

Text: Luke 1:46-55

Title: “The Joy of Serving God”

INTRODUCTION

We’re focusing this Christmas season on joy. The angel announced to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” Over and over again in the Gospels account of the birth of Christ there are references to this joy ... mega joy that is for everyone. The reason joy is such a huge part of the Christmas story is because it is such a huge part of the life the Messiah came to give us.

And if that joy is such a huge part of the life the Messiah came to bring us, why is it in such short supply in the lives of believers. We find ourselves whining and worrying ... stressed and depressed much of the time.

And in the absence of that real, mega joy, we try to stuff our lives with the things and experiences of this world, hoping to find that joy that is missing.

ILLUSTRATION – It’s like eating candy when what we need is real nutrition. Remember when your parents used to say, "You can’t have candy before your meal?" Why? It’s because they knew it would ruin your appetite for your next meal. The trouble with eating candy is that it gives you a sugar buzz, and then you don't feel hungry anymore, at least for a while. You see, candy hides the fact that your body needs certain nutrients like proteins and vitamins. The sugar buzz from candy masks your hunger for the things you really need. The things that produce happiness in this world act like spiritual sugar. It makes us happy temporarily, but it never lasts for long. And soon we find ourselves looking for something else. What we don’t understand is that we are starved for the joy and satisfaction in life that comes only through Christ ... joy that runs deeper and last longer (forever).

So I want to ask you again today, where is your joy? Where did you lose it? Where do you find it?

Joy comes from God. He is the source of this joy, and He gives it to His people. This is supernatural joy that comes with supernatural living. On the night before He was crucified Jesus said to His disciples:

John 15:11 - I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Notice Jesus said, “*My joy may be in you.*” Knowing the horrific pain and suffering of the Cross that awaited Him the next day, Jesus still talked about His joy. And He wants us to have it. The joy that filled Jesus can be yours and mine.

Open your Bibles to Luke 1:46. Last week we talked about the meeting of two very important women in the Bible ... Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Remember that Mary learned from the angel Gabriel that she was to become the mother of Jesus, the Messiah. Immediately Mary goes to the home of her cousin Elizabeth to stay with her for a few

months. When they first meet, the baby John, in Elizabeth's womb, leaps for joy at the approach of the Savior now in the womb of Mary. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and she speaks a message to Mary confirming that she is indeed the most blessed of women in the world, for she is carrying the Savior of the world. Beginning in Luke 1:46 we have what is called "Mary's Song." Mary's heart is so overwhelmed with the joy of being chosen by God for this huge task that she explodes with gratitude and praise. Read Luke 1:46-55.

I want to talk to you today about the joy of serving God. I know people who spend their lives rummaging around from hobby to hobby, relationship to relationship, toy to toy looking for what might be pleasing to them in the hopes that they will find a place to be happy. And they never find it. Stop the mad, elusive chase. Bury yourself in a life of service to God and you will find the joy you are looking for.

Look again at Mary's song. For nearly 2000 years it's been recorded in Scripture. As far back as 1500 years ago her song was set to music, and in various forms, the church has been re-singing her song.

Luke 1:46-48 - "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."

This overflowing joy and rejoicing from the fact that Mary is aware that God has chosen, called and equipped her to part of something that will bless the world. In her song Mary identifies herself as the Lord's "servant" (v.48). The word means "slave girl." She is overcome and overwhelmed and absolutely lost in service to her Great God.

Note: I think it's interesting that this joy comes over Mary, not while she's in the temple experiencing an exhilarating time of worship. No, she's probably sitting in Elizabeth's living room when her heart explodes with joy because she has been included in the great work of God her time ... that her life will be consumed with fulfilling the purposes of God.

Now to understand this we need to go back a few verses to see how Mary became part of this great thing that God was doing that brought her great joy. So let's go back to Luke 1:26. Luke 1:26-27 explain for us that God sent the angel Gabriel to deliver the message to Mary, who is pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. Luke is careful to acknowledge that Mary is a virgin. So God is giving to this young lady a task that will ultimately cause her to overflow with great joy as she is caught up in the great activity of God.

There's joy in serving God. But, having said that, we all know that not all service is joyous. Sometimes it is a drudgery and brings no joy. Why? It is because we are not serving in the "sweet spot."

ILLUSTRATION – Guys, if you play golf or baseball you know about the "sweet spot." When you hit the ball in just the "sweet spot" on the club or the bat ... just the right place ... there's unusual power. The ball explodes off of the club or the bat. Ladies, you know about the sweet spot when you're cooking. I've watched Nan in her sweet spot in the kitchen. She's got all the ingredients she

needs, all the utensils she needs, and the oven heated to just the right temperature. She's in the cook's "sweet spot." And the result is something delicious.

Well Mary is in that sweet spot ... the "service sweet spot." And the result will be something that blesses the whole world, and brings great joy to her heart. You'll find joy in the service sweet spot when these four things are lined up:

1. THE GRACE OF GOD (Luke 1:28,30)

Luke 1:28 - The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Luke 1:29 - Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

Luke 1:30 - But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

ILLUSTRATION – Maybe we don't exactly get the picture of how overwhelming this situation is for Mary. Students it would be like someone coming to you and telling you that by a strange twist of circumstances you are to become the principal of your school. At first you would think, "Great, now I can do anything I want. Class dismissed! But then the reality hits home that you are in no way qualified or capable, in and of yourself, to take on this task. That's the way Mary must have felt.

How could something (Someone) so great come from one so young ... so poor (peasant girl) ... so simple ... so unknown ... so unmarried ... so unrighteous (yes, Mary is not perfect)? Answer: Grace!

God always does it this way because in this is the way He gets the glory.

Now going back to Mary's song, you see that ...

- **God's grace flows to the humble.**

God works through humble people who realize how dependent they are on the grace of God. The Bible says that God gives grace to the humble. And that's exactly the way Mary sees herself.

Luke 1:48a - for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

Luke 1:51b - He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

Luke 1:52 - He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

This is true when it comes to salvation. You and I are lost in our sins and we cannot do a thing to save ourselves. We do not deserve to have a relationship with God and to have eternal life through Him. And the doorway to salvation is humbling ourselves to admit that.

And this is true in service. As long as I think God is privileged to have me on His team, I will be of no use to Him or to others. Grace is what makes our service truly glorifying to God and helpful to others, and that grace flows to the humble.

- **God's grace flows to the hungry.**

Luke 1:53 - He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

I think about the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:3 - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

As long as I'm full of myself and full of this world, I will never be filled with the grace of God. But when I realize my poverty apart from God, and I hunger and thirst for Him, I will be filled.

- **God's grace flows to the helpless.**

Luke 1:54 - He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

Luke 1:55 - to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

God came to help His helpless people. As long as we think that we can do things in our own strength, and that we don't need His help, we will miss the life God has for us.

So I have to say, "God I have nothing to give; I am helpless when it comes to really helping anybody. I empty myself so that you can do your work in and through me.

And this is true in service, because it is true in our salvation. We are helpless to save ourselves.

Romans 5:6 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless (helpless), Christ died for the ungodly.

And when we admit that we are humble, hungry and helpless, God's grace flows down.

You see, Mary saw the Lord turning everything upside down. And that's what grace does. Nobodies are exalted. And the hungry are filled. The helpless become strong.

ILLUSTRATION – In our service to God and others we should consume grace like a 747 consumes jet fuel. We just can't do the extraordinary without the grace of God, just like a 747 cannot fly without the jet fuel flowing to the engines.

So Mary sings with joy because of the grace of God. But also because of...

2. THE PRESENCE OF GOD (Luke 1:28)

Luke 1:28 - The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Remember that one of the names given to Jesus is Immanuel which means “God with us.”

ILLUSTRATION – I have a print hanging in my study right behind my desk. It depicts a preacher standing at the pulpit proclaiming God’s word. And there standing by his side, unseen the preacher and the people, is the Lord Jesus Christ with His hand placed on the shoulder of the preacher. That powerful image encourages me.

In the service sweet spot that creates such joy in the believer, we are aware of the presence of God ... as we preach ... as we teach ... as we sit in the floor and love on preschoolers ... as we serve food to the poor ... as we help people find a parking place.

Mary was serving in the grace of God, in the presence of God and in...

3. THE ASSIGNMENT OF GOD (Luke 1:31-34)

Mary is given the assignment of “presenting” Jesus.

Luke 1:31 - You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

Luke 1:32 - 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,

Luke 1:33 - and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

At its root, this is what all service is intended to do ... to present Christ ... so that His grace and mercy and help and salvation is present for others. Have you ever had someone serve you in such a way that you just felt the presence of Jesus? Maybe a friend came to your hospital room, or spoke an encouraging word in your discouragement, or taught you truth from God’s Word. And when you received that service you felt as though you were receiving it directly from the Lord.

Now notice how Mary responds to this revelation.

Luke 1:34 - “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

How will this be? The answer is in ...

4. THE POWER OF GOD (Luke 1:35-37)

Mary's joy overflows because she is serving God in service sweet spot ... in the grace of God, the presence of God, the assignment of God, and in the power of God.

Luke 1:35 - The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.

Luke 1:36 - Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

Luke 1:37 - For nothing is impossible with God."

You may think God could never do anything with someone like you or through someone like you ... someone with your weakness, someone with your past, someone with your fears. But that's exactly where God wants it.

1 Peter 4:11 - If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

God does it this way so He gets the glory.

CONCLUSION

How do we connect with this joy that comes in being consumed with the service of God? We must respond as Mary did:

Luke 1:38 - "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

I'm talking about the joy of serving God. Have you spent your life rummaging around from hobby to hobby, relationship to relationship, toy to toy looking for what might be pleasing to them in the hopes that they will find a place to be happy? And you never find it. Stop the mad, elusive chase. Bury yourself in a life of service to God and you will find the joy you are looking for.

INVITATION – Are you willing to say that? I am the Lord's servant ... May it be to me as you have said ... May God's will be done in my life. If that's where you are today, please stand.