

# GOD'S WORK IS MAGNIFIED

LUKE 1:46-56

*Jesus Came To Start A Revolution That Would Turn The World Upside Down.*

## **I. God's Work Is Magnified In Individuals (Vs 46-49)**

God Chooses Humble And Holy People To Work In And Through.

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A. God Brings Down Oppressors

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# God's Work Is Magnified

Luke 1:46-56

I think it's important for us not only to look at the words of an author, but also how he or she arranges the material. In this case, Luke is paralleling the births of Jesus and John the Baptist. He started with describing heaven's announcement of the miraculous birth of John to an old priest with a post-menopausal wife. In the next scene, we observed the same sort of experience concerning the announcement of the miraculous birth of Jesus to a young girl who was a virgin. Next on the venue was the prophetic song of Elizabeth, John's mother. This morning we will see the prophetic song of Mary, Jesus' mother. The next section of Luke will describe the birth of John and then the birth of Jesus.

By the way Luke has arranged the material, John and Jesus are not only connected by blood, they are connected in God's salvation plan. The prayer Mary offers up in this passage is referred to as the Magnificat. It comes for the word in verse 46 translated by the NIV as glorifies. It is the Latin translation of the Greek word megaluno.

I think it is important to really study this prayer carefully because we need to understand how revolutionary the Gospel is. It seems to me that we as the church in the West have been mainstreamed into society. During the first 300 years of the Christian church, Christians were persecuted mercilessly. They were at odds with the society in which they lived. However, when the Emperor Constantine not only legalized Christianity, but made it the state religion, that was the beginning of the downfall of the true nature of the church. In our culture, the church has become so political and have become so entrenched in the political system, that we no longer carry the revolutionary message of the Gospel. We have simply become one more political voice, with a political agenda, among many various organizations pushing their own political agendas. We have lost our way in becoming revolutionary in our approach to life.

I would like us to see how anti-cultural the Gospel ought to be. It is perfect that we hear these revolutionary words from the lips of a teenage girl, pregnant with the Messiah. We should be changing our ways of looking at the world based on the truth of the Gospel, not based on our personal or selfish interests. Let me give you an example.

One day, a middle aged couple came to me for some marital counseling. It seems they were experiencing a sort of power struggle. Here is how the wife explained it to me, "It was easy for me to submit myself to my husband when I was younger and thinner ... But then I got older and gained some weight. At this point in our marriage, it's harder for me to submit to him now ... Basically because now I think I can take him."

You see, often times we get involved in the political process because we have a personal financial stake in the outcome of an election or because we have a particular social agenda we want pushed through. Jesus was a revolutionary. He was a radical. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **JESUS CAME TO START A REVOLUTION THAT WOULD TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.** In other words, the world in which we live is fairly similar to the world at the time of Jesus. And yet it appears that the church is very comfortable in our world. How can this be?

# I. GOD'S WORK IS MAGNIFIED IN INDIVIDUALS

In verses 46-49, Mary's song describes how God's work is magnified in individuals. Unlike the world in which we live, GOD CHOOSES HUMBLE AND HOLY PEOPLE TO WORK IN AND THROUGH. In other words, our society chases after the rich, the powerful, and the popular. Even the church has become enamored with exercising political power. We often try to influence elections and flex our political power with money, and we are fully engaged in chasing after the things our culture tells us are important. Segments of society both on the political right and political left have hijacked Christianity and the sad thing is that many, many Christians have bought into their lies. Let's try and correct our views as we examine Mary's starting place. In verses 46-47, she informs us that life is about recognizing God. The God Mary is describing is not the God that society has made up, He is not the pathetic and passive God that people have conjured up in their minds, and He is certainly not the God that the politicians have turned Him into. The God that Mary is describing Here is God of the Bible; both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Look how she starts her song. Let me just take an aside to explain why I call this a song. The entire passage follows the format of Hebrew poetry. We have talked about this before, but it's worth reviewing. Hebrew poetry is not based on rhyme or meter. Hebrew poetry is achieved through parallelism. The Hebrew poet takes two lines and either compares them or contrasts them. While we are here in verses 46 and 47, look how Mary achieves the poetic technique. The first line has three parts; "My soul" is the first component, "glorifies" is the second component, and "Lord" is the third component. Now look at the very next line. "My spirit" matches "My soul" in line one. "Rejoices" matches "glorifies" in line one. And "God my Savior" matches "Lord" in line one. Do you see that? The whole section is composed of these parallels. If you study the passage on your own, please also note the parallelism between the individual strophes as well.

Let's get back to recognizing God in life. Let's start with the names for God in these two verses. I'll define the others as we move along in the passage. Lord can refer to a human teacher or one in authority. The Hebrew word for Lord is Adonai. The Hebrew makes the distinction in whether the word is referring to God or a human by using the plural. This is important because Jesus will claim to be God with this title. The plural, Adonā, always refers to God. The singular can refer to either God or humans. Jesus will use a Hebrew Scripture passage where King David says, "My Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand." Jesus' argument is that since David is King, he would not refer to any human as lord. Therefore, Jesus translates both these uses of Lord in the plural. Jesus' translation of David's statement is this, "My God said to My God, sit at my right hand," meaning that God the Father said to God the Son, sit at my right hand.

Look at the parallel title, God my Savior. Jesus' Hebrew name is Yeshua which means God is my Savior. In other words, Jesus came as the Savior. It is important for us to understand this as first century Jews. Ever since Israel was carried off into captivity by the Babylonians about 600 years before this, they had been ruled by the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and now at this time, the Romans. Although they were oppressed by these countries, the Romans treated the Jews pretty well, as long as they didn't cause any political problems. The Jews were looking for their Promised Messiah to come and save the politically as well as spiritually. They were looking primarily for a military Messiah. In fact for several years before Christ, Zealots would rise up and try and start a political revolution. Rome did not have much tolerance or patience for this type of revolution. These Zealots were crushed mercilessly by the Roman government. I'm thinking she also had this type of Messiah and Savior in mind. Jesus will come to start a revolution but this revolution is much higher and much more powerful than a political or military

revolution. Jesus will announce the institution of God's Kingdom and God's evaluation system. Jesus came to turn the world's evaluation system upside down. God values humility. The world values pride. God values the lowly. The world values power. The God values the lowly. The world pursues happiness. God's people pursue holiness.

The starting point for Christians is learning to accept and submit to God's value system. Mary says that her soul and spirit rejoice in God and His Kingdom and she lives to glorify God. And that brings us to verses 48-49 where we are introduced to the real meaning of life. Life is about serving God.

Let me again start with the names used for God. First of all let me point out that in the passage of Scripture we are looking at this morning, Mary uses the phrase "He has," "has," or "has done," referring to God's work 9 times in her song. In verse 49 she refers to God as "The Mighty One." In Hebrew, this will take a variety of forms. El Gibbur is translated as Mighty God in Isaiah 9:6, the famous Messianic passage. El Shaddi translates as God Almighty. Then Mary ends the sentence by saying, "holy is His Name." The Name refers to God's covenant Name by which He enters relationship with the Hebrews. The Name is translated Jehovah or Yahweh, depending on how one pronounces it. Because they did not want to offend God by pronouncing His Name out loud, the Jews often simply refer to God as Ha Shem, which means The Name. Mary is definitely referring to the God of the Hebrews, the One Who created the heavens and the earth. The One Who delivered the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt and brought them safely into the Promised Land. The One Who will send the Chosen One, the Anointed One, Who will be known as Messiah.

In these verses, she makes it clear what this Almighty God does. He watches over the humble ones who serve Him. Look at that word for mindful in verse 48. The word in Greek is a compound word epiblepo. Blepō means to see. Epi means upon or over. So we could translate that as God gazing upon or watching over His humble servants. The word used here for servant is the word for slave. Mary acknowledges two things that we must also acknowledge if we want to be authentic Christians. First, she has given herself to God as a slave. She only wants to serve God. Secondly, she recognizes her humble state. I think that the main reason modern day Christians do not experience joy in their lives is because we have followed the culture in which we live and come to believe that we are entitled to get what we want. With attitudes of entitlement, we can never receive gifts and blessings from God because we think we deserve them. And when we don't get what we want, we blame God. If we want to even begin enjoying life, we need to come to the point where we acknowledge that we are pieces of garbage. The only thing we are entitled to is to spend an eternity in hell. There is nothing intrinsically good about us except that God loved us enough to send this magnificent Savior Jesus to rescue us from the bondage of sin and death, to give us life and meaning. We will only find joy in life when we come to realize that knowing God, loving God, and serving God is what life is all about. Mary says that all generations will call her blessed. Mary does not think generations will call her blessed because she is so good or deserves to be elevated to this position. Generations will call her blessed because God Almighty decided to use her in His fantastic plan of salvation. When we start to receive all of life, the good times and the bad, as gifts from God, we will be filled with joy and happiness because we will feel blessed to be conduits of God's love and His plans. God used Mary's womb to give birth to the incarnate Jesus. God may give us money so we can help feed poor people. God may give us gifts of compassion so that we can visit the sick and welcome strangers. God has given us His Holy Spirit so that we can lead others to salvation and freedom. God loves to give to His children who live in gratitude. The world evaluates people by

how much money they can amass, how powerful they can become, and how well known they can become. On the other hand, God is looking for grateful, humble, and godly people to use to bring His love to this lost and hurting world. If we want to experience the fullness, abundance, and joy that Jesus promises, we must understand that life is all about knowing God and serving Him. **GOD CHOOSES HUMBLE AND HOLY PEOPLE TO WORK IN AND THROUGH.** If God is not working in us and through us, then perhaps we need to give up all our attitudes of entitlement and start living lives of gratitude and thankfulness. Further, we need to understand that we find joy through serving God and not in the things of this world.

## II. GOD'S WORK IS MANIFESTED IN ALL NATIONS

In verses 50-53 we are reminded that God's work is manifested in all nations. Through Jesus, **GOD'S LOVE AND SALVATION IS AVAILABLE TO ALL.** As I think about someone like Mary in today's culture, she is not someone who we would find on the A-list. She couldn't get into the night clubs and restaurants other teenage stars like Miley Cyrus, Lindsey Lohan, Vanessa Hudgens, or other rich and powerful families can go. Mary was just a plain middle class teenager. The world is exclusive and sets their values and standards on who can enter their world. In God's kingdom, there are no such distinctions. Salvation and entrance into God's family is available to all whoever chooses to respond to God's call.

In order to come to God though, we must do it His way. Verses 50-51 illustrate that it takes humility to come to God. In our culture, people have a hard time admitting that we are pieces of garbage, that at heart we are evil and disgusting. People in our culture want to think of ourselves as good and valuable, worthy of God's love and blessings. People often come to churches and think they should be given more respect because they are rich, powerful, successful, or famous. Look what Mary says in verse 51. She says, "God has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts." The Bible is absolutely clear on this point. It hammers it home over and over again that God opposes the proud, God takes a stand against the proud, and that God will punish and destroy the proud. There is no special treatment in God's kingdom for the rich, the powerful, the educated, or popular. There is no race or gender distinction when it comes to God's salvation. In order to receive God's salvation, we must come to the place where we are humble enough to admit that we richly deserve to spend an eternity in hell. We have to admit that all we have and all we have become, has not come as a result of our hard work, careful planning, or intelligent choices. Everything we have or have become come as a direct result of God's unmerited grace. The world doesn't like that.

Did you ever do something for someone who didn't appreciate it? Perhaps the person felt you owed them something. Perhaps the person is too proud to receive the gift you are giving. It is not very rewarding to be in a relationship with self-centered people who think they deserve good things. On the other hand, it is a real joy to give to people who are humble enough to receive and are moved that you would think enough about them to give them a gift. God is no different. He enjoys giving to those who know how to receive with gratitude.

And that's why Mary says in verse 50 that God's "mercy extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation. If we really knew Who God was; we would fear Him because He is the One Who will decide where we spend eternity. He will decide if we spend eternity in heaven with Him, or eternity in hell without Him. I hear people say things like, "My idea of God is this or that." God is not going to allow anybody define Who He is or what He is like. He has described Himself and His expectations of us in the Bible. We need to fear God because He is

sovereign over all and has the power to enforce His will. Humility, submission, and obedience are the characteristics God is looking for in people.

Verses 52-53 clearly illustrate that it takes upside down thinking to come to God. In Mary's world, the common Jew would experience oppression from the Roman Government, from Jewish tax collectors, and from their own religious leaders. All these people enjoyed the good life, while the common person barely eked out a living. The politicians, those who played along with the government, and the religious leaders lived the high life on the money and the work of the common Jew. There was no way to oppose them or overthrow them. That is why the common, everyday Jew anxiously anticipated the arrival of Messiah.

Historically, the Jews had seen God bring down nations and rulers that oppressed His people. Luke is preaching revolution in his Gospel. But the revolution is not overthrowing governments or changing political systems. This revolution has to do with setting people free from sin and all its consequences. Jesus will establish His kingdom in the church. We should never expect the government to act in Christian ways. Christianity is meant to be lived out in the church. The revolution in the church is that everybody who is authentically Christian came to Christ the same way. We are responsible to care for one another. Social justice is never going to happen in societies at large. However, social justice should be a way of life in the church. The Bible is also consistent on this point. God uses human government and politicians to simply maintain order. God brought down the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Romans. What discourages me the most is when I see Christians passionately arguing politics. Right wing conservative Christians argue with Left wing liberal Christians. How can that be? How can Christians be divided over arguments about Caesar? Why should we expect human governments to live out Christian principles when we have trouble living out Christian principles in the church? It seems to me that our energies and monies would be much better used in living out Christian principles and Kingdom standards within the church. Again, I know that I am in the small minority of Christians who believe we need to concentrate on living Christian principles out in the context of church. I believe that Christians have been so fooled that we are now being used by politicians to further their agendas. I am convinced that the church will help elect Anti-Christ. Christians have been sucked into the political system somehow thinking they are doing God's work. It is clear from the Bible that God will bring down politicians and governments and judge them.

God's desire is to lift up the poor. Please tell me, are there any Democrats stopping any of us from feeding the poor? Are there any Republican politicians stopping us from sharing Christ with our friends, families, and neighbors? Are there any politicians forcing us to have divorce rates that by some studies are higher than the general population? Are there any government officials preventing us from reading, studying, or memorizing our bibles? Are there any government officials forcing us to watch pornography or forcing us to become addicts? There are no politicians or public officials that are preventing us from living out our faith in Christ. Oh, we may not like the amount of our money the government takes. We may not like the fact that we have to pay so many taxes. But all that doesn't matter. Jesus said this,

*"... give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God" (Luke 20:25 / NLT) ...*

And

*"... I am not an earthly king. If I were, my followers would have fought when I was arrested by the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36 / NLT).*

God's thinking and God's ways are totally upside down from this world. If we spend our time living out God's kingdom values in the church, we would definitely capture the attention of the world. Think of how revolutionary this thought is. **GOD'S LOVE AND SALVATION IS AVAILABLE TO ALL.** Just think of what a place church could be if we started to live out God's commands. Listen to how Luke described what happened when the early church decided to live out God's kingdom commands:

*"42They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.*

*43A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. 45They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. 46They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47 / NLT).*

Wow, would this be a great place if we lived like this?

### III. GOD'S WORK IS MANIFEST IN HIS PEOPLE

And that brings us to Mary's point in verses 54-55. God's work is manifest in His people. **GOD WILL EMPOWER HIS PEOPLE TO BE MESSENGERS OF HIS KINGDOM.** Think about this. We are God's plan of salvation. We are to be the place where the world can see Who God is and how He expects us to live. We need to simply keep the commands God has given us. He will empower us to live out our Christian faith. It is God, not a political revolution or the ballot box that will bring down the oppressors. Mary's song is taken from different points of Israel's history. Parts of her song come from Moses and Miriam's description of how God destroyed Egypt and delivered Israel safely into the Promised Land. Some of Mary's song is taken from Deborah's account of how God delivered Israel from their oppressive enemies. The historian Asaph records how God delivers His people from the hands of their enemies. Judith records how God destroyed the Assyrians on Israel's behalf. And Hannah reminds us that God is on the side of the underdog and God is the One Who judges. We do well to remember that God is the One Who is the judge, not us.

In that same vein, we must also realize that God lifts up the oppressed. God never forgot nor will He forget His people Israel. Listen to what God promised Abraham:

*"1Then the LORD told Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. 2I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. 3I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1-3 / NLT).*

God has promised to bless the entire human race through Israel. We believe that took place in Jesus. Notice also that God clearly states He will bless those who bless Israel and He will curse those who try and harm Israel. In other words, if someone messes with God's children, then God will mess with them. I am more and more amazed at how anti-Semitic the world is. The world

has clearly throughout history shown how much it hates the Jews and that sentiment is escalating today. God has already stated He will bring down rulers, politicians, and governments.

It seems to me that Christians ought to have a deep love for the Jews and continually try and be a blessing to Jews and to Israel because we too have been grafted into the family of God. Listen to the attitude Jesus takes when His children are abused. Luke records what Stephen saw while he was being killed:

*“55But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily upward into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand. 56And he told them, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand!” (Acts 7:55-56 / NLT).*

Jesus was not sitting down at the right hand of the Father while His child was being killed. Jesus made a special note of the names of the people killing Stephen. We need to busy ourselves with living out the kingdom life here in the Church. God will judge the politicians, the rulers, and the governments. **GOD WILL EMPOWER HIS PEOPLE TO BE MESSENGERS OF HIS KINGDOM.**

In verse 56, Luke temporarily writes Mary out of the story. It seems as if Mary stays until John is born. She witnessed the miracles surrounding John’s birth and then went home. **JESUS CAME TO START A REVOLUTION THAT WOULD TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.** Because of her humility and obedience, Mary occupies a special place in salvation history. We too, as individuals and as a church have a special role to play in salvation history as we wait for Jesus’ return.

Listen to how John Wesley put this. “If I had three hundred men who feared nothing but God, and hated nothing but sin, and were determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, I would set the world on fire.”

If we choose to take seriously our faith in Jesus Christ and start to live out His kingdom principles in our church here on Devon Avenue, I guarantee that we will rock this neighborhood and turn this city upside down. Are we up to it?