

Mary's Hymn of Worship

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Luke 1:46-55

Preached on: Sunday, December 15, 2013

As we approach this time of worship and it's been a wonderful time of worship, hasn't it? I love to sing these great, great hymns that speak of the Incarnation of our Savior but let's just go before the throne of grace together and then I'm going to have you open your Bibles to Luke 1.

Will you pray with me?

Father, as we come into your presence, especially after having sung these lyrics that are so profound, that are so misunderstood by this fallen world and yet so dear to our hearts. As we think of what you have done for us and who Christ is, O Lord, we have no language to voice our praise. Father, how could we possibly ever be able to thank you enough for sending your own dear Son from heaven to earth in the form of a lowly, common-born baby. The one who has created us and yet who came to redeem us as our substitute. Lord, the fullness of your condescension and your sacrifice, your humble obedience to the point of death, even death upon a cross, is just beyond our ability to even fathom. It makes us eager, Lord, for the time when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that you, the Lord Jesus Christ, are Lord.

We know that heaven awaits a more suitable tribute than we are now capable of offering and it will be our joy to fill all eternity with unbounded praise. And certainly, Lord, we want to begin that praise even here this morning as we gather together in corporate worship because our hearts are so humbled and our minds are taken captive by the reality that Christ left the glory of heaven to enter the world of humanity in so humble a fashion.

Lord, that you were born like us so that you might redeem us, that we might become like you. You made yourself a servant that we might learn how to serve. You gave your life that we might live. You suffered so that we can share in your glory. So, Lord, we give you thanks here this morning for these great truths and as we look into your word, to understand them even more deeply, I pray as your servant that your people will be overwhelmed anew and afresh by these transforming and eternal truths. So we commit ourselves to you in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Take your Bibles and turn to Luke 1. This morning we will look at Mary's hymn of praise in verses 46-55. It wasn't necessarily a hymn that was put to music, however it might have been but we use the word "hymn" here as an indication of a paean of praise, an ode, more of a lyrical type of poem that expresses exaltation of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a few thoughts by way of introduction to grab your mind a little bit. Perhaps you have seen on television that in Times Square there is a large billboard that the atheists have put up and it says: "Who needs Christ during Christmas? Nobody." And

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“Christ” has a big X through it. You know, I might say, “Who needs the MAS in Christmas? Nobody.” The Mass, referring to the Roman Catholic, that pagan, heretical notion that Christ must be sacrificed over and over and over again in a Mass on some phony altar by illegitimate priests and so forth, and that somehow Jesus is truly and substantially a part of that and they even worship the elements and so forth. If you want to get rid of anything, get rid of that but we can't get rid of Christ otherwise there is no such thing as Christmas as we understand it.

When I saw that billboard and it's one of these electronic boards that has all the lights and all, my mind went to John 3 where Jesus said in verse 18, “He who believes in him,” referring to Jesus, “is not judged.” But he goes on to say, “He who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, because their deeds were evil.”

David Silverman, the President of the American Atheists, contends that Christmas is “better without the religion.” He went on to say that no one really enjoys going to church anyway during the holiday season. I hope that's not true of you. It's certainly not true of me. I can't wait to come and give God glory. But this should be no surprise because certainly people without Christ as we once were, are spiritually dead. They don't understand these things so we need to have an attitude of love and pray for individuals like this that God would reveal himself to them.

But to those people, and perhaps there are some of you in this audience, certainly some that will be listening through the internet, I would say that Christmas is a time of worship and praise for those who have been transformed and redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a magnificent opportunity for us to reflect upon the Incarnation of Christ, God who took upon himself human flesh. This is a time when we can come together to think about not just that he came but why he came. This is a great opportunity to spread the gospel. Every carol we sing is really a doxology of our soul. Every gift points to the gift of God's grace. And every opportunity of fellowship points to that time when we will be with family and friends and ultimately with our God in heaven. Every meal is a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Every nativity scene points to what really happened and it gives us another opportunity to get lost in the wonder of what God has done. Like no other passage in all of Scripture, we see these great wonders expressed in Mary's hymn of worship.

Before we read it, I was thinking about this: seldom can we learn much from a 13 year old girl or a 13 year old boy, for that matter, about worship but I believe that we would all do well to sit at her feet as we look into what she said by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. So, follow along as I read Mary's great hymn of praise beginning in Luke 1:46,

“46 And Mary said: ‘My soul exalts the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has had regard for the humble state

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of His bonds slave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. 49 For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. 51 He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty-handed. 54 He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his offspring forever.”

So this morning, I invite you to join me in examining this heartfelt expression of worship and in so doing, really compare her worship with your worship. I think that's important to do. Remember that true worship is a heart attitude of reverence and adoration that can be expressed in a variety of ways to our God but we want to ask the question right from the get-go here: what is acceptable worship to God? And certainly, at its core, we know that God is pleased with those who worship in spirit and truth. In John 4:23, Jesus said that, he said, “True worshipers worship the Father in spirit and truth.” Spirit refers to that internal subjective part of man, the inner man, the human spirit. So acceptable worship is not some external conformity to ceremonies or rituals but it's a genuine expression of the inner man.

It's a genuine expression of the heart but the subjective must be regulated by the objective, namely: the truth, the word of God. For example, if we believe things about God that are contrary to Scripture, if we hold to errant Bible doctrine, then our worship is not pleasing to Him. If we pretend to worship God when, in fact, our hearts are worshiping idols like body image or attention and acceptance or fortune and fame, entertainment pleasure, whatever, then we are phony, we are hypocrites and God is not pleased and as we take a look into Mary's heart, we want to examine our own.

I wish to focus on three aspects of her worship this morning. We're going to see first that her worship was spontaneous despite her circumstances. Secondly, we will see that her worship was God-centered, not man-centered. Finally, we see that her worship rehearsed God's mercy, past, present and promised. Now, let me remind you of what we just read a little bit ago in our Scripture reading so that we have the context here: God dispatched the angel Gabriel to this 13 year old, Jewish, young lady from Nazareth betrothed to Joseph and he told her that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon her and she will conceive and she would ultimately be the mother of Yeshua, the Messiah, of Jesus, the Son of the Most High. Then it's interesting, as added confirmation and, I'm sure, knowing that the young lady would need somebody to talk with after hearing this, a person that would actually believe her, God has His servant, Gabriel, tell her in verse 36, “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.’ And

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the angel departed from her.” So, he tells her that, “Not only are you going to be with child from the Holy Spirit and bear the Messiah but also your 80 year old relative who has been barren, is also pregnant.” And we know that she was pregnant with John the Baptist who was the forerunner of the Messiah.

Now, think about what would have been going through Mary's mind when she hears all of this. She would be thinking, “Who is going to believe this?” Right? I'm sure she would have also been thinking, “What is Joseph going to say when I tell him this? What will my family and friends say?” You see, we've got to remember that no one has heard from God in 400 years in Israel. 400 years. “And now they're going to believe me? A young lady in Nazareth?” Moreover, she knew that, according to the Mosaic law in Deuteronomy 22, the potential punishment for being pregnant out of wedlock would be execution. Now, fortunately in her time, they would divorce but she knew that all of this was a possibility. Imagine the fear that must have gripped her.

So as we read the text, we see that she travels into the hill country to a city in Judah to talk with Elizabeth and Elizabeth blesses her and I find it fascinating as I think about what would have gone there as we kind of read between the lines in the word of God, what does this virgin, young lady do? Does she collapse in a pool of tears? Does she begin to weep and wail wondering what to do? Does she beg Elizabeth, “O, you've got to hide me. What am I going to say? What's going to happen?” No, her heart explodes in worship. It's really an amazing thing. She's not ruled by fear but by faith. Despite the fear of scandal and cruel rejection, despite the inevitable suspicions that we know occurred even with Joseph, her beloved fiancé to whom she was betrothed, despite the inevitable anxieties of a poor young woman suddenly thrust into an unknown future, she's rich in faith. The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

As I think about it, too often when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, we tend to cower in fear and the last thing on our mind is to somehow burst forth in praise to God but that's what she did. Her heart could not be silenced by fear because it was full of faith.

So, first of all, we see that her worship was spontaneous despite her circumstances. Notice again, verse 46-47, “And Mary said: ‘My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.’” Both soul and spirit are used interchangeably throughout Scripture to describe the immaterial part of man, the inner person, the core of who a person is that will live on forever. Here, Mary uses a poetic device, one known as Hebrew parallelism in which the same idea is going to be repeated in different but yet synonymous words in order to reinforce her statement. So her soul now, just erupts in exaltation which is going to be the inevitable response of someone who worships God in spirit and in truth.

Now, how could this happen with this young teenage girl facing such an amazing challenge? What is it that animates such spontaneity and worship? May I suggest at least

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two things: first of all, she had such a deep love for God that she was saturated with his word. It's interesting as we look in the English here, we've got eight sentences and in those eight sentences, she quotes the Old Testament 15 times which proves she was a dedicated student of Scripture. Now, I might add, she didn't have a Bible like we have. Okay? They didn't have the written word. There were some here and there that they would have to go and study and memorize but they didn't carry it around with them. They didn't have it in their ipad and in their smartphones. They didn't have it so they had to memorize it. They had to be taught the word of God. They had to meditate upon the word of God. It was the constant topic of conversation. So, because of her deep love for God, she treasured his word and she was saturated with it.

I remember in especially the first few years when by God's grace, the Lord brought Nancy into my life and we fell in love and there were many years when I was away at school and believe me, when those letters came, I cherished every word. I meditated on every word. I even memorized many of those words. Why? Because of my love for her and it's the same thing. Dear Christian, let me be very clear here: your love for God can be measured by your love for his word. It's very simple. Mary, here, quotes portions of Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel, even portions of Leah's prayers as we will see in Genesis 30. We're going to see references to the law. She quotes from the Psalter. She quotes from the prophets. This young lady knew the word of God because she knew and loved the God of the word. Her soul was filled with an intimate and accurate knowledge of the lover of her soul.

When most Christians encounter some trial, they tend to respond in fear and confusion. I do. I struggle with that. I'm sure you do, if you're honest. We tend to respond sometimes even in anger and despair because at some level, the word of God is not as rich as it should be because probably our love for him is not as deep as it should be and so as a result, many Christians are doctrinally illiterate. They know very little of the word of God and, therefore, they have nothing to tap into when these things come their way. Many believers are even too ignorant to even know that they're ignorant. It's a sad thing.

I would ask you: could you write a hymn of praise like this? If you had time? And if the answer is, "You know, I really don't think I could do that," then I would suggest that perhaps your love for him is deficient and, therefore, your knowledge of him is deficient. Those of us who truly love our husband or our wife will spend time getting to know them and loving them and we will know them intimately. We love the sound of their voice. We love to study them and serve them and rejoice in them. Well, so too, those who truly love the Lord.

Beloved, please hear this in the spirit that it's intended: if you couldn't write something at least close to this, you're never going to erupt in spontaneous praise with something like this. Is that fair? I think it is and the more your heart is filled with an intimate and accurate understanding of the word of God, the more spontaneous will be your worship.

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Not only did she love God and his word but secondly, she was preoccupied with the glory of God. Notice what it says in verse 46, "My soul exalts the Lord." Again, Mary was obviously familiar with Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2, when in verse 1, Hannah prayed, "My heart exalts the Lord." I might add parenthetically, young ladies, well, young men too for that matter but especially young ladies: it's good for you to become familiar with godly women in the Bible and understand their attitude of worship. Obviously, Mary understood these things and so Mary received inspiration from Hannah and from Leah and then she responded accordingly.

In verse 48, her statement, "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant," that's a paraphrase of what Hannah said in her prayer in 1 Samuel 1:11. And at the end of verse 48, she echoes Leah's words in Genesis 30:13 when she goes on to say, "For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed." Would that we all have such a familiarity with the word of God because it is from the well of the word that spontaneous worship will erupt.

But notice more closely why we can say with certainty that she was preoccupied with the glory of God. It says, "My soul exalts the Lord." The term "exalts" means "to magnify; to make great; to glorify." And it's in the present tense which indicates that glorifying God from the core of her being, was the habitual continuous reality of her soul regardless of circumstances. So, magnifying the Lord was the preoccupation of her heart long before she became the recipient of divine favor which explains her spontaneous eruption of praise.

Too often we think of worship as something that happens in the church and we've got to have rituals and candles and religious icons, the right ambience or we have to have music that induces worship. Of course, nowhere in Scripture do we see that. I might add that God has given us music not to induce worship but to express worship. Music is that magnificent vehicle that God has given us that transports the doxologies of the redeemed and allows them to go forth into this dark world to present the glorious truths of the gospel.

Because the glory of God was the theme of her soul, it was naturally the theme of her song so she begins by saying, "My soul exalts the Lord," and then she says, "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Folks, this is what is acceptable to God. Spirit, a spirit that rejoices in him as Savior. That subjective experience within the inner man. And "rejoiced" here is a very strong word in the original language that expresses utter jubilation. Literally, an internal celebration of great joy that has to go some place and she was so preoccupied with God's glory. She was fully aware of all that he is, all that he does, all that he will do as the coming Messiah. By the way, this is reminiscent of numerous texts in the Psalter. For example, Psalm 103:1 that Mary would have been familiar with, where we read, "Blessed the Lord, O my soul, and that all that is within me bless his holy name."

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Now, we want to ask ourselves: do these things characterize our hearts? Do we find ourselves just spontaneously erupting in worship because of our deep love for God? Are we preoccupied with his glory? Do we love his word? Do we meditate upon it in private? And speak it in public? My friend, if those things are foreign to you, I would suggest that your worship, at best, is going to be contrived and, at worst, it's going to be counterfeit.

Not only was her worship spontaneous despite her circumstances but secondly, we see that her worship was God-centered, not man-centered. From the very start of her praise in verses 46 and 47, her focus was on the Lord her Savior. She understood that she needed saving from the penalty and power and presence of sin. Remember, in Matthew 1:21, the angel comes to Joseph and he's tormented in his mind here with what's going on and the angels is going to put him at ease about the child that had been conceived and in verse 21, he says, "And she," referring to Mary, "will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for it is he who will," what? "Save his people from their sins." Not from their poverty. Not from their bad health. Not from their struggling relationships, their poor business deals, their disappointed unhappy life but from their sins.

Mary knew that, first and foremost, her Messiah was coming to seek and to save that which was lost as Jesus said later on in Luke 19. By the way, I would add that this is contrary to the Roman Catholic dogma of Mary's immaculate conception that from the moment of her conception, she was kept free from original sin. You see, Mary understood as we see right here, that her greatest need was for forgiveness, for undeserved mercy and grace that she might be reconciled to a holy God. Why else would she declare, "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior?"

Truly her worship was God-centered. It wasn't man-centered. In these few verses, we see her focus on God as Savior, the Mighty One, the holy and merciful God. The one that judges the proud and exalts the humble. The one who is faithful to his covenant promises to Abraham and so forth. Now, you might say, "Well, don't all Christians have this at the core of their worship? That Jesus is the Savior? And we praise him because he saved us from our sin? Isn't all Christian worship God-centered rather than man-centered?" I would say, No. It's really sad that in many cases, we don't see this.

For example, a few years ago I turned into Fox News television network during the Christmas season to hear a pastor that they called an evangelical icon, deliver a special Christmas sermon. He presented a very delicious yet distorted version of the gospel based upon his understanding of the Christmas story found in the Bible and, unfortunately, it bore little resemblance to what the text truly says. It certainly bore little resemblance to the gospel that Jesus preached and the one that Mary understood. As I listened carefully, I became increasingly frustrated with his subtle spin on sin and the Savior and like so many other kind of politically correct entrepreneurs, religious entrepreneurs bent on attracting seekers, the preacher defined sin in such a way that really nobody could possibly be offended and his definition of sin was all those things we think and do that

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rob us of fellowship with God and steal away our happiness, the happiness that he wants us to enjoy.

So, the good news of the gospel becomes nothing more than God loving us so much that he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross to save us from our unhappiness. Excerpts of interviews on the street were included to reinforce his definition of sin. People were asked what they thought they needed to be saved from and they showed these little clips. Answers included things like "I need to be saved from my finances." Another person said, "From my destructive relationships." Another person said, "From my job." Another one said, "I need to be saved from myself." One person did say, "I need to be saved from my sin." But nowhere in that program was there a clear biblical definition of sin exposing man's dreadful condition, that he's under divine condemnation, having violated the holy law of our holy God.

The emphasis was always man-centered, it was never God-centered. Man and his needs, not God and his glory. God wants you on his team so that you can be happy. That's what came across and neither the preacher nor the people in the street ever acknowledged that because of their sin nature, everything that we are and everything that we do is fundamentally offensive to a holy God and apart from God's regenerating grace, apart from us placing our faith in his Son, we will experience his wrath and his justice forever. No one would hear that and, certainly, that is not something people want to hear these days.

So the preacher never told this vast audience that sinful man does not conform to the moral character and desires of God. His message was basically: God exists for you rather than you exist for him. His message was basically: God loves you so much that he sent his Son to die for you and save you from your unhappiness, to save you so that you can have a successful life, live up to your potential, fulfill your dreams, be personally liberated so you can be all that you can be, have a purpose in life and so forth.

My friends, how different that is from what Mary's message was even here in verse 47 when she begins by rejoicing in God her Savior. Not God her life coach. Not God her live-in Dr. Phil. Not God her investment adviser. Not God her personal Santa Claus. Moreover, she understood that her relationship to God was not that of a first round draft pick where he couldn't wait to somehow help her develop her talent. She recognized that she was a willing slave of her Master.

It's interesting, she answered Gabriel in Luke 1:38, "Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And in verse 48, she praised God because he "had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave." Unfortunately, because of the stigma of slavery, most translations replace the word "slave" with "servant" or "bonds slave" with the term *doulos* in the original language meaning "slave." Mary understood that.

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By way of historical context, in those days, slaves had absolutely no independence, no freedom, no rights. They had no legal recourse in the courts. They had no citizenship. They were completely owned by their master and submitted to him without any hesitation. Their personal desires, their personal ambitions, their personal dreams, were of no concern to their masters. They were completely dependent upon their masters who provided for them, therefore, a slave's responsibility was really quite simple. It was simply to obey all commands without any hesitation and when there were no direct commands, spend your life doing all you can to please your master, making yourself available to do his bidding.

Beloved, this is really our responsibility to Christ, isn't it? Our Savior. Our Lord. Kurios. Our Lord. Our Master. We are truly slaves of Christ only we serve an infinitely loving Master. She understood this. We know now that God has purchased us with a price and we have been redeemed.

So, all of this animated her worship. Because of her perspective, her worship was God-centered. If I could put it a little bit differently, she understood that she was deprived, not deprived. It's a big shift in our culture today. You tell people that they're deprived and God wants to give you all this stuff, well, everybody's going to go for that. You tell people that you're deprived, you're under Divine condemnation unless you place your faith in Christ, well, that just makes everybody furious. But that's the truth.

How I wish the tv preacher had told them the truth. How I wish that he would have said, "Because of your sin, dear people, you have violated God's law and, therefore, you stand guilty and condemned before his holy bar of justice. There is nothing you can do to save yourself and apart from his mercy, apart from his love, you will perish in your sins but the good news of the gospel, and this is why Jesus came, is that God has provided a way not only to forgive you but to actually satisfy his justice. He sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the form of human flesh to live a perfect life and die a violent death to pay the penalty for the sins of all who would believe in him. This is exceedingly good news of the gospel." O, how I wish he would have said that. Probably if he had said what I just said, they would have shut him off at that point.

How I wish he would have gone on to say, "O, dear friends, I invite you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ whose birth we have come to celebrate. To abandon your ambitions and your dreams. To set aside your path of self-determination, your self-will and become a willing slave of Jesus Christ and live for his glory. But know this: unlike the slave/master relationship of the world, the Master that we serve is one that died for us, that loves us with an infinite love, makes us sons and daughters in his family. That because of faith in Christ, God clothes us in his righteousness and no longer sees our sin but sees us hidden in his beloved Son. He makes us recipients of an unimaginable inheritance that is reserved for us in heaven and kept by the power of the living God. He makes us joint heirs with Christ, citizens of a heavenly kingdom and for this reason, we

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can say with Mary, My soul exalts the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior for he has had regard for the humble state of his slave.”

Finally, we see that Mary's worship rehearsed God's mercy, past, present and promised. By the way, this was common in the Old Testament. In Old Testament worship you see it a lot in the Psalter. Again, remember, she first begins by praising him for what he has done in her life, verse 47, “My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” This is the foundation of praise. We're no longer under Divine condemnation. But then next, isn't it interesting? She praises him for the unimaginable blessing of choosing her to be the earthly mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son.

Verse 48-49, “For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant.” The word “regard” carries the idea of her realizing that she was unworthy even of his notice, even of his glance. She goes on to say, “For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name.” I find it interesting: Mary does not complain about her lowly status as the world might see her nor does she suffer from poor self-esteem. Instead, she rejoices in the fact that God would even notice her. And to think that she had accurate theology to know that the one that would be in her womb would actually be her Creator and her Messiah and her Savior. That's just astounding. Moreover, she realized that the humble estate of the Messiah would be one that he would share with these insignificant parents. I was thinking about this: given our Savior's unfathomable condescension to enter into our lowly estate, who among us has any right to complain about anything?

To be sure, her humiliation would be short-lived, given the blessing God bestowed on her that all generations would remember and count her blessed but I find it also interesting that Mary doesn't limit her praise for God with respect to what he has done for her alone but also for what he has done and what he will do for all who fear him. In verse 50, she quotes from Psalm 103:17, she says, “And his mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear him.” To fear the Lord means to have a deep reverence for Yahweh, the personal name of God, and that reverence, that worship is expressed in a submission to him, a willingness to do his will as he has revealed himself in his word. This is what should cause all of us to explode in praise. Think of the countless millions of Yahweh fearing people. You don't hear that much, do you? Especially Yahweh fearing people but that's what it is. You don't hear much about God fearing people today but they're there. I hope they're here. I believe they are. People who realize they are recipients of God's mercy.

And in verses 51 and 52, she quotes Psalm 98 as well as Psalm 118, which again, demonstrates her familiarity with God's involvement in ancient history which is essential for acceptable worship. Can I say that again as I think about it? That's so important: you need to know ancient biblical history if you're really going to worship God in a way that is truly pleasing to him. I think you'll see that more as we go along here this morning. She says, “He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were

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proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.” Then in verse 53, she quotes from Psalm 107:9, “He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed.”

As I think about it, too often our praise is confined to our little world, our little time-line of life, our little microscopic look at what God has done for us and, certainly, that is worthy of praise but what we need to do is back up and see the big picture and gaze upon the full spectacle of everything that God has done. You begin all the way back and you praise him for his work of creation. You can just kind of go right down through Old Testament history: praise him for his judgment even in the worldwide flood and yet saving a few; praise him for what happened with the children of Israel; with what happened in the time of Joshua and Judges; what happened in the time of Elijah and Elisha; what happened when the Lord came and the Incarnation; what happened during the life of the apostles; praise him for the mystery of the church; praise him for all that he has promised; praise him for the big picture not just for, “O, God, thank you for what you have done in my life.” That’s what we see her doing here. She even praises God for what he has done in the life of his covenant people, Israel, and what he will do in the future. This is eschatological praise. Folks, this is the stuff of acceptable worship.

In verses 54 and 55, she says, “He has given help to Israel His servant.” Why? “In remembrance of His mercy.” Well, when did that happen? Well, when “He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his offspring forever.” What she’s saying here, she’s thinking back upon what God said to Abraham. She understood that God made a unilateral, unconditional, irrevocable, everlasting covenant with Abraham. You will remember that it was introduced in Genesis 12 and then it was actually made in Genesis 15. It was reaffirmed in Genesis 17 and we see that it was later renewed with Isaac in Genesis 26 and then later with Jacob in Genesis 28.

She remembered what God has said and all of the people understood this. This is why Messiah was coming. She remembered that God promised that through Abraham’s seed all of the nations of the world will be blessed. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ was a descendant of Abraham. He promised that there would be Divine blessings and protection on the descendants of Abraham, ultimately, the Jewish people. We see that today even though they’ve been the most hated people in the history of the world, they not only survive, they thrive even though most of them remain his beloved enemy until that day when he reveals himself to them.

He promised them that they would be a great nation and that he would be the father of many nations. He also promised them a land, a specific territory that will ultimately belong to them where God will be glorified. Throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see these things reaffirmed. The promises that will ultimately be fulfilled when Yeshua, the Messiah, returns and establishes his glorious kingdom and reigns for 1,000 years. A kingdom, as we see in Scripture, that will be merged into the universal and eternal kingdom of God from which it originated. Remember what Gabriel told Mary in

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Mary's Hymn of Worship

By David Harrell

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Luke 1:32, for “the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” I might add parenthetically: how foolish to think that Mary would have somehow understood this as a figurative designation of the Christian church.

While Mary did not understand that her people would reject their Messiah and thus postpone the universal monarchy of the Messiah until his Second Coming, she did know what God had promised and she took him at his word. In anticipation of the fulfillment of all of these promises, she closes with that final burst of praise in verses 54 and 55, “He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his offspring forever.”

Beloved, her worship was spontaneous despite her circumstances. Why? Because of her deep love for God and, therefore, her love for the word of God and her preoccupation with the glory of God. Her worship was God-centered, not man-centered. It was all about God and his glory, not me and my needs. And her worship rehearsed God's mercy, past, present and promised.

I want to challenge you in closing here this morning. I want you to do something maybe this week, certainly in the next few weeks. I want you to find a quiet place and set aside some quiet time which might be a little bit tough for some of you and I want you to get a couple of pieces of paper, really one piece of paper should be enough, and a pen and what I would like for you to do is write your own hymn of praise without your Bible. She didn't have a Bible. Just express your heart. Can you do that? Now, you might be thinking, “Boy, I don't write so good.” Do you know what? Nobody is going to read it. This is between you and your Lord and it's okay if it's not as comprehensive, if it's not as theologically accurate and, shall we say, deep. I want to say this kindly but many Christians are not as deep as this 13 year old girl was. Alright?

But as you write it, let it be an expression of your heart. Perhaps you can look at things past, present and promised and you can praise him for some of these same things and then use this as kind of a measure of really where your heart is at. If when you're finished, you come away saying, “My, this is really pitiful,” that's okay. Then you can say, “Lord, help me. Help me to understand more of who you are so that I can sit down with a piece of paper and a pen and I can say something that gives you far more glory than this, so that I can be able to sit across from another person with a cup of coffee and express to them something, at least, closely resembling what Mary said. Lord, help me with this.” And then take your time, get out the word of God and begin to shore up those areas of weakness. Okay?

I think that would be a wonderful thing to do during this Christmas season and parents, especially fathers, please hear me: Fathers, this is your responsibility to teach your children. So you sit down and you help your children do this and it will be a wonderful learning opportunity.

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Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these glorious truths and how they can impact us as your people. Thank you for speaking to us through your word and now I pray that the seeds of these truths will bear much fruit in each of our lives. I pray especially for those that know nothing of your transforming grace. O God, make them miserable until they cry out to you for the salvation that you will grant them so instantaneously if they come to you with a repentant heart, in faith believing in all that you have promised through the Lord Jesus Christ. Accept our praise and we give you thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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