

Christmas: A Display of Grace and Power

Luke 1:26-38

Intro: What We're Really Celebrating

[Looking at the first passage we read.] I wonder what you've been experiencing this holiday season? What has been a dominant experience for you this year? Some over this year and even in this Christmas season have experienced a deep and abiding (perhaps subtle, perhaps overwhelming) sense of worthlessness.

You look back on this past year and you didn't accomplish the things you thought you'd accomplish. You look at your marriage and see the mess that it is, or that it's not where it should be, and you know you've played a part in that. You look at your kids, and you think about how you've fallen short as a parent or grandparent. You look at your own walk with the Lord, and you're reminded of how dull your love is for him at times.

You feel like a failure, and feelings of worthlessness begin to creep in. Coupled with that is the feeling of helplessness. "I look back on my life and see so many failings, and yet, I've tried to change, but I can't." OR you might think, "I can't change the past and I'm experiencing the effects of my failings...I just feel helpless."

Does the message of Christmas have anything to do with you? There are two words—Christmas truths—that you need to cling to: GRACE and POWER. God lavishes his GRACE on the undeserving AND God works POWERFULLY to overcome the impossible. These are two Christmas truths I want us to explore from this passage and demonstrate that the message of Christmas gives hope to those who feel worthless and helpless. Let's begin with...

Truth #1: God lavishes grace on the undeserving.

[v26] Let's set the scene. God sends Gabriel, one of his angels, to the earth to deliver a message. And this is important because whenever we see in Scripture God sending an angel to carry a message, we know for certain, that message is really important.

So...we might expect Gabriel to be sent to a very important PLACE. But where does God send him? It says, "to a city of Galilee named Nazareth." What do we know about Nazareth? It was a small, unpopular, unimportant, lowly esteemed town in Israel in the region of Galilee. In fact, in John 1, when Nathaniel hears the Messiah has come from Nazareth, do you remember what he says? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth???" That's the view people had of that city!

Now, why would God send one of his angels to this unimportant/insignificant town? Maybe there's an important person there? **[v27, "virgin...Joseph"]**

So the angel visits a virgin who is engaged to a guy named Joseph. Not a lot happening here. Mary was a young unknown girl. Joseph was a carpenter by trade. It's an ordinary girl betrothed to an ordinary guy living in an ordinary town. The only important thing about them is that Joseph is of the house of David....which means, his family lineage is linked back to David, the greatest King in Israel's history.

You might think, then, that this would be a royal family whom Gabriel is visiting. Like, maybe Mary is a princess! She's not. That's not where her worth is found. **[v28]**

Notice, he does not say, "Greetings O WORTHY/ HOLY/ HIGHLY ESTEEMED/ ACCOMPLISHED one." He says, "Greetings, O FAVORED one." Know what that means? The word "favored" is a form of the word for GRACE. It could read: "Greetings, O GRACED one" or "One who is shown grace." Who is showing her GRACE? Gabriel says, "The Lord is with you." That's who's showing her grace. "God is with you, Mary. His disposition towards you is a gracious disposition."

Why? Is Mary favored by God because of how important she is in the eyes of the world...because of how good/worthy she is...because God sees something in her that makes him say, "I could use that one! She's the perfect candidate to bear the Savior of the world!" Of course not! There's nothing special about her. She's a very ordinary girl. But God lavishes grace on the undeserving.

By definition, grace is God's *undeserved* kindness to us. So it couldn't have been earned by Mary. She seems to get that. Notice her response. **[vv29-30]**

There it is again! She's found favor with God...been graced by God. To do what? **[vv31-33]**

"That who's gonna be in your belly, Mary!" That's a lot to take in, isn't it? And it would've hit Mary much harder than it might hit us, because Mary knew exactly what Gabriel was talking about. She would've been familiar with specific promises God made about the coming Messiah.

Did you pick up on it? "Son of the Most High...he will be given the throne of his father David...he will reign forever...of his kingdom there will be no end." Remember last week's sermon? Gabriel is alluding to 2 Samuel 7, where God made a covenant with King

David, that he would put his son on the throne
FOREVER.

It was anticipated that this King who came to make all wrongs right...to eradicate all sin and suffering...to crush all injustice and unrighteousness...to comfort the sorrowful and bring peace to the pained...to give joy to the disheartened and hope to the despairing. "You, Mary, will give birth to this long-awaited King."

What astonishing news! An unknown, insignificant, unimportant, little girl...from an insignificant, unimportant little town. Why would God choose her to bear the King of the world? ANSWER: Because God loves to lavish his grace on the unworthy.

This is the message of Christmas—and it's the message of Christianity. The message of Christianity is NOT: "Make yourself worthy. Be good enough. Be better. Turn over a new leaf. Change yourself. Shape up as a husband/ wife/ mother/ father/ brother/ sister/ child/ person." The message is NOT, "Make yourself *acceptable* to God." That's not how God works! He does not show his favor and kindness to those who make themselves acceptable. He, in his kindness, ACCEPTS the unacceptable! WELCOMES the unwelcomed. LOVES the unlovable. He, by his own grace, makes worthy the unworthy.

If you have said, “How could God accept me after all I’ve done?” you are ripe for receiving his grace. Now, if you say, “Why wouldn’t God accept me after all I’ve done?” Then you don’t understand grace/ Christianity/ the meaning of Christmas.

The whole reason Jesus was born was so that God could extend his grace to us. Jesus came to take care of our greatest problem, namely sin, so that we could receive grace from God. **[Gospel: Jesus, as a human, represented us before God—life, death, resurrection. Appeal to non-Christian]**

Christmas is about God’s grace coming to undeserving. That’s truth #1.

Truth #2: God works powerfully to overcome the impossible. Now, I’m not sure if you know, but there’s a bit of an obstacle to Mary getting pregnant. How was she described at the beginning of the passage? A virgin. And so she reminds Gabriel of this minor obstacle. **[v34]**

Literally, “Since I have not known a man.” “How is this even possible?” I don’t think this is a question that reveals a lack of faith in Mary. There have been many instances throughout the Bible of women getting pregnant when they were past child-bearing years, or they were barren. But a man was always involved.

What this angel is saying to Mary is NOT JUST rare, it's IMPOSSIBLE! And so, she naturally (and seemingly innocently...not out of unbelief but simple curiosity) asks, "How's this gonna happen? I mean, I believe you that it will...but HOW?" And Gabriel tells her. **[v35a]**

In other words: "God will do it! God will make it happen!" Now there's something important about that language of "overshadowing" ("the HS will overshadow you"). Does that sound familiar? This is an allusion to God's indwelling of the OT temple. When God took up residence in that temple, it says that his presence FILLED it and COVERED it.

That's the imagery we have here...WHICH MEANS, this is an indication of the very presence of God himself in Mary's womb. Think about what that implies about the nature of the baby who would be in there. Notice a key word in **[v35b, "therefore"]**

The word "therefore" makes the connection between the WAY Mary gets pregnant and the ONE whom she'll be pregnant with. The HOLY Spirit will miraculously make this happen, therefore, the child inside of her will be called HOLY.

What does this tell about this baby? What child is this? The text says, "He's the Son of God." This baby will not inherit a sinful nature; he will be holy from

birth. Does that boggle your mind? *Especially you who have kids!*

Can you imagine NEVER seeing from your toddler a screaming fit out of selfishness? Never taking another child's toy out of jealousy? Never pushing another kid on the playground? Never insisting on his own way! Jesus was holy from birth.

So the answer to Mary's question, "How can this be, since I'm a virgin?" is this: "The Holy Spirit will miraculously make it happen." Yes, it's crazy sounding, but is God powerful enough to do it? Gabriel reinforces that truth by pointing to the example of Elizabeth who's really old, but is pregnant. **[v36]**

Think of why he mentions this. "Mary, I know it's impossible to have a child without a man. But God is in the business of DOING the impossible. In fact, he's doing it right now. Your relative Elizabeth, who's old and barren, is pregnant." And we know who that baby is—John the Baptist.

And Gabriel tells Mary, "She's six months pregnant," Almost as if he's saying, "Go check it out for yourself, because she's showing." And that's what Mary does in the next passage. She gets confirmation that God can do more than we can imagine. And that's exactly the point Gabriel makes. **[v37]**

“Elizabeth’s barren womb and old age are no obstacles for God, Mary. Your husbandless dilemma is no obstacle for God! Because NOTHING is impossible with God.” Do you believe that? Do you believe that... you who...

- Feel hopeless this Christmas season?
- Are you so burdened for your straying children and grandchildren?
- Are you stuck in a rut of sin?
- Feel trapped in a suffocating circumstance and have no hope for freedom?

Nothing is impossible for God! (Now, of course Gabriel doesn’t mean God can do that which is contrary to his nature. He’s saying, “God is able to do that which is impossible for man.”) Cling to that! Here’s the way one person puts it, “...among many antidotes to a doubting, anxious, questioning state of mind, few will be found more useful than that before us now—a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. With Him who called the world into being and formed it out of nothing, everything is possible. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.” (Ryle, 28)

The same author goes on to say this: “Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God’s [power].” (Ryle, *Luke*, 29) Our hearts are most at peace when they are resting on God’s power. Why do you think that is? Consider when our hearts are NOT at peace. Much of the time,

it's because we're trusting in our OWN power/self-sufficiency/strength. But the problem is: we're not all-powerful, and therefore, we don't feel peace!

But when we trust in God's power, that's the pillow upon which our souls find rest. *I want you to try out something tonight. Instead of using your soft down-feathered pillow to sleep on, grab a rock from outside. See how good of a night sleep you get. That's what it's like to trust in ourselves with whatever we're going through. It's like trying to find rest on a rock!*

Nothing is too hard for God. Let that be the down-feathered pillow for your soul. That was Mary's pillow. **[v38]**

She takes that angel at his word. In other words, she's trusting in the power of God to do the impossible.

Conclusion

That's what Christmas is about: GRACE and POWER! The purpose of the birth of Jesus was to show us that God works powerfully to give us grace! You feel worthless? You feeling helpless? Cling to these Christmas truths: God is gracious AND God is powerful. And we KNOW that's true because both were put on full display on the birth of Christ our Savior.