

Luke 1:39-80

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to think for a wee while this morning about this, pretty much the whole passage that we read from verse 39 on to the end of Luke chapter 1.

Because there's quite a number of aspects to this which cause us to see the Lord at work here. Not just the conception in the womb of Mary of the baby Jesus, which obviously we're very much aware of in the preceding verses would have described how Gabriel appeared to her and declared that this was to be her particular calling for life and for God's service.

And we mentioned with the children how low, the baby at that time would be so tiny and so unseen. There'd be nothing showing, there wouldn't be any bump with the baby at all by then.

And yet, this presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, this living child, because that's what he is, he's not just a protoplasm or not just a so-called fetus or whatever.

He's a living child in the womb of his mother. And this presence of this living child causes Elizabeth, an elderly woman, miraculously again by God's Spirit, though by ordinary means via her husband, having herself a child in her own womb, going to be John the Baptist, that she herself is inspired by the Spirit to pour forth this hymn of praise.

[1 : 27] That when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, verse 41, the babe, that is the infant John the Baptist, leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

She's not just perceptive. She didn't just begin to see, oh, there's something different about you, Mary. I wonder what it is. Could you be expecting? No, it's not that she's perceiving this. There's no sort of a woman's intuition unlocking this fact or whatever here.

This is something she could not know except the Holy Ghost reveals it to her. And that's what we're told. That she was filled with the Holy Ghost. And she spake out with a loud voice and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me, identifying that which is within her womb as the Messiah, my Lord, the Savior, going to be.

Now, notice what she doesn't do. She doesn't say, oh, what is this to me that my lady should come to me? She does not exalt Mary to the sort of place that some other branches of the church, for example, may do so.

[2 : 33] Mary would be the first to repudiate that kind of sort of queen-like worship that is sometimes given to her simply because she has chosen to be the mother of our Lord.

But rather, she is described in exactly the scriptural term, the mother of my Lord. What is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Elizabeth is being told this and taught this by the Holy Ghost.

It's God who has revealed this to her. There's nothing outward showing. And probably Mary hasn't shared the angelic visit with anyone. She's just decided to go and visit her cousin, to go and see the truth of what the angel has told her about Elizabeth as well.

But she probably hasn't told a soul. And yet, Elizabeth knows about it because the Lord reveals it to her. As soon as the voice of my salvation sounded in my ears, the babe leapt in my womb for joy.

The baby which is now six months gone in the womb. And we know that because we're told that it was in the sixth month that the angel Gabriel came and visited Mary and gave her this news.

[3 : 44] Verse 26 of Luke chapter 1, if you were to look back to that. It's a sixth month with Elizabeth, so the child is six months old in the womb. And it leaps for joy. John the Baptist in his infancy leaps for joy when the baby Jesus in his mother's womb appears in the doorway.

It brings forth this supernatural praise. It's not just that Elizabeth is a pious, godly woman, although she is, because we're told at the outset of chapter 1, that in verse 6, they were both, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the

Lord, blameless.

But that's not why she knows it. It's because the Lord has placed this in her heart and brought it forth from her lips, is supernatural praise. That he fills her with the Holy Ghost and she speaks out with a loud voice.

Likewise again, verse 67, when Zacharias, at the time of John the Baptist's circumcision, it said his father, Zacharias, was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied, saying, and then you've got the rest of the chapter there.

It brings forth this insightful, spirit-filled praise and worship. Now, this is part of what happens when a soul encounters Christ.

[5 : 03] Whether it is the risen Christ, as we now would recognize and know him, or whether it is the infant Christ, still in the womb at this stage, the encounter with Christ brings forth this supernatural, insightful praise and worship that is directed not simply to God, but also recognizing that this Messiah is likewise divine.

No human force does this. This is the work of God. And likewise, when a soul encounters Christ, it is not just that, oh, well, I suppose all these years I've been reading my Bible and praying and trying to do my best, all of this must have borne fruit.

No, it hasn't, although the Lord will use all of these things as well. Nothing will be lost. Just like when Paul was converted, all his years of rabbinic education and all the years of knowing the law and the prophets and the scriptures as a Pharisee before he was converted, and then the Lord could take all this knowledge and take all these gifts and apply them and use them for the furtherance of his kingdom.

But God did not say, oh, yeah, see that son of Tarsus? He's really well learned, isn't he? He knows all the law. He knows all the prophets. I think I know what I'll do.

I'll make all of that worthwhile and I'll bring it all to fruition now. It was nothing in Paul. Paul reckons himself the chief of sinners, as every born-again believer would do, recognize themselves as the chief of sinners.

[6 : 36] It is the work of God when a soul encounters Christ, that he brings forth in them what is no longer mere outward, formal, going through the motions-type worship, but rather worship which is spoon-filled, which is anointed by the Holy Ghost, which enables them to perceive things they would never previously have understood or perceived.

They now know things of the Lord which all their searching or reading or studying or pray didn't produce to them before. This is the work of God. It brings forth in sinful praise and heartfelt worship, supernatural praise.

That is what it does for Elizabeth. That is what it does later on for Zacharias, because this is a work of God's Holy Spirit. And when these souls encounter Christ, all they're in the womb, they can't see him in the womb.

We can't see him now that he's in glory. So in every instance, apart from that brief span of time in history, that 30-something years, that he was on the earth when people saw him and could touch him and recognize him physically, although that didn't seem to change the world for the time that he was there.

It was afterwards the world could change. We are called upon to believe in a Christ whom we do not perceive with the eye of flesh, but who nonetheless, when we encounter him, changes our lives and changes also our worship.

[8 : 10] It is filled with the Spirit. It becomes our desire to worship the Lord. It gives us insight and perception and grace which we did not possess before.

Secondly, we see here, when many as pulling forth, what is commonly called now in later Christian history, the Magnificat, its Latin name, because my soul hath magnified the Lord, verse 46, we see here that obedience, which she follows, blessed is she that believed, and Zacharias finally shows forth obedience as well.

Obedience frees us from our old chains. Verse 51, He hath showed strength with his arm. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.

Now this is revolutionary. This is something that God is doing as though to show that the forces of the world do not scare him, that he is able to lift up whom he will and to cast down whom he will likewise.

[9 : 27] Some commentators have said that there is, first of all, a moral revolution. Verse 51, He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

Pride is not only a sin, of course, in his foolishness. To lift ourselves up and make out that we are better than others, particularly to have pride in the face of God is just plain stupidity.

And God scattles the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He exalts the humble. And this is part of what Mary is saying. He hath done for me great things, yet he has not had mercy on them that fear him from generation to generation.

He's regarded the lowest stake of his handmaiden. Which means that Mary was poor. She was from a poor family. She was from a poor background. And she wasn't amongst those who were high and mighty in the land.

But when the Lord scattles the proud, he lifts up the humble. Because he knows that they, in one sense, can afford to be lifted up. Because they're not going to think more of themselves than they should.

[10 : 31] The letter to James makes mention of something like this a wee bit. But it says, you know, let the brother, verse 9 of chapter 1 in James, let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.

And I think, okay, fair enough, of course he's going to be delighted that he's exalted. But the rich in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

And I think, well, why did the rich ever delight or rejoice that they are made low? We touched on this before in the past, I realize, so if I'm repeating myself, apologies for that. But I would suggest to you that a reason why the rich can rejoice when he's made low is that even when he is low, the Lord loves him no less.

It's as though, if somebody were rich and famous and powerful and then met, say, the girl of his dreams and she loved him back and he manned and he had a wonderful life together and then, he lost everything.

Then all his wealth suddenly went down the tubes and all his share crashed or whatever or his career suddenly went upside down and then he had nothing. No more big fancy house, no big flat bank balance, no fancy car, nothing to recommend him.

[11 : 40] All the things that he thought she might have loved him for, now he's got nothing. And if she still loves him through all of that, then he will know that it wasn't just his money or his estate or his powerful situation.

He will know that she loved him for him, not just for anything that he could give her, anything he could bring. And in one sense, when the rich and the powerful are brought low, this is what James says, let them rejoice in that he is made low because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. Because when the rich or the powerful are made low, then those who still love them regardless, he knows we're loving in truth. And the Lord does not cease to love the proud when he brings them low.

He does not cease to love the sinner when he exposes to them their sin. He does not cease to love those who have been proud and high and lifted up when they're brought down to the dust, but rather he may use the fact that they have been brought so low to enable them to turn to him and to see that this is a God who never stopped loving me even when I was brought down to the dust.

There is grace, there is mercy in the Lord even when he brings down those who have been mighty. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

[13 : 00] That's in some ways a moral revolution. Pride being a sin, it changes that. And likewise, there's also this sense of social revolution. He's put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree.

He hath built a hundred good things and the rich he hath sent empty away. There's an economic, you could say, revolution there. God, who has control of all the resources that the world is choosing to redistribute as he sees fit.

And he is changing things and when the Lord enters our life, he does change things. He changes things in that heart, he changes things in that spirit and soul, he changes things in the household, in the family, in the workplace of the person who has been thus converted and changed.

When the Lord enters a person's life, when they encounter Christ, personally for themselves, nothing is ever quite the same again. Verse 54, he hath hopefully helped his servant Israel in remembrance of this mercy as he spake to our fathers, that Abraham went to his sea forever.

You see, God is not forgetful of what he promises. Sometimes it may seem, oh yeah, God promised that long ago, but look how many years have passed, look how many centuries have gone by and still nothing has happened.

[14 : 21] And Peter makes reference to that, you know, when he says, there be not ignorant of this one thing. There are those who say, you know, where is the promise of his coming?

Verse 4 of 2 Peter 3, they are saying, where is the promise of his coming? For since the Father fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, whereby the world that was overflowed before in the days of Noah, that perished, but the heavens and the earth which are now by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto the flag against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing. One day is with the Lord, a thousand years and a thousand years this one day. It seems to us God is taking ages in fulfilling his promise, in coming back and restoring all things.

But the reason God holds off is for mercy. The reason God holds off is so that we can be more ready when he comes, so that those who have yet to be gathered in shall be gathered in.

We don't know who they all are, but God knows. And he will allow time for every single one of his elect children to be saved and to be gathered in.

[15 : 37] God is not unfaithful to his promises. He has hope in his service, Israel, in remembrance of his mercy. As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his sea forever.

Obedience frees us from our old chains. When we come to the Lord and put our trust in him, it means that all the injustices of the world that we see, all the oppression of the poor by the rich, all the oppression of the Lord's people by those who hate him and those who follow false religions or no religion, and we see it in our country and we see it in other countries of the world of persecution against the Lord's people.

All of these things need not cause us to think, oh, what's the use? Oh, what's the hope? God has forsaken us. No, it frees us from our slavery and these things and enables us to see God is working at his purposes.

He is completely in charge. He will, in the fullness of time, exalt those of law degree. He will put right what has been put wrong. We trust in him because although we don't see his word brought to pass, yet we believe that he has said it and that he will do it.

How do we know? Because he always does. It is said that when you look at the number of prophecies that are about Jesus and about his coming again throughout Scripture, there's so many hundreds in the Old Testament and in the New.

[17 : 05] And all of these, it's maybe something like 80% or whatever, have already been fulfilled. Maybe it's more than that. I don't know the exact percentage. But the amount that is still left to be fulfilled, it's a comparatively small, tiny percentage of all the prophecies about Jesus and his coming and all that he will do have yet to be fulfilled.

All the rest have been brought to pass. All the rest have been fulfilled. God keeps his work. He is always faithful. And yet we might sit there and think, oh, well, I don't see any evidence of it yet. Why hasn't he done it yet? Why hasn't he done it yet? Come on, I've been waiting all this time. Why hasn't God done it in my time? God will do it in his time, in his perfect time.

It is as though if somebody promised you a victory in a sporting competition and there was still five minutes to go and say, come on, come on, we're still losing. I thought you said we were going to win. It's right up until the whistle that the time is there.

It's right up until the last kick of the ball or the last hit of the racket or the last pounding of the athlete's foot upon the track right up until the whistle goes, there is still time.

[18 : 14] God will complete all things in the fullness of his time. He confers the greatest gifts. He confers on his people who, like Zacharias, were dumb, unable to open their mouths.

He confers on Zacharias the greatest eloquence. Nobody ever gave a speech like Zacharias does here. It is wonderful what he pours out here.

And it's not about himself. Oh, I'm a great guy. I, who in my old age have brought forth a son.

Everybody give me credit. Everybody give me grace. It's not about himself.

It's not even other than the smallest degree about his own son. Except what we have here at verse 76. Thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the highest.

For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. Even that isn't really about John.

[19 : 12] It's more about Jesus. But ultimately, everything that Zacharias pours forth, it's about the Lord. The Lord unlocks the tongue of his son.

The Lord opens the mouth of the dumb and gives him not only the greatest gift, because the gift of an infant son in their old age is that for which Zacharias and Elizabeth would have longed, would have prayed for for years.

And I think when we looked at Abraham and Sarah and when we were previously looking at that section of Genesis, you know, you just have to stop and think for a moment that when this, what would have been young couple, this young priest and his wife, when they were first married and they would, they'd be hoping for children and the first few months would go past and still nothing and still nothing and then the months would turn into years and still nothing and still nothing and then hope would begin to fade and still nothing and still nothing and all the years and decades that went past.

We don't know if Elizabeth was, you know, like Sarah, past the age for childbearing or whether there was just time left for that, but they would have given up hope, certainly. They would not have expected in their old age to be blessed with the gift not only of a child but of a son and this to them would be a big deal but the greatest gift of all is not, oh look, you've got a child.

It's what the Lord intends to do through this child. He gives the greatest gifts and because he gives the greatest gifts, he gives the greatest eloquence to declare them that we should be saved from our enemies, verse 71, and from the hand of all that hate us, verse 74, that he would grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear and holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

[21 : 07] Obedience frees us from our old chains, frees us from our old enemies, not because they're not still there, not because they're not still active but because they no longer have power over us.

You see, the enemies of Christ, they thought they had won their victory when they took him, when they crucified him and killed him, but all they were doing was they were fulfilling God's purpose in paying the ultimate price for sin.

They didn't win. God won. God won and God approved the sacrifice of Jesus and the death of Christ upon the cross by raising him up the third day. You see, even if our life is taken away by the enemies of Christ and those who hate us, we still win in Christ.

We are free from all our old enemies. They have no more power over us because as Paul said to the Philippians, he'll form it for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

For the believer, they have the joy and the faithfulness of serving the Lord here, living and working with the Lord's people. They have the service of worship of the Lord. They get to know him more and more.

[22 : 22] They have all that joy here but when their life is taken away, they go immediately to be, their souls go immediately to be with the Lord for all eternity. There is nothing better. Paul says, he has strength to do.

Having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better. Our enemies have no power over us now when we are in Christ.

The greatest gifts, the greatest eloquence, it's never surpassed if you think of, not only the gift the Lord is given to Zacharias but this eloquence that he pours forth, speaking about the Lord, this is also his epitaph because if you think about it, Zacharias and Elizabeth for that matter, we never encounter them anymore, anywhere else in scripture.

We never read that Zacharias is doing anything or saying anything. We never read of this elderly couple anymore in scripture. This pouring forth of his hymn of praise when God unlocks his speech. This is not only Zacharias' finest hour, it is his grand finale and the Lord brings the very best at the very end.

[23 : 39] This conclusion to his life, not only the birth of a son of Ayr and John the Baptist, but also this pouring forth of such praise to God as he had never been able to give before.

The Lord, in obedience to him, frees us from our old chains and confers on us the greatest gifts and the greatest gifts. Also, we should notice what Zacharias says here, that he would grant unto us, verse 74, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear and

holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.

If we are freed from our enemies, it's not so that we can lie back on the couch and take it easy. It's not so that we can sit in our hands or twiddle our thumbs or just toast our feet by the fire. It is rather that we are saved to serve.

If you think of the Israelites being brought out of the land of Egypt, they didn't say, oh, let my people go so that we can go and relax and enjoy ourselves in the sandy desert and we can just drink the water from the rock and eat the man that the Lord will provide.

We just want to take it easy because this slavery here, it's been so hard in Egypt. God doesn't say that about his people. Moses doesn't say that through the, the Lord doesn't say it through Moses about his people, but rather what he says is let my people go that they may serve me, that they may serve me three days journey in the wilderness, that they may serve me.

[25 : 04] We are saved to serve. When the Lord converts a soul, it is not so when that soul can just make things easy and do nothing and say, that's me going to heaven.

Now I've got nothing else to worry about. They are rather saved in order to serve. They are saved so that all the years that remain of their lives and all the gifts that they have and all the resources the Lord has put at their disposal can now be used for the greatest and most worthwhile purposes on the face of this earth, which are the furtherance of God's kingdom and the spreading of the knowledge of Christ, which alone saves.

Faith in Christ Jesus alone saves, but people can't trust in someone that they haven't heard of. To be able to serve the Lord, to know the Lord, to rejoice in God, to enjoy him forever.

This is part of why we are created and until we encounter Christ, until our lives are changed in that way, we have not been fulfilling the purpose for which we as human beings were designed, which is one reason why so many lives until we know Christ, so many lives have this sense of being unfulfilled and incomplete and always wondering, is there something more?

Am I missing something? There must be more to life than this. There is. man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

[26 : 39] If we are not glorifying God, we won't be enjoying him either. So this is why we are created and if we're not fulfilling the purpose for which we are designed, then we're just a kind of ornament at best on the face of the earth.

We're not doing the thing that the Lord intended us for. We are saved to serve. Now, this is a chapter which rejoices in the presence of little children.

As yet, in the womb until John the Baptist is born, towards the end of that chapter, but it is about little children being conceived and being born and so on. And part of the glory, part of the joy that the Lord gives when he gives children to those to whom he does, is that if they are dedicated to the Lord, if they are brought within his covenant, if they are raised in the love and fear and nurture and admonition of the Lord, then our own ordinary children, if I can put that in inverted commas, because our children are not Jesus, they're not John the Baptist, they're not these kind of biblical heroes, they don't seem to us very ordinary, but our ordinary children are devoted to and intermingled with Christ's cause, Christ's purpose, they become part of this great work of what the Lord is doing if we bring them to know the Lord and his salvation.

We can't convert our own children, none of us can do that. All that we can do is give them all the possible means to know Christ for themselves.

It's just that, you know, while Zacharias can't speak, he can't say anything, he can't do anything, whilst our children, if they are deaf, if they are deaf to the things of Christ, if they can't hear the things of Jesus, how can they know to make an informed choice in the fullness of time?

[28 : 34] Sometimes people say, well, I want my child to make their own decision later on in life. Okay, that's fine, but how can they make a decision if they don't have the options in front of them?

Our part with our children is to bring them up in the knowledge and love and fear of the Lord. They may reject that. That becomes their choice. It may become their condemnation in the forms of time. But we do not save them from condemnation by just not exposing them to Christ. All we do is we throw them overboard in a boat at sea and we say, you're not getting a life jacket because it might make you float.

They're not causing our children to sink or swim and that says, we are giving them the means by which they may seek what the Lord is to be found and called upon it whilst he is near.

And by that means our own ordinary children who are not Jesus, who are not John the Baptist, but who are each one called by name. And I do, honestly, Hannah the Bible, believe that whatever

names we give to our children, we think it's us choosing them, but I would suggest to you it's the Lord who puts into the heart of the parents of every child, what it is there to be named, what it is there to be called.

[29 : 49] Every name has a meaning and I would suggest to you every meaning likewise has a purpose and that the Lord knows every single child by name. He knows what he or she will become, he knows all their potential and he knows likewise there is a key point at which they will or will not come to the Lord as their personal Savior.

Our own ordinary children can be and are meant to be devoted to the Lord, to be intermingled with his cause and his purpose.

The name John, which Zacharias gives to his son by command of the angel, is a short name of the name Jehohanah, which means Jehovah is gracious.

Well, the word gracious really means like gratis, a gift. It can also mean Jehovah's gift. John means Jehovah's gift or Jehovah is gracious.

And so likewise, the Lord is gracious in every child that he gives and every child is conceived and born for a purpose. We won't always know what that purpose is going to be, but God will know.

[30 : 59] But whatever it is that we have been given by the Lord, whatever it is we may encounter, whatever may be the times of blessing or fellowship or strengthening in different places.

You know, at this time of year families come together and people may gather and they have great times of enjoyment while they're together. But then, you know, the date passes, you have to go home, you have to face your own work, your own home, your own bills, your own difficulties and challenges and problems.

Verse 56, I'd like you to notice here. Maynay abode within about three months until Elizabeth was about due to be delivered of her own child and returned to her own house.

And by the time Maynay returns to her own house, she is three months pregnant now. By this stage, almost certainly, it will be beginning to show.

At this stage, she who hasn't told a soul, as far as anyone knows, she disappears. An innocent young girl, she comes back an expectant mother to be.

[32 : 03] And everybody assumes the worst. And this is a difficult day, a challenge that Maynay has to face. And it's not very pleasant for her. Until the angel speaks to Joseph and encourages him to take his wife and to not be afraid, there's going to be this challenge which initially Maynay has to face.

Oh, that's not going to be easy for her. Not going to be easy for anyone else. Not going to be easy for Joseph either. But this is what the Lord calls us to do, to go whatever times of blessing we have had, whatever times of enjoyment, whether, you know, it's for the young people, maybe it's a free church camps, or maybe there's Christian conferences, or whatever, or times of blessing at communions, or whatever.

We have to come down off the mountaintop. We have to disperse, we have to go back, and Mary abode within about three months, and return to our own house.

The time comes when we must go home and live out our calling where the Lord has placed us and called us and requires us to love and to live and to serve and to witness for them.

If there is not a faith, if there is not a relationship that changes our own ordinary, everyday life, that is not a faith for real life, because anybody can have a wow experience on a mountaintop, anybody can have a wow experience surrounded by a little sort of spiritual hot house of other red hot Christians, and think, oh yeah, this is really good, this is really great, but then you go home in the cold light of day, and suddenly it doesn't seem so real anymore, but if it is Christ you have encountered, if it is Christ you have in your heart, if it is Christ who has changed you, then that will likewise change your ordinary, everyday life, in your own home, in your own environment, in your own workplace, and where the rubber hits the road, as it were, where the real cold face of life, it will change that, because it will change you.

[34 : 06] Eventually, we will, the reality of our witness, of our Christian life, will be tested and tried, not just simply in these special situations, it will be tested and tried in the ordinary life of your home, of your family, of your workplace, in the ordinary and more mundane, perhaps routine, affairs of life.

Mary abode within about three months and returned to her own house. It would probably have been a lot easier for Mary if she had just stayed there, the remaining three months, if she had just stayed there until her own time was done.

Then she would have left the baby with Elizabeth and pretended nothing had happened, but there was a reality to be fixed, there was faithfulness to God to be fulfilled. Jehovah's gift is not just to Zacharias and Elizabeth, it is not just to Mary and Joseph, this is a gift the Lord seeks to give to us all, his beloved son, Jesus Christ.

and that will mean challenges in your life, that will mean potential changes, it will mean a reality change in your own life, in your own home, in your own heart, in your own workplace, in the real, everyday life of your own existence.

God desires, Christ desires, not just to give you a momentary experience of joy, he desires to change your life, he desires to give you life in all its fullness, not only for time, but for eternity.

[35 : 42] Let's pray.