Star Struck

Title: Part 1 – Blessed and Highly Favorec Date: November 26, 2023
Transition: Paul Prays & Seats

While everyone here in the house is saying "Hi," I want to welcome you in if you are joining us on our app or social channels. I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving. If you are anywhere in the Bay Area I'd like to invite you to join us in the house for Christmas Eve, EVE! Two service times at 5 pm & 7 pm on December 23rd, we'd love to be a part of your celebrations this year.

Speaking of celebrations, today we are beginning a brand-new collection of messages that will take us all the way to Christmas called "Star Struck." And the goal of this is pretty simple. In the hustle and bustle of the next month I want us to stop long enough to rediscover the hope, promise and expectation of Christmas.

For many of us, Christmas means overstuffed schedules, credit card debt, and skyrocketing stress. We struggle to find the connection between our holiday to-do lists and the story of Jesus' birth. Anyone know what I am talking about? Like you sit down to open gifts on Christmas day and it's like, "What even just happened? How is this season over once again and I don't even feel like my faith was engaged at all..." SO, this year let's change all of that! Let's allow ourselves to be "Star Struck" once again as we reorient our hearts and lives around this event that changed all of history.

OK, that said, I've got to now transition from that, to football, to Mary... here goes. How many of you have noticed how "star struck" everyone in the NFL is over Taylor Swift being at the Chief's games this season? It's nuts, right? Every time Travis Kelce does anything remotely good the cameras all pan up to the suites to see how Taylor reacts. ESPN is even running stories on if Travis will go to South America during his bye week with Tay Tay. All I'm saying is thank God Kansas City didn't play on Thursday or Friday, amen!

Lots of good football games over the past few days though. Anyone watch any football while their turkey was digesting? I was watching a game and at the very end the trailing team was driving in hopes of a Hail Mary. The clock was winding down, all they needed to do was get to the 50-yard line, get to the 45-yard line, and they would have at least one shot at the end zone. Everybody knows what a Hail Mary is, right? A Hail Mary is when the quarterback gets close enough, like maybe midfield, but close enough to throw it as far as he can with the hopes that one of his receivers will come down in the end zone with the ball to win the game as time runs out.

One of the most famous Hail Mary's in football history is one I'd like to forget about, but it happened the day after Thanksgiving in 1984. Boston College was trailing Miami as the clock was winding down. Miami was the defending national champions and entered the game with an 8–3 record, ranked twelfth in the nation. BC's quarter back is this undersized guy named Doug Flutie. Miami flushes him out of the pocket as time clicks to zero. Flutie then chunks the ball from his own 35-yard line only to have his receiver come down with the ball in the end zone. BC wins!

And you would think the term came from this game, BC is a Catholic school, but the term is actually credited to a game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Minnesota Vikings in 1975. Roger Staubach was the Cowboys quarterback and with time running out they trailed 14 to 10. So, Staubach throws the ball as far as he can only to have Drew Pearson come down with the ball in the end zone, Cowboys win. After the game the press was asking Staubach about the game winning pass and he said, quote: "I closed my eyes and said a Hail Mary." The Philadelphia Inquirer the next day printed as their headline, "Hail Mary Pass Blesses Dallas" and the Hail Mary became a part of sports culture

But where did it come from? It comes from our text today because in our text the angel Gabriel enters the scene with a message for a young virgin girl named Mary and ultimately for would be husband, Joseph. How's that for a transition? Star Struck, Taylor Swift, Football, Mary. But Mary is minding her own business

when the angel appears to her and says, and I'm quoting from the old King James Version, but the angel says in Luke 1:28:

Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And that's where the phrase Hail Mary came from. Maybe you grew up Catholic like my wife Cheryl did and you went to your first confession and the priest said do 10 or 15 Hail Mary's as penance for your sins. Where did that come from? It came from this text. Hail Thou art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou amongst women.

Some of you are like "Where is he going with all this, how does this all fit together..."

It all seems to go together for me because what could be more of a Hail Mary pass than the one you need to throw as God when you want to bring forth the Savior of the world from a virgin womb. The Christmas story is one of God moving against all the odds in a miraculously way to save the creation that He so loves! So, let's look again with fresh eyes as we begin in Luke 1:26, this time from the NIV which doesn't give us the Hail Mary like the old King James does, but it's a little more readable. Allow yourself to be a little star struck at all that is taking place here beginning in verse 26:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, [that would be the sixth month of Mary's cousin being pregnant with John the Baptist, in the sixth month] God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, [Gabriel had an earlier assignment to go to the temple with a message for Zechariah who was Nazareth] to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, [There's the "hail"] you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[b] the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." [Amen?] "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Not a political statement, not a condemning statement, just a footnote in the context here on the sanctity of life. When Mary, who's barely pregnant, walks into the house of Elizabeth her relative who's six months pregnant, John the Baptist inside of Elizabeth leaps in the womb at the presence of Jesus in the womb coming into the house. Luke gives us the specific details of "baby" and "six months pregnant" because God wants us to see the sanctity of even little lives.

So, now Mary, who was in wonder as she didn't know how any of this could be, erupts in worship. She moves from wonder to worship and Mary's song follows beginning in verse 46:

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

What an amazing moment to have the announcement of Gabriel over your life. You are blessed and highly favored. I grew up in a tradition where I didn't hear that phrase a lot, but in some churches you hear that all the time. In some churches that is a very big announcement. I'm blessed and highly favored. Anybody grow up or been to a church like that? It's like, how are you doing today? "Blessed and highly favored?" How's life going? "I'm blessed and highly favored!"

AND that was true of Mary and it's true of you and it's true of me. BUT the interpretation of that, as I think we'll see at the end, isn't necessarily that "I got a brand-new car and everything's going fantastic today. All my prayers have been answered exactly the way I hoped they would be answered. God is good all the time and all the time God is good. I'm blessed and highly favored..." I don't think that's always the result because Mary's circumstance isn't exactly that circumstance.

When the angel came to Mary, she was somewhere between 12 and 16 years of age. As the daddy of a soor to be 12-year-old daughter next week, for my sake, I just need to her to be 16 in this moment. But culturally, somewhere between 12 and 16, she's pledged to be married to Joseph. And so, at 16 years of age, planning a wedding, planning a future, and planning a life comes the announcement, "You are gonna be pregnant and it's gonna be the work and the miracle of God." A divine conception is going to happen.

Now that is really great and really troubling news all at the same time. Can we all agree on that? But somehow in the grace of God, Mary rose up in faith to believe that God was doing something amazing in her and through her. And even though it sounded to the human mind like a stretch, she said, but all things are possible with God. Let it be with me as you have said.

In other words, I'm gonna choose the side of faith when everything in my human mind makes me want to tilt to the side of this is crazy and I don't believe any of this. That would be a good takeaway for someone today. When everything in your life leads you to conclude this is crazy and I don't believe any of this, choose the side of faith. So, at 16 years of age, she's chosen to bear the son of God into the world. And at 28 years of age, she's at the temple to worship and her kid disappears. And once they finally find the kid, he says, "Well, where'd you expect me to be? I was at my father's house." And they're like, "Oh, okay, great. It's gonna be like this huh?" Right? In her thirties, she realizes there's a wonder kid in the house. When she's 46, she'd gone to a friend's wedding in Canaan, and when the wine ran out at the end of the reception, she kind of pulled the curtain back on Jesus, whether He was ready or not. Mom said, "Just do whatever He says..." "Jesus, get in there and do something and fix the wine." How'd she know He could do that? Because she'd been living in a house with the son of God for 30 years! And so now she's 46 and people are starting to go, "Oh wow, this guy can do stuff!" But at 49 she watches her Son suffer on a cross an excruciating death and knows that He's been put in a tomb and sealed in death.

But also at 49, she sees the miracle of the empty tomb and the resurrection. And also at 49, she has a goodbye conversation with Jesus where He says to her, "Mom, I'm gonna ascend back up into heaven. I know the whole thing's been crazy, but you've been awesome by the way. But I'm gonna ascend back to heaven. I'll see you later. Have a great life." And up into heaven goes her son at 49.

This is her life from 16 to 49... blessed and highly favored. Bumps in the road, crazy in the road. I'm sure it started with shock and awe. I'm sure other people tried to compound that with shame along the way. "Oh, great story, I've never heard that one, God did it, ha ha, that's amazing, creative way to approach that unplanned pregnancy. Then it was surreal, then there was suffering, then there was silence. And then there was the surprise. Blessed and highly favored.

She moved from wonder to worship, worried to worship, wounded to worship, waiting to worship, wow to worship, where'd He go to worship. But we see this pattern in the life of Mary who was blessed and highly favored.

Waiting > Divine Activity > Worship

There's waiting, there's divine activity, and then there's worship. To put it in a different way, there's faith. If we're never waiting for anything, we don't need faith.

I mean it would be great if God just did everything right when we needed Him to do it, when we wanted Him to do it, when we told Him to do it. But if God did everything exactly the way we want Him to do it, we would have zero need for faith in our life. So, come on, let's thank God today for our waiting because that stirs up in us the faith that we need to grow stronger! Amen! **But in our faith**, waiting is followed by God's faithfulness! Amen. Does anybody have a story of the faithfulness of God in the house today?

And once the faithfulness of God comes into our lives, worship is always the response, <u>BUT</u> what I love in Mary is she didn't wait until the resurrection to worship. Mary worshiped beforehand! Mary had a song at the very beginning when the baby was still in her womb! She believed in God's Word and worshiped God from the start!

BUT why did the wonder turn into worship? This is the most important part of the journey today. It was for two reasons:

Number one, what the Lord has done for <u>ME</u>. Mary said, "The Lord has been mindful of my humble state." Mary, this humble servant girl, now understands that she's on the radar of heaven, that her life matters to God, that she's in the story and in the plan of God.

But it wasn't just what God did for her that caused the worship. It was what God was doing for <u>US</u> that caused the worship. I want you to notice how this unfolds in Mary's song. Look back at verse 50 and then again in verse 54: His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. [And then in verse 54] He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

She's talking about the Savior, the Promised One, the hope not just of Israel but of the whole world. And if you notice, she is talking about God's mercy, God is extending mercy, He is being merciful... **Mercy unfolds the grace of God, and the grace of God is the key that unlocks worship in our hearts.**

If you want to create an atmosphere of worship in your home this Christmas don't begin with worship. Begin with rediscovering the story of the radical grace of God. Worship is the byproduct of a heart that has been awakened from the dead by the mercy of God. When mercy is alive in our heart, worship will be alive in our mouths! When there is no mercy alive in the heart, then you're wasting your time trying to get people to be exuberant in their praise this Christmas. External pressure cannot cause the heart to do what the internal change of grace will do.

BUT if people can see, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that God who did not owe us anything extended to us everything, and erased our debt through the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, then in that heart there is a song! Zachariah had one, Mary had one, and I have one. Thank you worship team for leading today but I came in here with my own song. I didn't come in here to worship, I came in worshipping! Amen?

Why? Well, He has been faithful! Am I still waiting on some things, absolutely! Has there been some wonder and waiting and wounding along the way, yup. But if God never did another thing in my life, I've already got enough to praise Him for! I'm in the house today with a bunch of people to celebrate a God of salvation, a God of mercy, a God of extravagant grace! I'm still moved by the gospel.

AND I guess that's the question today. Are you still moved by the Gospel, or do you need God to come through one more time for you to worship him? I want to be moved by the Gospel. I want what God has already done by sending His Son Jesus to this earth to live and die for my sins to be enough.

Because there are really only a few responses to God's mercy. The first response to God's mercy is to be ignorant of it. Meaning I don't even know that I need it. Like I'm not even that clued in to the holiness of God to know that I need mercy. OR I don't really know what mercy is all about so I'm just over here doing my best, trying to make it right with God.

And in either case, I don't have the full knowledge and understanding of the depth of the mercy of God. Of a love that's deeper than whatever I've done. That's wider than wherever I've run. That's higher than anything I can imagine. That's longer than any distance that would separate me from God. This love of God overwhelms everything I've done and everything I could ever do and brings me back to God. I didn't earn it. I didn't deserve it. I didn't merit it in any way, shape, or form. But God is a merciful God. And it's not just mercy, it's tender mercy. You're struggling, but I'm gonna help you. I'm gonna save you. I'm gonna do what you can't do. I'm gonna throw a Hail Mary and it's gonna be completed. And salvation is gonna come to all who receive this gift.

The second response to mercy is to receive it. And I think that's where the bulk of people in church are. I have definitely received the mercy of God. I remember where I was when I was saved. I remember where I was when I asked God to bring me to life. I know where I was when I prayed that prayer of faith in Jesus.

And I have received the mercy of God.

But the third person in the story of mercy is the person who's the conduit of the mercy of God. Mary didn't just receive the miracle; she was the conduit for the miracle. And she knew it right away. And she said this is You being merciful to Abraham and to every generation. This is everything we've been waiting for, all the

law and all the prophets all pointed to this moment. This is what you have promised and "Oh my gosh" I'm the conduit for the mercy of God.

Yeah, at 49, I'm gonna have to sit there and watch my Son suffer and die the worst kind of death. But I am a conduit of the grace that you're extending as His blood flows down to cover the sins of the world. Yes, it's gonna be crazy living in a house with a Son of God, yes, it's gonna be crazy having a story that the Holy Spirit birthed this child in me. But I'm a conduit of the grace of God. I'm blessed and highly favored.

[BUCKET & DRIED OUT SPONGE]

It's like a sponge. You know when you haven't been home for a while the sponge is kind of sitting in the sink or up on the top of the sink or maybe under the sink if you're one of those kinds of homes. But it's kind of crusty and shriveled up and a little bit, you know, hard. BUT that's someone today, this sponge was made, created, designed to absorb and to become pliable, to become usable right before your eyes. To be transform, right?

Some of you are coming into this Christmas season and you're just a crusty sponge. But the good news is the sink's running with the mercy of God and the grace of God. And all you have to do is get under the flow and let the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, the mercy of God bring you to life.

But others of you are more like this. You are the sponge that's sitting right there in the water soaking wet. Like it's totally full. It's fat and bloated and won't pick up anything because it has no capacity to. What God wants to do for you this season is wring you out a bit so that you can become useful in His hand and a conduit of His mercy and His grace.

I want you; God wants you to receive mercy today. And everyone can. This is the crazy thing about this moment. Not one person has to leave this gathering separated from God, disconnected from the mercy, the grace, the love, the forgiveness of God. Every person in this gathering can be saved, but more, every person in this gathering can be a conduit of that grace and mercy. Because there's somebody in your sphere who needs to know that God is extending mercy to them too.

And I believe that's what it means at the core to be blessed and highly favored. It is to be chosen by God, to be a conduit of His grace to others. I am blessed in highly favored, "Oh, it's not gonna be a cakewalk, but I'm blessed and highly favored. Oh, they're highs and lows, but I am blessed and highly favored. There're absolutely some dark days in the story, but I'm blessed and highly favored. And there are some amazing high days in the story, either way, I am blessed and highly favored. Some people aren't gonna understand and they're gonna be talking behind my back, but I am blessed and highly favored. This is not the way I actually saw it all coming to pass, but I am blessed and highly favored.

This isn't the family Joseph, and I were thinking about starting. But I am blessed and highly favored. I am in the story of God and I'm not just thinking about me. The worship isn't just about what you've done for me. I've got a song to sing because of what you've done through me!

What would the church look like? What would our church look like if we came through the door, not going, I need a little water on my crusty sponge today. But what if we came through the door going, man, God squeezed me this week. And it was amazing to watch God use someone like me to extend grace to someone else in the world. I've got a song of praise. I have something to worship God for. For who He is and what He's done, not just in my life, but through my life!

SO, church as your pastor, as someone who loves you, as someone who has been praying for you all week. I just wanna encourage us as a house, if the Gospel is in your heart, then let there be a song of praise in your mouth this Christmas season! If you are alive from the dead, then say so!

Two quick applications and we are done. The first is to create time and space to allow God's grace to flood your life. This would include things like being here in church for the month of December. Instead of using Sunday as a chance to catch up this Christmas season that you would use it to allow God's grace to turn you from hard and crusty to pliable in His hands.

But I also want to challenge you to create a habit of doing this daily over the course of the next month. So, on your way out today we have a Christmas season daily devotional called "The Eternal King" that we want to give you for free! This will give you some daily Scripture to read and some commentary to help prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The second quick application is to allow God to then use you to be a conduit of His mercy and grace. To not just soak in His grace until you become swollen and bloated, but to allow Him to wring you out and become useful in His hands. I'm talking about taking time to make some investments in the lives of people around you to earn the right to make an invite to Christmas Eve, EVE. Why would someone come to your church if you haven't even invited them into your home or out for a meal, right? Let's be conduits! The worship isn't just about what you've done for me. I've got a song to sing because of what you've done through me! Amen.

May we never forget that we are blessed and highly favored and, by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, may His praise always be in our mouth and on our lips. Pray with me, church.