

## Turn A Trial Into A...

Series: Only God Can

Luke 1:26-54

December 6, 2020

Welcome again to worship, as strange as this moment is. I told Myra last night that this year, I feel more like a television producer than a worship leader, what with scheduling recordings and editing video. We have done things around here that we've never done before, couldn't even imagine just 12 months ago. We have a Zoom account. I didn't know what Zoom was before February, but that's how we are doing a few Sunday School classes. We didn't have a YouTube channel until about 6 months ago. We have virtual meetings. Scott Hayes and I attended virtual Annual Conference. I haven't had a real, in-person meeting since the middle of October. All I've got to say is "wow", and thanks to everyone who has made this happen. 2020 certainly has been a trying year.

During Advent, we are hearing the message, experiencing a triumph, sharing a testimony, and winning the victory, because "Only God Can!"

Last week, we talked about the mess that the world was in when the angel Gabriel announced the upcoming birth of John the Baptist. We learned that only God can turn a mess into a message, a message of fearlessness, the presence of God, of a future, and of repentance and restoration with God.

Today, we are going to look at someone who had to go through a trial. I want to invite you to return to Luke 1:26-38:

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.<sup>1</sup>*

Six months have passed since Zechariah faced an angel inside the Temple in Jerusalem. Now we've moved north to Galilee and a village called Nazareth. We've switched from the religious capital of the country to a small, backwater town with a bad reputation. It was said in the Bible, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"<sup>2</sup>. We're told in verse 27 that this young woman, Mary, was a virgin engaged to Joseph.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:26-38 (NLT2)

<sup>2</sup> See John 1:46

Whereas Zechariah and Elizabeth are at the end of their long lives, Mary and Joseph are beginning theirs.

Now, I want us to try to look at this story from an outside perspective, as if it's brand new to us; even go so far as to put ourselves in Mary's situation. I want us to forget the end of the story – and I know that's hard to do – and consider Mary's perspective, the trial she was about to face. And if we do that, I think we see three things.

**First, Mary had to think, “This is not what I would have expected of me.”**

What do I mean by that? Well, the Bible clearly indicates that Mary was a virtuous and upright young woman.

Listen to what Gabriel said to her in verse 28:

*Greetings, favored woman!*<sup>3</sup>

Then two verses later:

*...you have found favor with God!*<sup>4</sup>

The word “favor” comes from the same Greek word *khar'-ece*<sup>5</sup>, which means to receive favor or grace because of something you have done.

Let me illustrate it this way: I do something good at home, and Myra has *khar'-ece* as a result. I take out the trash for two weeks in a row without Myra having to remind me, so she decides I've been a good boy and makes meatloaf for me.

Mary found favor with God because of the life she lived, one that feared God and follow His law. It was the same as Jesus was growing up. The Bible says:

*Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor [khar'-ece] with God and all the people.*<sup>6</sup>

So, Mary was virtuous and righteous before the Lord, the same kind of righteousness Jesus displayed growing up. Therefore, to find herself pregnant before marriage would have never been something she would have allowed to happen, unlike what happens so often today. Did you know that in 2018, of all the children born in that year in the United States, 40% were born to unmarried mothers?<sup>7</sup> Mary would have never allowed herself to become pregnant before she was married.

**Second, Mary had to think, “This is not what Joseph would have expected of me.”**

It's clear that Joseph knew what was right and what was wrong. Matthew 1:19 tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. It is the same adjective as was used to describe Zechariah and Elizabeth last week.<sup>8</sup>

So, when Joseph discovered the pregnancy, he knew it was not his child, and he knew what the Law said about this situation: if a virgin engaged to be married had intercourse, she and the man were to be stoned to death.<sup>9</sup> Mary knew all that as well; she knew what Joseph would expect of her. And she knew what could happen.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:28 (NLT2)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:30 (NLT2)

<sup>5</sup> χάρις

<sup>6</sup> Luke 2:52 (NLT2)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68\\_13-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_13-508.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 1:6

<sup>9</sup> See Deuteronomy 22:23-24

So, stoning was an option, but Joseph, being a righteous man, decided to instead quietly break the engagement so as not to publicly disgrace her. We'll talk about that next week.

But, for now, sufficient to say that this pregnancy was not what Mary knew Joseph would have expected of her.

So, to sum up thus far, Mary was a virtuous and upright young woman. Joseph was a righteous young man. One would have expected God to take care of them and bless them because of their obedience. But what happens? This leads to my 3<sup>rd</sup> point, and this is a big one.

**Third, Mary had to think, "This is not what I would expect of God."**

Isn't God supposed to reward and bless those who are faithful to Him?

He's supposed to care for her, not put her through this trial, this humiliation, through this gossip, through a potential death sentence. God is not supposed to do these things. Mary would never expected God to humiliate her, destroy her marriage to Joseph, to cast her integrity and righteousness into question.

But that's exactly what God did. God was asking Mary to take on a trial in her life, a big one, the biggest one a young virgin woman could take on: pregnancy out of wedlock.

Here's today's big point: **Only God can turn a trial into a triumph.**

God brought a trial into Mary's life, but He did not leave her to go through it without these 4 things.

**First, support from a strong believer.**

When we go through trials in our lives, a strong believer is what we need. Why? Because often in the midst of the trial, our faith can waver, our trust in God's providence and mercy can wane. We wonder, "Does God really know what He's doing here?" We need a strong believer to support us when we are going through a trial.

That's exactly what happened with Mary. Look at verses 39-41:

*A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>*

You and I need someone like Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, when we are going through our trials. I imagine that Elizabeth and Mary talked hours on end for the three months they were together. And this time helped Mary face the coming trial.

In the late 1800's, Ira Sankey was very famous for being D.L. Moody's song leader. On Christmas Eve of 1875, he was traveling up the Delaware River on a steamboat. Some of the passengers recognized him and asked him to sing for them. So, he sang the old hymn, "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us." As Sankey finished the hymn, a man stepped out from the shadows. He asked Sankey if he had ever served in the Union Army. He said he had. Then the man asked, "Can you remember if you were doing picket duty on a bright, moonlit night in 1862?" Sankey was very surprised and said, "yes." The man looked up at him and said, "I was there too. But I was in the Confederate Army. It was my job to shoot you that night. As you stood there, completely exposed in the bright moonlight, I drew my aim. Then you lifted your head and began to sing the same song you just sang. When you finished, it was impossible for me to take

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:39-41 (NLT2)

aim again. I thought, ‘The Lord who is able to save that man from certain death must surely be great and mighty.’”

It was Ira Sankey’s faith and voice that help a former rebel learn who God is.

**Second, a reminder of blessing.**

Often, when we are going through a trial, Satan tries to tell us, “God doesn’t love you. God doesn’t care for you. If He did, you wouldn’t be in the position you are in.”

It would have been easy for Mary to think that as well. But instead, she is reminded of God’s blessing. Verses 42-45:

*Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”<sup>11</sup>*

When you are going through a trial, you need to hear that God has a blessing for you. Then you know your trial will end in triumph.

**Third, the realization that God was there for her.**

Sometimes, when we go through trials, we wonder if God has left us alone in our misery. Even Jesus felt this. Yeah. From the cross, He cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”<sup>12</sup>

But Mary knew God was with her. Look at verses 46-49:

*Mary responded, “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.”<sup>13</sup>*

Though Mary was young, poor, female – all characteristics that, to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task – she knew God was with her.

I don’t know if you are going through a trial right now, but if you are, take Mary’s words and make them your own: God has taken notice of me. God has taken notice of me right here in the midst of my trial.

**Finally, the assurance that God is still God.**

When calamity strikes, when a pandemic hits, when our world turns upside down, we can easily think that God has lost it. He is no longer in control.

But that’s not what Mary says. Look at verses 49-55. What does Mary say?

1. God is holy.
2. He does great things.
3. He is merciful.
4. He is far above anyone you and I will ever face.
5. In fact, He lifts up the humble.
6. He brings us good things
7. He keeps His promises.

In the midst of our trial, we need the assurance that God is still God.

So, if you are in a trial right now, it probably isn’t what you wanted in your life; not something your loved ones wanted in your life; not something you think God would ever

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<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:42-45 (NLT2)

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 27:46 (NLT2)

<sup>13</sup> Luke 1:46-49 (NLT2)

allow in your life. But if a trial is in your life, then we know that only God can take that trial and give you a triumph through the support of a strong believer, by reminding you that you are blessed, by assuring you of His presence, and by helping you stand firm on the promise that God is still God.

Though none of you will face the trial of bearing God's only Son, learn from Mary to see how only God can turn it into a triumph. Join with Mary in saying, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 1:38 (NLT2)