

SAYING YES TO GOD

LUKE 1:26-38

Many of us desire to be blessed by God under the false belief that saying yes to God means life will be filled with pleasure.

I. GOD DOES NOT RESPECT HUMAN DISTINCTIONS (VS 26-30)

GOD SENT JESUS TO GATHER FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, CULTURE, STATUS, GENDER, OR AGE. GOD CAME FOR ALL AND WELCOMES ALL WHO RESPOND TO HIS CALL.

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- A. SUBMISSION
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Saying Yes To God

Luke 1:26-38

Last week we talked about the announcement of John the Baptist's birth. God sent the angel Gabriel to the temple in Jerusalem to meet an elderly priest who was in the holy place of the temple alone burning incense as he offered up the prayers on behalf of the Jewish nation. This morning we will see God announce the birth of Jesus in a similar way. As we will see, there are a lot of similarities in the two announcements and some critical differences.

Let me just name a few. The angel Gabriel is the messenger in both cases. Both people are alone when he approaches. Both Zechariah and Mary are startled at the angel's appearance. The angel tells them both not to be afraid and that they have both found favor with God. In both cases the angel announces a birth that seems highly impossible. Zechariah and Elizabeth are old and past the childbearing age. Mary is so young she has not even had sex.

Some of the differences are these. John's ministry is dedicated to prepare the way for Jesus. Jesus' ministry will far surpass John's ministry in power and scope. Zechariah was a priest and had been chosen to perform an important public service. Mary was a young girl who was a nobody. Zechariah was an old man. Mary was a young girl.

Most importantly though, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary all proved to be extremely godly people who desired to follow God and do His will. More importantly, they were willing to let God accomplish His will in their lives.

One misconception that we need to address in order to understand the announcements is this. We have come to believe in angels as cute, pudgy babies who play harps and sing beautiful little blessings. The Bible portrays angels as bigger than life warriors who scare the daylights out of people when they manifest themselves for who they really are. Please take time to go back and read your Bibles to see how frightening they are. Secondly, when an angel or God approaches people in the Bible with a blessing such as, "God has found favor with you," or "You have been chosen and commissioned by God," it usually means life as you know it is over. I cringe when I hear people talk about angels and demons as if they are on the same playing field as we are. I also cringe when I hear talk about God speaking to them. My feeling is that if God were really speaking to them, they would be a little more reverent about the whole experience. Actually, Zechariah's response is a little more towards the norm than Mary's. When you consider what kind of suffering God was calling her to, her response is heroic, courageous, and holy. Oh that our responses to God could be the same. When God approaches His special children, his favorite children, they are in for a bad day according to our standards.

Let me give you some examples of how you know you are about to have a bad day:

1. You know it's going to be a bad day when you arrive at work and there are TV reporters waiting outside your office.
2. You call the suicide prevention hotline, and a recorded message puts you on hold.

3. You turn on the news and they're showing emergency routes out of your neighborhood.
4. Your twin brother forgets your birthday.
5. Your car horn goes off accidentally and remains so as you follow Motorcycle gang.
6. You get into work and your boss tells you not to bother taking off your coat.
7. Your income-tax check bounces.

When God or His angels approached people informing them that God had called them, they could be sure it was going to be a bad day. All the apostle's that Jesus called and chose were martyred except for John. Tradition has it that he was boiled in oil but since he didn't die, he was exiled to the island of Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **MANY OF US DESIRE TO BE BLESSED BY GOD UNDER THE FALSE BELIEF THAT SAYING YES TO GOD MEANS LIFE WILL BE FILLED WITH PLEASURE.** However, I don't see that at all as I read the Bible. In fact, the opposite seems true to me. The closer to God people are, the more they seem to suffer. Let's see how God approaches Mary.

GOD DOES NOT RESPECT HUMAN DISTINCTIONS (VS 26-30)

In verses 26-30 we see that God does not respect human distinctions. In other words, **GOD SENT JESUS TO GATHER FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, CULTURE, STATUS, GENDER, OR AGE. GOD CAME FOR ALL AND WELCOMES ALL WHO RESPOND TO HIS CALL.** This is what is so beautiful about authentic Christianity. It doesn't matter what color you are, what country you come from, what part of the country you come from, what language you speak, how rich or poor you are, male or female, educated or uneducated, well or sick; all are welcome into the family of God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul put it like this:

*"²⁶So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus"
(Galatians 3:26-28 / NLT).*

THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM (26-27)

This theme is going to be emphasized throughout the Gospel of Luke. Last week Luke recorded the event in which God chose and spoke to Zechariah, a very old and respected priest in the Jewish temple in the Jewish capital of Jerusalem. In verses 26-27 we will see the other end of the spectrum. God sent His angel with a message to a town way up in northern Israel to a young unknown teenaged girl named Mary. The first two first phrases are literary keys that demand we consider this passage with last week's passage. In the sixth month refers to Elizabeth's pregnancy. We left off last week with Elizabeth going off into seclusion in order to ponder the miracle God performed in allowing her to get pregnant and the message spoken over her unborn son. And of course the fact that God again sends Gabriel with another announcement of a

miraculous birth. We have already talked about the similarities and differences concerning Gabriel's appearance and his message from God.

I want to simply emphasize a couple of things here. First of all, there was a great contrast between Zechariah who was old and revered and Mary who was young, unknown, and had no real status. In fact, Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph who was from the tribe of Judah. Joseph means "may God add or increase" in Hebrew. Mary means "strong willed or stubborn." We will see that Mary will need a strong will to go through with this calling from God. She is indeed a remarkably strong young girl.

I would like to point out to those of you who are avid Bible readers that this situation may be comparable to the Joseph in the Old Testament. Almost the last third of the book of Genesis is devoted to Joseph. He saves Egypt from famine and also becomes the savior of his family. The story is focused on Joseph, when the real story is kind of buried. Judah is the one in whom the promised Messiah will be born. The Hebrew culture was for the most part male dominated. Mary will be the one who conceives and gives birth to Messiah.

And the last point I want to make here is this. Luke is a physician and not a Jew. He is the only non Jewish author of New Testament books. Luke goes out of his way to demonstrate that Mary was a virgin and that the conception of Jesus in no way involved any human male. As we go on, we will see that there is absolutely no doubt in Luke's mind that Jesus was born of a virgin.

Let me quote from the Hebrew Scriptures:

"¹⁴All right then, the Lord himself will choose the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel—'God is with us'" (Isaiah 7:14 / NLT).

Now the Gospel writer Matthew was a Jew and he did not miss the connection. Here is how he describes the status of Mary:

"¹⁸Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph, her fiancé, being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly.

²⁰As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All of this happened to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³'Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,

and he will be called Immanuel

(meaning, God is with us)'" (Matthew 1:18-23 / NLT).

Now Isaiah's prophecies were made about 700 years before the time of Jesus. Here is the problem. In the context of Isaiah, this prophecy was fulfilled in his time. A young woman conceived and had a child. You see the word for virgin in the Isaiah passage can mean a virgin or simply a young woman. But Matthew wants us to know that the real fulfillment of this passage took place in the birth of Jesus and that Mary was a virgin.

However, Luke does not share this same interest. Luke is concerned as a physician in noting that this is a supernatural birth; that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

AN INCREDIBLE GREETING (28 & 30)

In verses 28 and 30 we again come across an incredible greeting from an angel. During the ministry of Jesus, Luke will record all sorts of people receiving this beautiful touch from God. However, I really want you to get a feel for how this all happens. Mary is sitting a home alone. Perhaps she is cleaning the house, cooking lunch, or just relaxing. Out of nowhere, this incredible, supernatural being appears. The angel says, "Rejoice Oh graced one. You are highly favored by God. God is with you and you have found favor in His eyes. Don't be afraid." That sounds really good, doesn't it? It seems as if this is Mary's lucky day. How could any human ever get so lucky to hear those words?

However, you Bible students may be saying to yourself, "Uh oh. This cannot be good." But some of you of you may be saying, "Why should that be problematic?" It seems as if everyone who is chosen by God in the Old Testament ends up running for their lives, jailed, harassed, tortured, or killed. Listen to how the author of Hebrews describes the fate of Old Testament heroes:

"³⁷Some died by stoning, and some were sawed in half; others were killed with the sword. Some went about in skins of sheep and goats, hungry and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸They were too good for this world. They wandered over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground" (Hebrews 11:37-38 / NLT).

In fact we know John the Baptist will suffer this fate as will Jesus and His disciples. Most people who have a real understanding of God and how He works would understand that from an eternal sense, this is really great news, but from an earthly point of view, this is not going to be pleasant. Once commissioned, the prophets knew their earthly lives were ruined. But they all had the grace to see their eternal rewards. The author of Hebrews continued:

"³⁹All of these people we have mentioned received God's approval because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. ⁴⁰For God had far better things in mind for us that would also benefit them, for they can't receive the prize at the end of the race until we finish the race" (Hebrews 11:39-40 / NLT).

A REALISTIC RESPONSE (29)

You see, when God calls us, we should realize that all of our earthly expectations of success and pleasure are dead. Mary clearly understood this by her realistic response in verse 29. Luke says that she was greatly troubled at the angel's words and wondered what this type of greeting could

possibly mean. Let's keep in mind that Mary is a normal, typical, teenaged girl. And here, standing before her is an angel, bigger than life, and greeting her with these words. God is always looking for people who will love Him and serve Him. You may be thinking that you are not good enough, smart enough, or polished enough. But the fact is this. **GOD SENT JESUS TO GATHER FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, CULTURE, STATUS, GENDER, OR AGE. GOD CAME FOR ALL AND WELCOMES ALL WHO RESPOND TO HIS CALL.**

GOD'S WAYS ARE ABOVE OUR WAYS (VS 31-37)

In verses 31-37, Luke clearly illustrates here from the very beginning of his Gospel that God's ways are above our ways. For us we must make note that **GOD'S CALL WILL ALIENATE US FROM THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.** Again, if we think that following Christ will bring us good health, or riches, or fortune, or anything else, we must put this out of our minds. If we are truly following Christ, we will often find ourselves at odds with the world. I can guarantee that following God is exciting and brings a great deal of joy and peace, but not often worldly pleasure.

GOD'S WAY IS OFTEN DIFFICULT (31)

In verse 31, the message to Mary illustrates that God's way is often difficult. The angel says she will become pregnant and give birth to a son. This cannot be good. She is unmarried. If she gets pregnant, she may be stoned as a prostitute. Certainly her fiancé will not want her. Life is going to be difficult. How will she support herself and her baby? She is just a teenaged girl. This seems a little overwhelming. And besides all of this, the baby's name will be Jesus which means God Jehovah is my salvation. Let me make this point as clearly as I can. We will not be part of the in-crowd if we decide to follow Jesus. We won't be admired by worldly people. We probably will not become rich or powerful if we decide to follow Jesus. If you are single and trying to follow Christ, you may never get married because it is hard to find believers to even date. If you are trying to live out your Christian principles at work, you may not get promoted. You may have to pass on some lucrative deals because you are a Christian. People will look at you as if you were crazy.

GOD'S WAY IS SPIRITUAL (32-33)

The reason it is so hard for us to live in this world is because God's way is spiritual as we are reminded of in verses 32-33. This savior from God will be great and called the Son of the Most High. There is no doubt. God is sending His own Son to save the world and Mary will give birth to this Savior. He is going to be some sort of King over the Jews. His kingdom will be forever. This had to be confusing to Mary. There is no doubt in Luke's mind that this baby Mary is going to conceive is going to be some sort of supernatural man.

GOD'S WAY SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE (34-37)

He will go on to further explain this point in verses 34-37 by demonstrating that God's way seems impossible. It's interesting that Mary doesn't ask any questions about this miraculously

powerful son she is about to give birth. She is focused on the immediate impossible task of her getting pregnant without ever having sex. In other words, she knows basic biology. It takes the egg of a woman being impregnated by the sperm of a male. She says, “How can this be since I am a virgin?”

There are so many times in our lives where we focus on the impossible and miss what God is doing in our lives. The angel answered by telling Mary this will be a supernatural conception. We know that Jesus existed from all eternity. This is not going to be any sort of biological conception using sperm and egg. Jesus is not going to come into being. He is merely going to take on human flesh. Think in terms of how Jesus lives in us. When we open the door to our hearts, Jesus come in and takes up residence in us. In the case of Mary, there was no sexual act performed, natural or supernatural. Jesus simply inhabited the egg of Mary and took up residence in it. This is nothing like the Greek myths where gods have sex with humans and produce offspring.

And the sign the angel gives to Mary is this. She will find that her relative Elizabeth, who was barren and past the child bearing age, is now in her sixth month of pregnancy. God can do anything through us, in us, and for us. Our main problems are fear and unbelief. As Christians, we are to be people of faith not because of our talents or abilities, but because our Father is the God of the impossible. Do you need to experience God’s power in your life? The angel said that nothing is impossible with God. The Apostle Paul put it this way:

“¹⁴When I think of the wisdom and scope of God’s plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. ¹⁶I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. ¹⁷And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love. ¹⁸And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. ¹⁹May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

²⁰Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. ²¹May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen” (Ephesians 3:14-21 / NLT).

GOD’S WAY EXPECTS A YES RESPONSE (VS 38)

Yes, **GOD’S CALL WILL ALIENATE US FROM THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.** However, we need to constantly be looking for God to accomplish seemingly impossible works in our lives because He is the God of the impossible.

What does all this mean for Mary? What does all this mean for us when we come in contact with God’s will for us? Verse 38 says that God’s way expects a yes response on our part. In other words, **GOD IS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO GENUINELY LOVE HIM AND ARE READY TO DO HIS WILL.** We must set aside our selfish desires, our pride, our fears, and our doubts. The only way to be in a relationship with God is to learn submission and obedience.

SUBMISSION

First let's talk about submission. In the Bible submission can take place when a stronger power conquers a weaker power and forces them to submit. In other words, when one nation conquered another, they made them slaves. There is nothing noble about this type of submission. The type of submission that is applauded by the Bible is when out of reverence and love for God, someone willingly places themselves under the authority of another. For example, one day every knee will bow and confess Jesus as Lord. The devil, all his demons, and all who have rejected Christ will one day be forced to bow before Jesus and acknowledge that He is God. However, at this point in time, we have a choice to make. Either we can willingly place ourselves under the Lordship of Jesus, or we can reject Him and live life any way we choose. I have given myself to God in faith. I hope that all of you have as well. Look how Mary responded to the angel. She said, "I am the Lord's slave." She willingly bowed before Jesus as Lord. She was in essence saying to God, "I give up all my personal rights, hopes and dreams. I belong to you."

Let me take a moment to clarify what the Bible means by saving faith. For about the last 40 years or so, the church has separated Jesus as Savior from Jesus as Lord. Here's what I mean. We tend to look at Jesus' Lordship as His being the generic King of the universe. We tend to look at this in the universal sense. However, when view Jesus as Savior, we want to look at Him as our personal Savior. So we somehow have fooled ourselves into thinking that Jesus is our Savior, but not Lord of our personal lives. In other words, we want Jesus to forgive us of our sins and take us to heaven. However, we don't want Him interfering in our personal lives. This is nothing like biblical submission. In the Bible, if Jesus is not our Lord, He is not our Savior. And further, He is not only the Lord generic over the universe, He is Lord over our lives.

OBEDIENCE

So as we bow down before Jesus and address Him as "Your Majesty," we demonstrate the truth of our confession through obedience. Listen to me. This is not a yippy skippy assignment for Mary. When she turned up pregnant, as an unmarried woman, she would become an immediate social outcast. People would look at her as if she were a prostitute. In fact, under Hebrew law, she could be publicly executed. In her mind, when she became pregnant, Joseph would surely dump her and then she would be a single mother. This becoming pregnant before marriage was not a fate young girls sat around dreaming about. In Mary's mind, when she became pregnant, life would be over for her. She had no clue as to what her fate would be. And yet, her response was, "May it be to me as you have said." It's easy to be a Christian when things are going well and we are getting what we want. But Jesus becomes our Lord when we obey Him even when it will cost us everything.

We know that Christians are not supposed to date or marry non Christians. Is Jesus Lord of your love life? We are not supposed to be prejudiced. Is Jesus Lord of your thought life? We are supposed to be honest in all our business dealings. Is Jesus Lord of your business life? We are supposed to be pure in thoughts and actions? Is Jesus Lord of your sex life? We are to submit to the government and pay our taxes. Is Jesus Lord of your tax returns? Mary's answer was, "Yes Lord, Yes." What is our answer to God's call?

It all has to do with love. One day everyone who has ever lived and every being in the spiritual world will have to bow down and confess Jesus as Lord. But at this point in time, **GOD IS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO GENUINELY LOVE HIM AND ARE READY TO DO HIS WILL.**

Mary is an incredible young woman. She is wise, brave, courageous, and holy beyond her teenage years. She is able to respond to God's call with a submissive and obedient spirit. She also has a realistic idea of what this is going to cost her. Let us follow in her footsteps by acknowledging Jesus as our Lord and Savior with eyes wide open. Let us no longer be confused as to what it means for follow God. **MANY OF US DESIRE TO BE BLESSED BY GOD UNDER THE FALSE BELIEF THAT SAYING YES TO GOD MEANS LIFE WILL BE FILLED WITH PLEASURE.**

We have seen God call an old and respected priest. We have seen God call a young unknown girl. Both have responded to God in faith. Keep this in mind. God is no respecter of human titles, positions, or status. God calls people from every race, culture, financial status, gender and walk of life. God is calling each one of us where we are. The question is, "Are we willing to submit to Him as Lord and obey Him where we are?" Listen to what Oswald Chambers said:

"God plants His saints in the most useless places. We say, 'I should be here because I am so useful.' Jesus never estimated His life by the standard of greatest use. God puts His people where they will glorify Him, and we are not capable of judging where that is."

Mary didn't have a clue as to how all this would play out and she only had a hint of the suffering that would be involved. Nevertheless, she said yes to God. My hope is that all of us will say yes to Jesus as both Lord and Savior of our lives.