

JESUS REIGNS FOREVER

Luke 1:26-80

Key verse 33b

“...his kingdom will never end.”

This is now the third Sunday of Advent, the first season of the Christian year, leading up to the Christmas Season. For thousands of years, God prepared for this great event. In Sam's message he mentioned the importance of preparation, through the illustration of preparing a turkey for his family's thanksgiving meal. What was the turkey that God was preparing? Another way of wording that is: “What is God doing?” What is going on? For the past 2000 years God has been working mightily. But we need eyes to see it. Advent is the season to fix our eyes on him.

In some respects the past year has been hard on many of us, and on our nation. Time Magazine put President-Elect Trump on the cover as man of the year, with the title: President of the Divided States of America. These divisions are not easily mended, as understanding and trust are low, and this is not just a political matter. The generational shifts in our recent years have caused divisions that have led to many churches and ministries closing, while others struggling to redefine and reorganize. There is a temptation to pull away, becoming self-centered. In whom or in what can we find a renewed sense of unity, direction and vision? There are so many things to cover in this passage, but I want to think about three things: What is the big picture of what God is doing? What is the secret of being blessed? And lastly how will this task be accomplished in and through us, in every generation?

First, Jesus' kingdom will never end (26-33). Verses 26-27 say: “**In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.**” The main actor in history isn't me or you, or Bible characters, or angels – it is God himself! God intervened and chose Mary for his own purpose, having arranged history to this time and this place, working through many generations of Abraham's descendants until this very moment. It was something no one could have foreseen or predicted; God is mysterious, and wonderful! Why pick Mary? Luke tells us clearly two reasons: **First, she was a virgin.** This fulfills God's promise to bring the Messiah through a virgin (Isa 7), and **second, she was engaged to Joseph, a descendant of David,**

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putting Jesus his son in the line of David. A theme of this passage is God's word and his faithfulness to it.

Verses 28-31. "**The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'** Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, '**Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.**'" God's message to Mary was one of God's favor or grace to her, and this was a high favor! Out of all women ever created she alone would give birth to Jesus, the Savior of the World!

Verses 32-33. "**He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.**" This is the big picture of what God is doing: he is establishing Jesus' kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. What is so great about King Jesus? The angel points out a couple things. Jesus called himself the Son of Man, yet his disciples (Mt 14:33; 16:16; Mk 1:1; Jn 1:49, 11:27), demons (Mk 3:11; 4:41), and even the centurion who facilitated his execution (Mk 15:39), called him the Son of God. What did they see in Jesus that prompted such a response? They found in him the character of God: God's love, justice, holiness, compassion, wisdom, and authority. In short, **Jesus is great because Jesus is the Son of the Most High.**

Another reason Jesus is great is because he is the Son of David. "**The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever...**" Jacob's descendants had many kings in David's line. Why the fascination with David? If they longed for a kingdom of wealth and ease, Solomon's kingdom was a far better example. If they longed for a kingdom of religious revival, Josiah's kingdom was far greater. David's reign was one marked by war, conflict and intrigue. Who would want a kingdom like that? It wasn't because of the socio-economic conditions or religious superiority of the nation of the time that interested them; rather, it was the character and person of the king himself that drew them to long for David's kingdom. David's throne was the reign of a shepherd, a man after God's own heart. The memory of Jacob's descendants saw David clearly as the one who fought their battles, the one who shepherded them. The Psalmist summarizes so well in Psalm 78:72, "**And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.**" He is the one who united them in a single direction and devotion back to the Lord their God. Think about our national history. We universally like presidents like Washington and Lincoln. It isn't because the condition of the USA was much

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better under their presidencies. After all, they were times of war and hardship. We call them great because of their character, and how wonderful to have a shepherd ruler!

And lastly, Jesus is great because he will reign forever, his kingdom will never end. All human kingdoms come to an end, and all human shepherds, no matter how good, or human tyrants, no matter how evil, pass away. But Jesus' kingdom is different. But why have an eternal kingdom? Doesn't God already sit sovereign over all the earth? Absolutely he does. In our near-sightedness we sometimes forget that, and get anxious and worried about this world, as if things are out of control. Is Jesus' eternal kingdom that God is establishing just an extension of this power and authority? If that were true, why send him as a baby in a manger, who has no power or authority at all? No, Jesus' eternal kingdom isn't to restore God's throne, because as Job found out very personally, God never lost it! But God remains Sovereign, the King of the World. Jesus' eternal kingdom is not for his sake, but absolutely for our sake. He is a king in the line of David, but he is also the Priestly King in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:25 explains this crucial difference: "**Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.**" His eternal kingdom is for us; he will never cease his role as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6), from now to eternity!

Second, “blessed is she who has believed” (34-56). Up until now, Mary has been a passive participant in God's plan. But from this point she engages. From her I found some secret of being blessed. How to know I'm blessed? First accept God's purpose and his words. Look at verses 34-37. "**‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.’**" Her question was more than biology. Through it we learn that Jesus did not have a human father. He is God's Son by the Holy Spirit, and the Son of Mary. He is Holy God and perfect man. He is the perfect mediator, the perfect Savior King.

The angel gives the word of God to Mary. To Mary this comes down to a matter of faith. God's word has never failed. But each generation, each person, must decide to believe God's word, even one word of God, for himself or herself. What did Mary decide to do? Verse 38. "**‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to be be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.”**

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Struggling with God's word doesn't begin by hearing it, but by choosing to obey it, putting it into practice. This year Pastor Ron gave us Luke 6:47-48 as a key verse, praying for us to be wise builders; those who come to Jesus, hear his words and put them into practice. Mary, although a young teenager, gives us a good example. Have you been struggling with one word of God? The first step of knowing I'm blessed is to accept God's words. To do so invites misunderstanding and hardship. Instead of trying on her own, Mary found direction by carefully God's word to her, and hurried off to Elizabeth's house.

Now Elizabeth was a holy and righteous old lady, the wife of a priest. Suddenly, one of her relatives, perhaps a third cousin, the teenager Mary shows up at her door, unwed and pregnant. Elizabeth may have wanted to reprimand, rebuke or reprove her, or at least call her mom. Look at verses 41-45. "**When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!'**" What a powerful testimony of the Holy Spirit! How easy it is for us older people to get caught up in our own experiences, and hold God's work captive to our own standards. Elizabeth could have compared herself to Mary: "You haven't observed all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. You aren't married to a priest. You have a lot of growing to do little missy!" But she did not. Instead, she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She became so humble, seeing again the coming of King Jesus is the point, not her life or Mary's life. When we give room for the Holy Spirit to work, and he will make us broadminded like he is, with wisdom and words to be able to give the encouragement and counsel younger people need.

This is a crucial matter for us, as a ministry that focuses on college students. At 18 years old, many are directionless, or enslaved to sins. When I was 18, I might have been both. I may have been the worst of sinners. Despite this God uses us for his purpose to advance the kingdom of his Son, Jesus. Eighteen-year olds need God's words, and godly counsel. People who are much older than eighteen year olds may not have all the knowledge, but we have experience of years of failures to learn from. The good news is we don't need to be pregnant with John the Baptist or be descended from a priestly line to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let's pray that God may fill all our older people with the Holy Spirit, to see young people with eyes of hope, to confirm and encourage God's work. We need each other.

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Mary accepted God's word by faith. Mary sought out Godly counsel and help. But there was one more thing she did before she experienced the joy of the Lord. Look at verses 46-49. "**And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.'**" Does she sound like someone who feels dissatisfied with her life? She found true personal and existential fulfilment in her life, not by focusing on herself, but by getting over herself and focusing on the true protagonist in history: God, and his story. She found that obeying God's calling on her life was the very thing she always wanted, indeed what she was created to do. Her situation was not easy, and required her to suffer. But she was willing to suffer in order to participate in God's purpose to establish the kingdom of God through Jesus. This requires overcoming a self-centered worldview. It is counter intuitive, but this is the road Jesus gave us to walk, the road of self-denial (9:23). When God became the center of Mary's universe, his mercy to every generation became evident. She found herself in the stream of God's plan. God's great character of faithfulness, mercy, compassion and justice would be fully realized in the world through her Son. If we cling to the idea that the world revolves around me, we are never free to really pursue the great purpose God has for us. We can't find our place in his kingdom community, because a kingdom can only have one King. But when we let go and surrender to God we find ourselves in his redemptive plan and kingdom purpose. Then we too, like Mary, like Elizabeth, and countless others over history will know this deep satisfaction and fulfilment, that we are blessed.

Third, "he has come to his people and redeemed them" (57-80). When John was born, all the people gathered to celebrate, because it was clear to them that the Lord had shown great mercy to Elizabeth. They shared her joy. When the time came to name their son, Zechariah and Elizabeth remained faithful to God's word and named their son John. After Zechariah wrote John's name on the writing tablet, his speech was restored, and he began to praise God! They didn't draw attention to themselves, but remained faithful to God's word the end, so that all the people were filled with awe, talking about what God was doing, knowing the Lord's hand was in this.

Last week Sam mentioned that Zechariah's mute training was an Opportunity for Personal Improvement. Zechariah didn't let it go to waste. He was not discouraged, or nursing wounded pride; he was full of the Holy Spirit, and prophesied. Instead of focusing on himself or his family, he saw the bigger picture

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of what God was doing in the world, and is full of praise: “**Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them (68).**” His personal and family story found meaning and purpose in the greater narrative of God’s plan. His song is all about King Jesus. It is so deep and wide, but I want to focus on how God is establishing the kingdom of Jesus on this earth, what this means to us, and how we are to participate.

Verses 69-71 read, “**He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us –**” Horn here is a symbol of a mighty king, and that is Jesus. He uses his power to save us. Salvation from whom? Not terrorists, but Satan, and the power of sin. Satan holds people in bondage to sin, fear, shame and death. His hand is invisible but tangible. He is a liar and a murderer. When under the oppression of Satan’s hand, people are helpless. But our King Jesus, our Shepherd King, has come to save us from our enemies. Recently in Luke’s gospel we studied about Zacchaeus. When faced with the helpless situation of his national crisis, he became a slave to Satan. He became selfish, abused and hurt many people. Everyone hated him with good cause. But Jesus came to redeem even him. Zacchaeus had wanted to see Jesus, but Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus! Zacchaeus found strength in Jesus’ care to repent, even giving away half his possessions and paying four times restitution to those he had cheated. Jesus pronounced: “**Today salvation has come to this house (19:9).**” Each of us here has a story of how Jesus, the horn of salvation, has redeemed us, through his mighty power. This is how we become his subjects, not through his rule over us, but by his deliverance and salvation for us through his death.

Verses 72-75 read, “**...to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**” This has been God’s plan all along, through Abraham to bring Jesus our King into the world. He enables us as individuals and as a community, his royal priesthood to serve him without fear. This gives real purpose, satisfaction and meaning to life, to carry out the good work we are created in Christ Jesus to do.

Verses 76-79 reads, “**And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow**

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of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” Zechariah’s prophetic words gave clear mission for his son John. What he would announce Jesus would complete. Jesus’ coming into the world as the rising sun is so poignant. In every generation the gospel message is like a rising sun, which will soon cover the entire earth in the light of gospel truth. One Day Jesus is coming, O glorious day. In this we find a common goal and mission, to give people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins, that which is only found in the message of the gospel. We have a real cause for unity in mission, a real purpose and hope in the kingdom he is building, and a real way to participate. Let’s engage in it all the more as we pray and serve world mission, starting from our families, campuses, this church to the world. Let’s not remain small-minded, but see there is a whole world out there that needs this gospel, the good news of King Jesus.