them away, and when he sends them away, it says he sends them away empty. Empty.

According to one commentator, it says, "the image here is of a court. According to oriental custom, the rich come with gifts into the court and receive even greater gifts from the

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monarch who does not want to be outdone in generosity. The poor are set aside. It's not like that with God. The rich think that everything is owed to them, but he sends them away empty." It's a word here that means having nothing, like possessing nothing.

It could also mean resulting in nothing. It's the same word as futile, futility, useless. The rich has amassed his wealth thinking he can buy his way into or out of absolutely anything. But when he comes to heaven's gate, he's going to find that his earthly riches are useless. God sends him away empty. Futility. So, God opposes the proud, he frustrates the arrogant, he subverts the powerful, he disappoints the rich. Beloved, that's a demonstration of God's justice, isn't it? To recompense the arrogant, the mighty, the rich.

As Abraham told the rich man in the story that Jesus told us about the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16, "Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner, bad things; but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish." Those who humble themselves now will not only

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avoid the excruciating agony of hell, they're going to find the comfort of God in everlasting life.

Well, not only does God oppose the proud, the good news is that he, we glorify God because of what he does, secondly, because he gives grace to the humble. He gives grace to the humble. Again, the humble, the hungry, they have the central place here in Mary's poetic structure, central place. God's mercy toward the humble, this is the high point. This is the crescendo of her song. Take a look at verse 52, God lifts up the lowly, "He has exalted those of humble estate." Mary uses the same word here translated, humble estate, back in verse 48, when referring to herself.

She said, "God has looked on the humble estate of his servant." Mary identifies the recipients of God's favor here as humble, as lowly, as insignificant people, those whom the world would easily pass by, roll over, ignore, and even despise. Spiritually, the humble are those who recognize their poverty before God, their utter lack of resources. They're not arrogant. They're not self-assured, they're not the mighty, they're not

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able to muscle their way into heaven, they're not able to think their way into heaven and outsmart God.

These aren't the wealthy relying on earthly riches to buy their way to a heavenly reward, not at all. The humble are those who realize they have absolutely nothing, nothing to favor God with. They have their hands out, their head bowed down, their hearts directed toward heaven in prayer. And their only plea, the tender mercy of God. Trusting him to reach down in pity and in mercy to save them. You know what? God listens. He listens.

He is not only pleased to show mercy, he rejoices, passionately to lift them up. And when he lifts up us, he lifts us up very high. Ephesians 2:4-7 says God lifts up the humble. As it says there, "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together in Christ ... he raised us up with him, he seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show to us the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Wow. God is immeasurably wealthy in mercy and in

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grace. And he lavishes the humble with his riches, he drenches them in the mercies that are new every morning. God fills the humble with grace to do his perfect, his joyous will. Isn't that awesome?

Not only does God lift up his people, Mary rejoices because, look at verse 53, he fills the hungry. God fills the hungry. "He has filled the hungry with good things." Notice Mary doesn't say he's filled the hungry with food. There are two words he could, he, could be used here, that Mary could use here for food, but she uses the word, good, goodness, good things. It shows that Mary's primary thought here is not about physical sustenance. She's not thinking about those that don't have enough to eat. She's not thinking about eradicating world hunger or anything like that.

Mary is talking here about spiritual sustenance. Those who hunger spiritually are those whom God will fill. He'll sustain them; he'll satisfy them with good things, good things. Lowly, hungry, these are the descriptions of the humble, those to whom God shows mercy. Lowly and hungry, those who are the humble

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belong to the generations of people who like Mary fear God, revere him, honor him, worship him. They're the ones who receive mercy, and they'll receive every good thing.

Just turn, as we close, quickly over to Luke chapter 6. Luke records one of Jesus' sermons there, it's Sermon on the Plain. It sounds remarkably similar to the Sermon on the Mount, but it is different. In Luke 6 verse 20, Jesus "lifted his eyes up on his disciples and he said this, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you who are hungry now for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh. Blessed are you who hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.'"

Look, the poor, the hungry, the mourners, the hated, the despised, the reviled, the spurned, those are Mary's people. Those are her people. They're ours too, aren't they? They're ours, too. Those are the ones who receive mercy from God. They

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know him. They bow before him now, and now they find, in humility, they find mercy. That's why God chose the poor of this world, James 2:5, "to be rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom to which he promised to those who love him." And we would rather identify ourselves with those who are the poor of the world, the despised, the lowly, because they're the ones who know God. He's the greatest treasure which the world, the rest of the world completely misses.

The world's blind to the glory of God, his almighty power, the beauty of his holiness, the goodness of his mercy. The world is blind to all of that. Why? Because it's too busy fulfilling proud ambitions, too preoccupied with fighting for might and influence, for chasing wealth and money, distracted by the gods of gold and silver. Sad, isn't it? But God has intentionally hidden the treasure of himself from them. He's frustrated their ambitions; he's confounded their so-called wisdom; he's subverted their power, and he's revealed himself to us, to babes, people like you and me. Our boast is not in ourselves.

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Look at us. Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble. There are a few among us, who are wise, mighty and noble. I know a couple of you. But there are a few who among us are wise, noble. It doesn't say no one wise, but says a few. No one mighty, just a few. But the world considers most of us to be foolish, to be weak, insignificant. And most of us, because of our adherence to Christ, are despised and rejected, and you know what? That's okay. It's exactly as it should be because that's how God gets all the glory. All of it. Our boast is entirely in God and in God alone.

Jeremiah 9:23 to 24, "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this,' the what? "That he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,' declares the Lord." No one like him. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we give our hearts to you once again in praise and worship. We want to glorify you, rejoice in you, and cause you to be known in this earth. So many blind, so many distracted.

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Let us not be among them, Father. Help us to glorify you and bring you praise and honor. And please go before us by your spirit and prepare the hearts of those we talk to that they too may see for the very first time your glory. We give all glory and honor and praise to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.