



MARY'S SONG

Part 5 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 1:46-56 | October 25, 2009

OPENING PRAYER

All right, Mars Hill, we continue in "Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God." If you've got a Bible, go to Luke 1:46-56. I'll pray, and we'll get to work.

Father, we ask that our time would be pleasing to you, that it would be helpful to us. God, I thank you for this amazing story, true story of this wonderful sister, this young woman Mary. As we examine, Lord God, her life and her relationship with you, her response to you, her enjoyment of you, we invite you, Father, to send us the Holy Spirit, that he might impart to us the same kind of faith that she had, and the same kind of worship that she demonstrated, that we might give our lives in service to her son the Lord Jesus Christ as she did. And we ask for this grace in his good name. Amen.

Well today, you're going to get to know a little bit more about a young woman named Mary. She is a woman who lives her life in relationship with God. As a result, she is a great example for us.

TWO APPROACHES TO LIFE

And let me say that there really are two ways to live your life. And I'll give this to you by way of preface. One is to start with your life and your experience and project that on to God. We'll call that the bottom-up approach. The result is, when things are good, you feel like God's a good God and he's close and he loves me and he cares about me. And when things are hard, you start to wonder, "Is there really a God?" You start to gravitate toward agnosticism or atheism. Or maybe God is very, very far away, and he's really not interested in my life-deism. Or maybe God's an impersonal force, not a person; maybe I'm on my own; I don't really have a relationship with God-pantheism, pantheism. Maybe God is good and evil, yin and yang-Eastern religion. Or an aberration of Christian theology called "process theology" or "open theism." Maybe God is good, but he's powerless. He's impotent. He wants to help me, he wants to do good, but he's just not powerful and strong enough.

The result is, if you start bottom-up-you start with your feelings and experiences and sin and sadness and suffering, and you project them toward God-when you need him most you'll run from him not to him. You'll have questions about him, not worship for him. And you're going to be in a difficult place. Some of you are there today. You're certain that your future is uncertain. What's going to happen next? How is this going to work out? Life has gotten very complicated. Maybe because of sin you've committed, maybe sin that's been committed against you, maybe circumstance that is set before you.

The other way to live life is what we'll call the top-down approach. It is to assume that God is who he says he is; that the Bible is true and that it reveals to us the character, the nature, what we'll call the attributes of God. Believing that and then interpreting all of our life in light of what God says and who God says he is. If that's the case then, as we go to Scripture, we realize God is good. He made the world good; we've corrupted it through sin. The sin and the suffering and the sadness that is experienced, is not because of God, it's because of Satan and demons and sinners all working together in a war against God. And God is good, altogether always and only good. And God has a plan that he is working out and unfolding through history to be a redeemer and a liberator and a deliverer and a Savior.

And so when we are suffering, or when we are sinning, or when are anxious, or we are frustrated, we're to trust in God, run to God, not question God, run from God. So what God does often times in Scripture, he'll give us people to serve as examples. Some of them are very negative. They respond in ways that are deplorable. Their life and their legacy suffer. God gives them to us as warnings. Other people respond to God in faith. They trust him. They trust his word. They trust his character. They trust his promises, particularly in the most difficult of circumstances, and they are for us wonderful examples.

RECAP OF THE STORY

One of the chief examples that Scripture gives is a woman named Mary. She is an amazing woman. Her story actually starts in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14, hundreds of years before she was even born. Isaiah the prophet revealed through the Holy Spirit that a virgin, a young, unmarried virgin woman would give birth to a male child, a son. And that his name would be Immanuel, which means God with us.

So the rescue mission is that God would enter into human history, that the creator would enter into creation, that God would become a person to identify

with us, and to be that mediator, reconciler we need to reconnect us back to God. That he would be fully God, fully man, able to mediate and reconcile men and women to God. Hundreds of years passed. Everyone was wondering, where is this man, and who is this virgin woman?

The angel Gabriel then shows up to a young woman named Mary. She's probably a teenager. You could be betrothed-their version of engagement-as early as 12. About a year later, you would be married as early as 13. She is probably a junior high age young woman, likely no older than high school. She's young. She's in a small town called Nazareth, at that time, maybe dozens or hundreds of people, a very small town either way. She is potentially illiterate. She is in a poor working-class family. She's engaged to a young man named Joseph. She is preparing for her wedding, and the angel Gabriel shows up. And the whole script of her life changes. And he says, "You've been chosen by God, favored by God, you're going to be the promised mother of Immanuel, God with us." She has faith but questions, and so she asks, "How can this be? I'm a virgin." The angel Gabriel says, "It'll be a miracle. God the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, he will enable you to conceive. And you'll give birth to Jesus."

Mary is also told by Gabriel that her relative, an elderly barren woman named Elizabeth, who has never had children, and is beyond childbearing years, has also been blessed of God, and that God has opened her womb and she will give birth to John the Baptizer. In hearing of this, Mary is so excited she packs up her things and she takes the roughly 100-mile hike through the wilderness into the Judean hillside to go to the home of Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah. She spends a few months with them, and we pick up the story in Luke, chapter 1, verse 46.

REPLACE WORRYING WITH WORSHIPING

Now let me say this by way of preface. You're going to see Mary in a circumstance where she has ample opportunity to be worrying. This young woman has much to worry about. For those of you who worry well, it's your spiritual gift, you're very good at worrying-maybe you come to the point of your life today where there's a lot you're worried about. Health, finances, relationships, children, future, security. There's a lot of worry. There's a lot to be concerned about. Mary is in that season of life.

The Scriptures we will read today are recording a season in her life where she was away from home. And she didn't exactly know what would await her when she returned. Would Joseph really want to marry her? After all, she said she was a virgin, but would he believe that? Would he marry her but then quit? Would he divorce her and then leave and abandon her, as just yet another single mother? What about her reputation? She was called a whore, and a harlot, and a tramp. She told everyone, "I love God, it's a miracle, God made me pregnant." And they all laughed and made fun of her. They came to Jesus during his adult life and said, "At least we know who our father is." What they were saying is, "Your mother's a whore."

Not to mention the concern for pregnancy. How many of you women, just being pregnant alone is enough to worry. In a small town, without great medical care, plus you're poor. It's dangerous. A lot of women died in childbirth. A lot of children died in infancy. In addition to that, her own health and well being. In that day, if she was considered to be a harlot, then they could take her out to the city center, strip her, put rags as clothes on her, beat her, mock her, call her a whore, spit on her, and leave her there as an example for all the other women in town. What about her family? Would they reject her? Or believe that God was using her? Not to mention the pressure of being the mother of God. That in and of itself, for a junior high girl, that's a lot of pressure. She's a first-time mom. What a way to start. Here's God, do a good job. [Laughter]

Mary is in a season of her life where she has a lot that she could be worrying about. And rather than worrying, we find her worshiping. So that's what we read in Luke 1:46-49. The first thing I want you to learn from the example of Mary is to replace worrying with worshiping. Now, it's okay to be concerned about your life, and to make plans for your future. But Jesus says do not worry. And then people wonder, "Well, if I shouldn't worry, what should I do?" Worship. Take all of that energy and impetus and put it toward worship. Mary does. "And Mary said," or sang; ultimately this is going to be a song. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Rather than worrying, Mary is worshiping. And I need to explain to you then, worship. Worship is what we were made to do. It's what we all do, all the time. It's simply the way that it is. And worship starts with God. The God of the Bible, unlike every other god and every other religion, is one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, eternally existing in perfect harmony and communion, sharing all the divine attributes. And the Father, Son and Spirit, they communicate with one another, love one another, honor one another, glorify one another, serve one another. It is perfect community. Absolutely perfect. They worship, enjoy, celebrate one another, continually. The Bible says we were made in the image and likeness of God, male and female, that all of us are worshipers, we're unceasing worshipers. What that means is, we give ourselves to, we live in light of, someone or something. Now, we're supposed to be worshipers of God. We are supposed to celebrate God and trust God and enjoy God and love God and serve God. Because God is good to us.

WHAT IS IDOLATRY?

But what happens is, the opposite of worship is idolatry. We keep worshiping, but we worship people, things, other than God. It's amazing how, even the Ten Commandments begin with, there's one God, you worship him alone. If you obey those two commandments, you don't break the rest. You don't worship food and become a glutton. You don't worship sex and become a pervert. You don't worship money and become a thief. You don't worship anger or your reputation and become a murderer. It changes how you live. It's incredibly practical.

Nightline was out and they did an interview on the Ten Commandments and I was trying to explain this. People get rock stars and athletes and sports teams and hobbies, and boyfriends and girlfriends, and husbands and wives, and sons and daughters, and grandkids, and intellect, and reputation, and appearance, in a position of God. We live for them, we get our meaning, our value, our security, our significance, and we worship. And the worship is

always in vain because idols always disappoint. Unlike God, they're not perfect, they're not selfless, they're not loving, they're not good, and they don't endure forever. That's why idolaters are always despairing.

And then Jesus comes to take away our sin and reconcile us to God and fill us with the Holy Spirit that we might worship God by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. It's all Trinitarian. The life of God is connected to us. The life of God is imparted to us so that we can worship God. And that means all of life. With our money and our time and our talent and our treasure, the way we live is to God's glory and others' good and our joy.

HAPPY WORSHIPERS

And that's God intent for us, to be happy worshipers, because God is the happy worshiper. And what we see in Mary is that she's a happy worshiper. Now she has much to be worried about. But rather than worrying, she's worshipping. I don't know if she's like my daughter Alexie, who turns six this week. I met with Alexie yesterday. We took her to a big special breakfast up at Salish Lodge at Snoqualmie Falls. And she's this ray of sunshine in my life. She's in kindergarten and she sings and dances all the time. That's one of her primary connecting ways with God. And she was recently singing and dancing, and I was studying the Scriptures, and I said, "Sweetheart, you remind me of Mary." I wonder if Mary wasn't a little girl like that-always singing and dancing and worshipping and enjoying God. Celebrating God, happy in God.

I wonder if Mary wasn't a girl like that. Because when we see her, she is most assuredly a happy worshiper. And what you're going to hear is her language of worship. Now worship is all of life, but it includes singing. And she begins by saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord." What she's saying here is, "Down deep, in my new heart that God has given me, as his daughter, I want to magnify the Lord." We're image-bearers of God, we are to reflect, mirror, the love, the truth, the compassion, the justice, the selflessness, the humility of God. That God is a certain way and, connected to him, we are to reflect something of him to the earth. What she's saying is, "In my soul, even though my life is uncertain-my health, my reputation, my marriage, my family, my future, I'm poor, I'm pregnant-I just want God to be honored. I want God to be glorified. I want others to see, even in my life, that God is good. And he's good to me."

And so this is the deepest desire of a truly Christian person, where the Holy Spirit resides in the deepest part of their new nature. If you're really a Christian, that's what you want. You may be worried about certain things, but you want to be worshipping through everything. So she says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit"-right, she is worshipping God with her spirit. It is her spirit and the Holy Spirit intersecting to honor Jesus, the son to be born in her womb, that God the Father might get praise.

SEVENTEEN ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

And she goes forward listing, if you can believe this, in her song at least 17 attributes of God. At least 17 attributes of God in one song. She is possibly, likely illiterate. In that day, it would have been very unusual for a woman of her age and socioeconomic status to be formally educated in that rural town. She may be literate; it is more likely that she heard the Scriptures read to her in synagogue on Sabbath, she committed them to memory and she is choosing to live her life top-down: "Who is God? I'm going to live in light of that."

And so what you'll hear are 17 attributes of God. Furthermore, you'll hear echoes of Hannah's song in the Old Testament. And she is in a line of Miriam, Hannah, Deborah, women who worship. You're going to hear echoes as well of 1 and 2 Samuel, Deuteronomy, Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. This is a theological teenage worshiper. She's amazing. She knows who God is and she trusts the Scriptures. And when she could be worrying, she starts worshipping.

1. GOD IS LORD

She says 17 things about God. Number one, she says that God is the Lord. "My soul magnifies the Lord." What that means is that her God, he's in charge. He is above all, all other kings, all other kingdoms. Satan, demons, religions. Her God, our God, Yahweh, he's above everyone and everything. There's no one beyond him. This is of great comfort for her. As she looks at her life and her future-"What will happen with my husband and my reputation, and my family, and how will I feed this child, and how will I raise God?"-what she says is, "You know what, the Lord's in charge. The Lord's in charge. I trust him." So this is where theology becomes biography that it might culminate in doxology. Who God is changes who we are, and it culminates in how we live. See, it's easy to say, "Jesus Christ is Lord" when things are going great. When things are going difficult, or your future is uncertain as hers is, all of a sudden, you're like, "I don't know, worry is Lord, finances are Lord, reputation is Lord, well being is Lord, comfort is Lord." She says, "No, my God is Lord. Whatever he has, that's what I receive."

2. GOD IS SAVIOR

Number two, she says that her God is Savior. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Some would tell you that Mary was sinless; she wasn't. She in fact notes that she herself needs a Savior. We're all sinners. Like Mary, we all need a Savior. And Savior means rescuer, deliverer, hero. How many of you watch a movie and it's all dark, and the hero shows up and you're like, yes. Right? Scripture is God's story of human history, and his involvement in it on a rescue mission as the hero. He's the Savior. And ultimately, her Savior will be her son. That Jesus will be born. That he will live without sin. That he will die for her sin. That he will rise for her salvation. That her son will be her Savior.

3. GOD IS OMNISCIENT

Number three. She says that God is what we'll call omniscient, which means all knowing. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." What she says is, "My God knows everything. My God knows that I'm young. My God knows that I'm poor. My God knows that I'm pregnant. My God knows that I don't have a lot of resources at my disposal. My God

knows that my reputation is going to be destroyed. My God knows that my life is going to be difficult and complicated. My God knows.”

Friends, this is where your view of God is so incredibly important. So incredibly important. Some say, “Oh all religions teach basically the same thing.” No they don’t. No they don’t. See, pantheism, panentheism, vague spirituality-God’s not a person, he’s a force; he doesn’t pay attention to you, it’s just an energy that endows you. See, our God is personal. He’s alive. He’s living. He’s personal. He thinks, he feels, he speaks, he loves, he knows. God knows every hair on your head, the Bible says. God knows every longing of your heart. He knows every day of your life. God knows it all. And do you know what, he pays attention. There are a lot of people, but God knows everyone by name. And he pays attention to the exact circumstances of their life. And he’s a Father who is attentive in detail to all of his sons and daughters. That’s what she says.

Do you know what, no one pays attention to Mary. No one’s paying attention to Mary. She’s in Nazareth, not Jerusalem. She’s single, not married. She’s young, not old. She’s poor, not rich. What she says is, “Nonetheless, God knows me, and God loves me, and God pays attention to my life, and God knows my needs.” Do you believe that? If you do, you’ll sleep differently. Isn’t it amazing that she starts her song saying, “God is my Lord and he’s my Savior”? She doesn’t start with all of her complaints toward God. “God, you know, the dress isn’t going to fit. The boyfriend’s kind of freaking out. My parents are wondering how to explain this to my grandmother. It’s going to be really awkward at synagogue with a baby and no husband quite yet. Oh and by the way, I’m in junior high, and this seems like a lot for me.” What she says is, “He’s the Lord, whatever he wants, he’s my Savior. He’ll get me through.”

What are you absolutely distressed about right now? Have you worshiped about it? You’re probably worried about it. But have you worshiped about it? Some say, “I don’t feel like worshiping.” Here’s how you get yourself into worship-I’ll let you know a little secret-you worship your way into worship. You sing until you feel it. You don’t sing because you feel it. You sing until you feel it. She worships. Our God is the Lord. He’s the Savior. He’s in charge, he knows us, he loves us.

4. GOD IS RESPECTFUL

Number four. He’s not only Lord, Savior, omniscient, he’s respectful. This is amazing. “From now on all generations will call me blessed.” It doesn’t start that way does it? For the next thirty years, roughly, she’s going to be called a whore and a tramp and an adulteress. But she has the long view of things. She doesn’t hold up her reputation as an idol. She lets it go. She says, “You know what, I will be recognized as a blessed woman, I just need to patiently wait.” See, God here is giving her her dignity. This is amazing about God. See, most religions, the gods or goddesses, they strip you of dignity. They abuse, they take, they demand. Our God gives. And he gives dignity, gives dignity. Some of you are here, you have been beaten, you have been molested, you’ve been abused, you’ve been cheated on, you’ve been abandoned, you’ve been betrayed. Dignity has been taken from you. The God of the Bible, he’s a respectful God, he gives dignity back. So much so that he calls us sons and daughters. He says we’re adopted into the divine family called the church. Great dignity for the children of God. Our God is respectful.

5. GOD IS MIGHTY

Number five. He’s mighty. When she says, “he who is mighty,” do you believe that God is powerful? This doesn’t mean that everything goes perfect and it’s always easy and you’ll be a winner every single time, so just think happy thoughts. But it does mean that no one and no thing can thwart God. Satan, demons, sin, circumstance can’t ultimately thwart God. He is powerful. He is mighty. He is the one who can do great things. Again, if you believe that, you’ll stop worrying and start worshipping.

6. GOD IS PERSONAL

Number six. He’s personal. I love this. He “has done great things for,” whom? What’s the word? “Me.” Me. Me. Is that true? Some of you who struggle with prayer, struggle with worship, struggle with celebrating who God is and what he’s done, let me give you a secret that has benefitted me personally greatly: journaling. I have a file on my laptop and I journal every week. One of things that I do every week, the first question-it’s a list of questions-the first section is, what are the evidences of God’s grace that I have recently seen? And I write them down. I write them down. Where have I seen evidences of God’s grace? And I’ll tell you what happens as I record them-and I pray, “Holy Spirit, please remind me of the evidences of your grace in my life,” as I record them-you know what my heart starts wanting to do? Sing. With gratitude. “Oh, that’s right God, you did this, and you did this, and you did this, and you did this.” And the longer I do it, the longer the list becomes of ways that he has done great things for me.

If you’re struggling right now with despair and discouragement, maybe even depression, let me submit to you one thing that would be very helpful: you keeping a journal, typing or writing, evidences of God’s grace. So that you, like Mary, could say, “He has done good things for me.” What has he forgiven you of? What is he teaching you? How is he changing you? Who has he put in front of you? What circumstances has he saved you from? What opportunities is he calling you to? Your whole life would change if you were one who was seeking, and recording, the evidences of God’s grace so that you could say, “He’s done great things for me.” He’s personal.

7. GOD IS HOLY

Number seven. He is holy. She says, “holy is his name.” God is not good and evil. He’s good. He’s good. He doesn’t do evil, he only does good.

IS GOD PUNISHING ME?

One of the saddest things I’ve experienced recently in praying for people-I keep getting this question so I feel compelled to answer it publicly. A lot of people coming up with their lives in very difficult circumstances, asking, “Is God punishing me? Is God punishing me?” I’ve had so many women I’ve prayed for recently, struggling with infertility, they’ve had abortions in their past, “Is God punishing me?” No. Because that would be unholy. If you’re

a Christian, that means all your sin was placed on Jesus, he suffered and died in your place, for your sins on the cross. For the Father to punish the Son and punish you, that would be unholy. Because that would be unjust.

Now, when we sin, there are consequences. If you eat too much, drink too much, and spend too much, you'll be unhealthy and broke. You reap what you sow. But that's not God punishing you, that's just consequence of folly. But no, God doesn't punish you. God loves you. He does great things for you. Holy, all together good, that's who he is.

See, Satan would whisper in your ear, when you're suffering, struggling, sinning, and he would tell you, "God is hurting you." And he's a liar. God does great things. "Holy"-not unholy-"holy is his name." See, what Satan wants you to do, he wants you to run from God rather than to him. He wants you to be worrying rather than worshipping. Mary is again in this season. Does she have anything to worry about? Whatever you and I have to worry about, she probably has more. The fact that she has to birth and raise God, I can't imagine that pressure. How many of you have held a child, your child, and just the thought of, "I need to feed them, care for them, keep them healthy, love them and raise," that was an overwhelming sense of responsibility. And, this is God. That's a whole other level. [Laughter] Worshipping is the answer for worrying.

REPLACE COVETING WITH WORSHIPPING

Number two, worshipping is the answer for coveting. And so what I want you to learn from Mary is to replace coveting with worshipping. Now coveting is this: we look at someone else's life, and the evidences of God's grace in their life, and God's provision for them, and God's caring for them, and we get jealous. It's actually one of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not covet." Well, what do you do if you don't want to continue coveting? Well, you start worshipping. And see the truth is, we live in a world that exists to make you a coveter. We call that marketing and advertising. All it exists for is coveting. See their car, don't you wish you had that car? See their house, don't you wish you had that house? Oh, look at them, they're skinny, don't you wish you were skinny? Oh look, their clothes are nice, don't you wish you had their clothes? Oh, they're healthy, don't you wish you were healthy? Look, they're married, don't you wish you were married? Oh, they're divorced, don't you wish you were divorced? Right? Coveting. [Laughter] Coveting. And all of life is to get you to covet, to be dissatisfied, to look at someone else's life and say, "Hey, how come that's not my script? Why don't I get to read those lines?"

And what Mary does, she celebrates the evidences of God's grace in her life, and then she looks out at the evidences of God's grace in other people's lives, and rather than coveting, she's worshipping. See, what can happen is, worship becomes this narcissistic, individualistic, absolutely selfish activity. "As long as God does something good for me, then I'll sing to him." Well, we worship God, number one, because of who he is. Number two, because of what he does in our life. Number three, because of what he does in other people's lives. We worship God for all of it. And so maybe right now is not the season where God is doing something for you, he's doing that for someone else. So rather than coveting, you start worshipping and you say, "Thank you, God. That I'm sick, but they're healthy. That I'm struggling, but they're growing. That I'm unemployed, but they found a job."

See, this is why it is so important to be part of the church family and community. If all you do is worship God because of his grace in your life, you're going to be missing out on a lot of opportunities to really experience deep and true joy. When you get connected, you get to see people become Christians, and sin forgiven, and lives changed. You have so much to celebrate. So much to be glad for. I'll be honest with you and tell you that one of the greatest joys of being a pastor is seeing the evidences of God's grace in other people's lives. It fills me with joy and it causes me to want to cry out to God in gladness because he's so good to so many.

Now again, Mary could look at other people's lives and say, "They're rich, I'm poor. Their life is perfect and mine is complicated. I had a script and God rewrote it." She doesn't. She sings. She sings. She says, "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."

Previously she said, "He's been good to me." You're going to hear this now: "He's been good to them. I worship him for who he is. I worship him for his grace in my life. I worship him for his grace in their life." And she calls out additional attributes of God.

8. GOD IS MERCIFUL

Number eight. God is merciful. His mercy, she says, extends from generation to generation. You hook these two concepts together. God is merciful. That means he withholds from us justice that we deserve as sinners. He replaces it with grace, giving us good things we don't deserve. God is merciful. Do you know how merciful God has been with me? I was thinking about it, that God would put up with me. I'm having a hard time putting up with me. And I'm not holy like God is holy and perfect like God is perfect. And God is merciful with me, like he's merciful with you and with us. Not only that, he's merciful from generation to generation. You know what that means? God's going to be merciful with my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren. You know what, when I'm dead and gone for hundreds of years, there'll still be mercy for people with my last name. That's amazing. That God would keep being merciful. How many of you, you're just done being merciful to certain people? You're absolutely sick of them. God isn't. In fact, he's going to be merciful to them their whole life, and then he's going to be merciful to their kids and their grandkids, and their great-grandkids. See, most of us, we can't endure a lifetime with certain people. God's good for a thousand generations. Merciful. She says, "That's amazing." That's amazing. So she worships God for being merciful.

9. GOD IS WORTHY

Number nine. She says that God is worthy for those who fear him. What she's saying here is, reverence, awe, respect, submission, obedience-God deserves that. Who else are you going to trust? What else will you rejoice in? Who else is going to be the center of your life, the source of your identity,

the igniting of your passion? Where's it going to come from? God is worthy to be revered, to be respected, to be praised, to be honored, to be loved. See, we become like that which we worship. You need to know that. If you worship God, who is merciful and compassionate and loving and kind and generous, you become more like him. You put anyone or anything else in that god-like position of centrality, preeminence, and prominence, you become like that which you worship, and it gets worse every day. And everyone that is connected to you suffers. She says, "You know what, God is the one to be feared, revered."

10. GOD IS POWERFUL

Number ten. She says God is powerful. She uses this analogy: "He has shown strength with his arm." He's powerful. It's not that God will do everything we want him to do, but God can do whatever he wants. The Psalmist says that God sits in heaven and does whatever pleases him. It's amazing to me; I have seen people who say, "Yeah, I'm an alcoholic, but you know God's not bigger than alcohol. I'm a drug addict, but God's not bigger than drugs. I'm, you know, I'm dating a total loser, but God's not bigger than this relationship. He couldn't, you know, deliver me and give me joy apart from this person that I'm idolizing." Really? Really? God's not bigger? Stronger? More capable, and competent, and powerful? It's almost as if people just yield, they just give in and give themselves permission to live lives of folly. When instead, they need to know, their God, to use this metaphor-God is not a physical being, he's a spirit-he uses his arm. He's got a strong arm. You think of a soldier. You think of a warrior. You think of a fighter. You think of someone reaching down into history and grabbing people and saving them, and defending them, and protecting them, and securing them, and embracing them, and cherishing them. What she says is, "My God is powerful."

11. GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Number 11. He is sovereign. This is beautiful: "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones." Those are big words from a teenage girl in a rural town. She had no human rights. She had no civil rights. It is likely that she would not have been permitted to buy property, testify in court. On the scale of value, as a young, unmarried, teenage woman, she was right above cattle and livestock. Who was under the throne of Caesar. What she says is, "Caesar's not Lord, God is. And Caesar sits on a cute little throne. But above that, there's a much bigger throne. And my king rules over all kings, and his kingdom is over all kingdoms. And he's the sovereign one. And he gives me dignity. And he gives me love. And he gives me forgiveness. And he gives me mercy. And he's done great things for me. And he even knows the thoughts of people's hearts. And if they're proud, he takes them down. And if they're seated on thrones, ruling and reigning as bullies and thugs and abusers like some husbands and fathers and kings are, God strikes them down with the strength of his hand. And he defends the widow and the weak and poor and the oppressed. And young women like me, we have a real king." Those are big words from a teenage girl.

Mary's confidence is not in Mary. Mary's confidence is in Mary's God.

God is going to establish a kingdom. He inaugurated it at the resurrection of Jesus, he is forwarding it through the preaching of the gospel and the expansion of the church, and he will culminate it at the second coming of Jesus. And you know what will happen? There will be just one throne. And Jesus will sit on it. And all the dictators, and all the rulers, and all those who are high and mighty and proud, whether it's a king's throne, or a CEO's throne, or a politician's throne, everyone else will be on their knees before the throne. And Jesus will be the one on the throne. And Mary says, "I'm very patient. I look forward to that day when I meet the real king." Because why?

12. GOD IS GRACIOUS

Her next point, number 12, is that her God is gracious. He has "exalted those of humble estate." What she's talking about here is those who have been humiliated. Before her is a life of humiliation. Have you been humiliated? Parents say horrible things to you? Your father walk out on you? You been cheated on? You been lied to? You been betrayed? You had people say things behind your back, true or untrue, that are devastating or demoralizing and denigrating? Been humiliated? You been beaten? You been molested? You been raped? You been abused? Been cheated on? Been lied about? Have you been humiliated? What she says is, "My God is gracious. He takes those of us who have been destroyed and he gives us dignity. He takes those of us, in the world's eyes, we have little if any meaning of value or purpose, and he bestows on us dignity and grace." It's a big part of what we do at Mars Hill. You can be in prayer. Pastor Mike's working on the Redemption Group book. Justin and Lindsey Holcomb, new to our team, have run rape crisis clinics, and help abuse victims around the world.

Disgrace means someone without grace. Do you know what God does to those who are disgraced? He gives grace. I feel it's a big part of what we're doing as a church. And depending upon whose statistics you read, one in four, one in five, one in three women is an abuse victim; one in four, one in five men is an abuse victim. Humiliated. We want Mars Hill to be a church where there is grace for the disgraced. Where they would know that God exalts those who have been humiliated. That he actually uses their life and the story of God's redemption in their life as hope to others who have been humiliated. It's wonderful, this God. See, Mary doesn't know what will happen, but she does know who God is. It changes everything.

13. GOD IS GENEROUS

She goes on to say, number 13, that her God is generous. Don't you love this? "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." Have you ever been hungry? See, for most Americans, it's gluttony that's the real issue. Right? We're obese because we eat and our God is our stomach, to use Paul's language. Hungry means we went ten or fifteen minutes longer than we wanted to before our next meal. In that day, as in some people's lives today, there was actual hunger. Have you been hungry? Mary was poor. She knew what it was like to have hunger. You're living in a rural area. She's in a farming community. If the crops don't grow, you don't eat.

I can still remember when I was a little boy, my dad was working-class poor. He was a construction worker. My dad worked very, very hard until he snapped his back hanging drywall. And then he went to college, and now he's a building inspector, and goes to Mars Hill. My dad is one of the hardest-

working men I've ever known. My dad worked incredibly hard. But there were seasons when there just wasn't any work. In the construction industry, as the economy ebbs and flows, or as weather hits, sometimes construction grinds to a halt. I can still remember, as a little boy, my dad had a 1950-something Chevy pickup truck. It was my favorite truck, I loved it. I always wore steel-toed boots like my dad, and a white t-shirt and jeans, like my dad. I had my own little hardhat, my own little thermos, my own little lunch box, my own little tool belt, and I would hang out with my dad. I would build stuff. And I loved riding in the truck with my dad. And then one day my dad sold his truck. I remember as a little boy crying and crying and crying. I was maybe three or four. Because the truck was driving away and somebody else had it. And I asked my dad, "Why did you give away our truck?" My dad said, "I didn't give away the truck. I sold the truck." "Daddy, why would you sell the truck?" "Son, we don't have any money. We can't pay the rent. We can't afford food. It's winter and they're going to turn off our heat. We can't pay our bills." So my dad sold his truck.

I remember sitting around the table as a family. I was the oldest of five. I remember being the only child, and then my sister was born. I remember sitting at the dinner table and I would be eating and my parents wouldn't be eating. Usually it was something simple like macaroni and cheese. And I remember asking, "Well, how come you guys aren't eating?" and they said, "There's no food. You eat." My dad slept on stacks of sheet rock at job sites and would send the money home to me and my mom. I can still remember as a little boy taking bottles to the store with my mom to trade in for change so that she could buy milk so that I could have it to drink, because we didn't have anything. I remember eating food from the food bank as a kid. Not because my dad was lazy, but because he was working-class poor. Like Mary's husband Joseph-in God's providence, my dad's name is Joseph-was a hard-working, blue-collar guy; you think a guy with calluses on his hands and a tool belt and he's sweating, working hard at a laborer's job to feed his family.

What she says is, "he has filled the hungry with good things." Hers is a God who gives, doesn't take, he's very generous. One of the things that we love at Mars Hill is the generosity of God. I mean, he gave us himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. But James, Jesus' brother, says every good and perfect gift comes from God. Friends, one of the ways that God feeds the hungry is through his people, the church. At Mars Hill, we like to do this in a more quiet way. What the world doesn't need is more people doing things for self-glory so that they can write a big check and everybody would cheer them. Because it's about glorifying God, not me, or you, or us.

But what this looks like is us individually making decisions to be good stewards of the wealth that God has entrusted to us, because the truth is, if you look globally, a good percentage of us would be counted among the rich. Practically, this means if someone is standing around with a sign asking for money, if you do not know them but want to help them and people like them, you give your service and money to a credible agency that loves Jesus and will serve them. Otherwise, you may simply be funding a drug or alcohol addiction. So, you give it to credible, reputable organizations that love people, share Jesus with them, feed them, house them. You give it to places where they help to feed the hungry. You go there and feed the hungry. Serve.

For us this looks like Micro-Missions, where we have a couple hundred thousand dollars that we give so that Community Groups could find places in their neighborhood to serve people and organizations. It means we give 10 percent of our money to church planters-people who are starting churches and don't have a salary coming in for the first few years; usually are married with kids, just starting their family; fat broke, trying to serve needy people. It means that, with the holidays forthcoming, we're going to bring before you projects and partners and each campus is going to pick a partner, an organization that really does help fill the hungry with good things-battered women, and single moms, and street kids, and those who are poor. And each campus will be partnering, saying, "We want to be generous." Why? So we can get glory? No, because God is generous and what it means to be a worshiper is to reflect the generosity of God. Not so we get glory, but so that God gets glory. And people wonder, "Why is there generosity? Ah, his name is Jesus." He's the most generous of all. He gave his life that we might have life. And everything we have belongs to him. And we want to steward it in such a way that honors him and helps others.

What she says is that her God is a generous God. "The rich he has sent away empty." The rich are meaning the greedy. Those who use people and love money, it's not that they love people and use money. Everything for them is about more profit, not more gospel. That money has become their God. They worship money, their car, their possessions, their status, their health. And let me say this, it's not a sin to make money. Two things, it depends on how you get it, and it depends on what you do with it. If you work hard and smart, and God makes you rich and you're generous, praise God. If you're greedy and stingy, you're going away, particularly from this life, empty. You're going to stand before God and give an account. Because you either worship your wealth or you worship with your wealth. Big words from a junior high girl.

14. GOD IS JUST

That's her fourteenth point, that God is just. See, he doesn't just let people steal. He ultimately takes it away from them, redistributes, and ultimately in his kingdom, the hungry will be fed. The poor will be housed. The needy will be cared for. The marginalized will be protected. And that kingdom ethic is supposed to live among God's people, particularly beginning with us men, to be generous providers, defending women and children, the weak, the oppressed, the widowed, the marginalized, the orphaned, to be generous. It includes all of us, but it begins with the men. Mary says, "I really love that God." Herself being poor, single mother, in a small town. She's really glad that God knows her, loves her, will take care of her. Doesn't mean that everything will be easy. It doesn't mean that she will never be hungry. But when she is, that hers is a God that likes to give good things. Good things.

I just feel compelled in the Spirit to tell you this as well. As you're generous toward people-please be generous toward people, toward co-workers, family, friends, neighbors, those in need-would you please do this, would you give good things? So often times it's all the junk we don't want. It's the stuff we don't need. Good things. Good things. If there's a kid in your neighborhood that's going to school with no coat on, buy him a good coat. If there's a single mom in your neighborhood who can't afford groceries, buy good groceries. Give good things. Give good things. Why? God gives good things. God's a good God. God gives good things. We want to give good things. That's what Mary says. It bestows dignity on people. It bestows value on people. It shows people that they really are cared for. When they ask why, the answer is, God. God's a good God.

H2. REPLACE ANXIETY WITH HISTORY

This is all in a song. This is a young woman singing out of her heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit. She closes with her final words, her great song, and I would encourage you, in light of them, to replace anxiety with history. "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." And Mary remained with her," that is Elizabeth, "about three months and returned to her home."

15. GOD IS HUMBLE

She says three more things about God. Number 15. He's humble. He helps. He helps, God helps. Some of us, we feel like we need to come to God asking him, "God, what do you want me to do?" The truth is he doesn't need us. We need him. Our God's a giver, not a taker. He's humble. He's willing to get involved in your life and your mess and your stuff and your needs and help you, and help us. And help us to help one another. See, she looks at her life, she has two options. Anxiety: What will happen? History: What has God done? In moments of crisis and doubt, if you lean on anxiety you'll start terrifying yourself about the future. "What if Joseph leaves? What if my parents reject me? What if they strip me and beat me in the public square? What if I'm a single mother? What if I can't afford to feed this baby? What if we have complications in the pregnancy? What if?" Instead, she relies on history. She says, "I heard about this guy named Abraham. He was old, his wife was barren, they couldn't have a kid. God gave them Isaac. Then came the nation of Israel, the culmination is my son, the Savior of the world. I think he's good for this. He's been working on this for thousands of years." And sometimes it's very easy to read Scripture, or biography, or meet people, and say, "Yeah, God's been very good to you, but I freak out." What? It's the same God. He's good to them. He's good to you. He's faithful to them. He's faithful to you. Replace anxiety-what?-with history. Trust that he's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And it doesn't mean that everything's fixed, but you keep your head on straight. And you'll be able to worship your way through it. And find a way to glorify God so that you might have joy and reason to sing. Read Scripture, read church history, read biography. Get to know people and hear the story of God's work in their life, so you can replace anxiety with history. You know what, if God has been good, he will be good, because he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever.

16. GOD IS FAITHFUL

Number 16. She says he's faithful. He is. "He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." What she's saying is this: he's totally faithful. If he says he's one way, he's going to be that way. If he says he does certain things, he does those things. He is a faithful God.

17. GOD IS ETERNAL

And number 17. He is eternal. Some of you would even ask, "Okay, but when does the goodness of this God expire?" She says-this goes on for how long? "Forever." Our God is good forever. Our God is what? Lord, Savior, all knowing, respectful, mighty, personal, holy, merciful, worthy, powerful, sovereign, gracious, generous, just, humble and faithful forever. Forever. Mary says, "That's my God."

And what does she do? What does she do? She sings. She sings. Because song is a means of enjoying and honoring and recognizing and proclaiming God. That human beings were made to sing. Genesis, the first recorded words we have of Adam before sin enters the world, he sings about his wife and his marriage in the presence of God. It's worship. Worship is more than singing, but it most assuredly includes singing. Revelation says that in the end, we'll sing new songs.

OUR GOD SINGS

Here's why we sing. Our God sings. Do you know that? Do you know that God sings? Zephaniah 3:17 says that in that day-the day that Jesus comes back, the day that all the dictators, bullies, thugs, abusive husbands, violent boyfriends, those who do evil are all taken off their throne-it says in that day God himself will delight over you with song. Can you imagine what it's going to be like when God sings over his people? And then his people will sing back to him. Our God is a very good God. Our God is a very happy God in spite of all the sin, injustice, tyranny, oppression, and evil on the earth. All the sickness and the sadness and the sorrow and the strife and the sin. Because our God is working a plan. Because he is the Lord and he is the Savior. And he's working on forever.

Luke 15:10 says that there is rejoicing in the presence of God when a sinner repents. Many have said, "So if you repent then the angels rejoice." That's not what it says. It says there's rejoicing in the presence of the angels. Who's in the presence of the angels? God. God rejoices when we repent. God is happy when we repent. God sings when we repent. Some of you will do that today to become a Christian. Give your sin to God. Jesus died as your Savior. He forgives. He cleanses. He heals. He's merciful, good, compassionate, just, generous, and kind. He's holy and altogether good. And he'll forgive you and embrace you and love you. Some of you will do that today, this gift of repentance as a Christian.

And I think this is one of the problems we've had at Mars Hill. We tend to come in, hear how sinful we are, and we don't sing very much. Because we feel we're horrible. And we are. But he's good. And if we don't sing, it's because we're not yet thinking about him, we're still thinking about us. We're thinking about our sin, not our Savior. We need to think about our sin, then our Savior. And if there is rejoicing by God when we confess our sin and trust in Jesus, there should be rejoicing with us. If God's happy, we should be happy. If God's singing, we should be singing. If God's celebrating, we should be celebrating. And so we move from sin to Savior. We move from sin to song.

JESUS AS WARRIOR KING

Now I'll close with two things. For you guys this is probably the hardest. I don't know about you, this was one of the hardest things when I became a Christian. I went to church as a new Christian for the first time. Everybody was singing and raising their hands. I had never seen this. Freaked me out,

more than a little bit. Me and my buddies, playing baseball, we never just like burst into song. [Laughter] Just never did. "Oh hey!" Doing like, you know, it never happened. [Laughter]

Never. My dad, my brothers, and I, out working on the car, trying to drop a transmission. "Song time. I'll lead. You guys do the chorus. Shine, shine, shine." Never happened. In my whole life. Never seen it, never heard it. Guys doing this [hands raised] only when you committed a crime and got caught. [Laughter]

So I go into church and all the guys are singing and happy and hands up. I'm thinking, "Jesus, are you sure? Isn't there another option?" [Laughter] "Is there a different team?" And part of it is this, that the majority of people who attend church are women. We love women, we're glad they're here, glad they love Jesus. But a lot of the songs then and a lot of the church services are built for the ladies, which is great, praise God. But the men feel a little weird. And a lot of times it is, "The church is the bride, Jesus is our Groom. Love him. Cry. Sing the prom songs. Be happy in him." But if you're a guy, you're going, "Bride? [Laughter] Like, there's a long list of reasons I don't feel like singing, contemplating myself in a white dress as the Beloved." [Laughter] Right? And so when it speaks of the bride as the church, in Scripture, it's always collectively. So, we're to respond to Jesus like a wife does to a husband, with respect and such. And so that makes sense.

So for you ladies, feel free, right. From your heart, go for it. Now for the guys, let me give you the way this has really helped me. I love that language of his arm has reached down. He takes bullies and thugs and dictators off their throne. He defends the widow and the homeless and the oppressed and the weak. He looks after children. He takes women like Mary, who in that culture if Joseph abandoned her, her only means of income probably would have been prostitution. She says, "I'll worship him because he'll feed me. And he loves me and he knows me and he'll care for me." I love that picture.

So let me present to you, Jesus as warrior king. Warrior-the one who defeats Satan, sin, death, hell. He's against all of the abusers and the dictators and the evildoers and the thieves. And he's a king. He's adopting those who have been humiliated as his sons and daughters. He's bestowing on them dignity, value, and worth. He's taking away their sin. He's wiping every tear from their eyes. And he is guaranteeing a kingdom where there'll be one throne and he'll sit on it and we'll all be blessed. And he'll fill the hungry with good things, and the blind will see, and the lame will run, and those who weep will be filled with joy forever.

And men, when we sing, we sing to Jesus. We sing to that Jesus. We sing to that Jesus in triumph, in victory. We sing to him because we want to become, by grace through the Holy Spirit, like him. We want to love women. We want to serve children. We want to be generous. We want to fight for justice. And so we worship to become like him, to be on mission with him. And so men, don't leave, sing. Raise your hands. Celebrate. If you'll do it at a sporting event, when someone does something amazing and you leap out of your seat and you raise your voice, and you raise your hands-the tomb is empty. Raise your voice. Raise your hands.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, I pray for us as a people that we would grow in worship throughout all of life, with things like generosity and justice, but also in our corporate gatherings as we sing. May we sing out of our heart like Mary did. May we sing by the power of the Holy Spirit like Mary did. May we sing because Jesus is our Savior. May we sing because it is what we do as we prepare for the kingdom. May we sing until we hear you sing over us Lord God. I pray for the ladies that they would feel free to sing. I pray for the brothers that they would feel free to sing. I pray that those who oftentimes at this point leave would sing. That those who at this point keep their hands in their pockets would raise them. Because God you are worthy and you are good and you are God, and we want to, by grace, become like you as we worship you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.