

01/26/25 - Luke 1:39-56 - "Humble Vessels of Great Proportion"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Please turn with me to the Gospel of Luke 1, 39 through 56. It'll be on the screen, but I encourage you to look in your Bible as well.

Again, Luke 1, 39 through 56. Luke writes, starting in verse 39, In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah.

And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

[1 : 12] For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. This is God's word. Thanks be to God. God bless you.

It's exciting to be getting into a Christmas narrative. I love Christmas. I sing Christmas carols all year round, so this is very fitting for me.

[2 : 22] We're getting to Christmas in January. Amen. We're going to see something in the passage today, which was already proclaimed through the word.

We dissected that God fills humble vessels to achieve extraordinary purposes. That God fills humble vessels to achieve extraordinary purposes.

I want to clue you into a true story from the last century. There was once a small, dimly lit shoe store.

And as any shoe store, you walk in and you get high off of the fumes from leather and shoe polish, right? And within this shoe store, this single shoe store, was a young clerk that was carefully working, arranging shoes around the displays after the afternoon rush, and people ravaged the shelves like animals.

Now, just as anyone, anyone who's quietly working with their hands busy, our minds are working as well.

[3 : 40] We're off into our thoughts, right? Drifting off into the worries of life and work and more. This was just an ordinary young boy in a shoe store, faithful in his quiet work.

Now, outside this ordinary shoe store with this ordinary clerk was this young boy's Sunday school teacher named Edward Kimball, who on this day felt compelled to visit the boy's workplace to share the gospel with him.

After the last time in Sunday school, he noticed that this young clerk started asking very interesting questions as if God was doing something in his heart.

And so this Edward Kimball approached the shoe store. Summoning the courage to walk in, Edward steps inside, and it's game on.

He didn't get high from the fumes, but he did approach this Sunday school student and began to speak with him. And obviously, oh, what are you here for?

[4 : 55] You know, he doesn't have shoes. He's not interested in shoes. He's interested in a conversation. A little awkward start. Anyone else out there struggle with that small talk, right?

Amen. And, you know, the stammering, and it's kind of like, the reason I'm here. Remember, this ordinary Sunday school teacher shared the gospel with this young clerk, this student in Sunday school.

And now it's not a grand sermon, right? It's not an unforgettable impression in perfect words. Actually, Edward Kimball left the store feeling like he just pushed that kid further away from the Lord, maybe feeling deflated, convinced in his heart that he didn't make any difference at all. But what this ordinary Edward, this Sunday school teacher, didn't know, what he couldn't have known, is that this young clerk in that store was none other than D.L. Moody, who would one day be used by God as one of the greatest evangelists of his generation, preaching to millions and changing countless lives.

this ordinary D.L. Moody would grow up to inspire F.B. Meyer, who would influence Wilbur Chapman, who would mentor Billy Sunday, who shaped pivotally the life of Mordecai Hamm.

[6 : 31] Mordecai Hamm was the preacher who led Billy Graham to Jesus Christ. All of this was achieved along the stringed and threaded plan of God dating back to a nervous conversation in the back of a shoe store, which served to spark and ignite a chain reaction of faith in which God impacted millions even today.

See, God's greatest work often begins in the most ordinary places in life, especially among that which is unseen to the naked eye.

And today, we'll see this unfold in the life of Mary, in the life of Elizabeth, unseen to the naked eye.

And so, the sermon title today is Humble Vessels of Great Proportions.

And as I mentioned at the beginning, we'll see that God fills humble vessels to achieve extraordinary purposes. I'd like to pray specifically for the Lord to preserve my voice to the end of the sermon.

And we already have a praise in this sermon. I got all pages of my sermon this week. Last week, you probably didn't realize, I forgot the last page of my sermon on the printer.

[8 : 04] So, I was kind of just rolling with the spirit. There you go. The critics in the back are like, oh, we knew something was wrong. All right.

All right, let's pray. Father, strengthen me, uphold me, may your words speak through me, may your powerful presence overwhelm me, may your people today hear from you.

And Father, as I yield myself to your service, I pray that we yield ourselves collectively to receive what you want us to hear today.

Mold us today, shape us, and refine us by the power of your Holy Spirit through the working of your word. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And so, the first section of this is looking at a vessel of faith.

And this is looking at Mary's situation. And it goes from 39 to 45.

[9 : 12] And we left off in the narrative last week of Mary submitting her will to the mystery of God and his plan, his miraculous plan, a virgin birth.

That doesn't even make sense. It's paradox. This mysterious revealing of a virgin birth, and she submits to the Lord her will.

And Mary was given a sign that a barren elderly woman, Elizabeth, would also somehow, miraculously, be pregnant.

And to say the least, the urgency in this passage, she went with haste in verse 39 into the hill country, to a town in Judah. you can imagine that she didn't really hesitate too much.

She put those shoes on and she's like, okay, this is really odd. I need to figure this out if this is true. So Mary, with great urgency, saddles up, begins a solo trek.

[10 : 29] It's about 80 to 100 mile trek and a journey south to the countryside of Judea. And it was just her and her thoughts for this ordinary insignificant teenage girl.

Now, I want you to imagine for a moment, she arrives as this passage so quickly within two verses. Luke is getting right to it. He's saying, she got there.

We're not going to talk about the journey. She got there. In verse 40, she entered the house. And can you picture this scene after a three to four day journey going. She knocks on the door.

Standing on one side of the threshold is an old woman pregnant with that baby bump. An elderly woman.

And on the other side of the threshold is a young teenager not showing yet, just newly pregnant as a virgin.

[11 : 35] Both humble vessels of great proportions. Fascinating. And as Mary began to exchange words with Elizabeth, obviously greeting, you greet people like, Mary, what are you doing here?

Right? And at the moment that Mary greeted her, the text says, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb.

Now, I've seen weird things happen in my wife's stomach with our carrying our kids. The alien hands popping out and wiggling around.

But can you imagine women who have carried children in their bellies? Could you imagine what that does to your bladder? And that back pain?

Can you imagine what happens here? Surely, this was pretty significant response that happened at just the moment of Mary saying what the Lord was doing in her life.

[12 : 49] And she came to investigate and said, you would be pregnant. then all of a sudden this pound and a half child in a womb does the pole vault.

Literally, this nine inch child vaulted with joy before even Elizabeth could respond.

In other words, for Elizabeth, it was an experience that she couldn't see, but something she deeply felt within her. Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy because God's silence has been broken.

The salvation is near. What an image of the sanctity of life here, too. It's contentious in our world.

That a child, just a pound and a half, translucent skin, fingerprints, toe prints, not only has potential, with air quotes, of being an emotional and spiritual being, but that baby, a pound and a half, with an amionic fluid, is that emotional and spiritual being.

[14 : 21] maybe even more touching is the thought of the zygotes implanting in Mary's womb, which is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not a clump of cells.

See, God's purposes are present even in hidden states in life. what a precious reality, a reality within the womb.

And it's safe to say that Elizabeth's soul, as anybody, as that bladder gets smashed, she's like, what? You know, blessed are you among women, she says, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. She's like, I see in my mind some things once in a while, but I see her saying, blessed is the fruit in your womb, and blessed are you, you know, you are chosen, and that thing in your belly is chosen. In other words, Elizabeth attests that Mary is a humble vessel being used to achieve extraordinary purposes of God.

[15 : 43] God, she says in verse 44, for behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

It was not a coincidence, it wasn't a coincidence at all. This is a little reminder for parents that if you have been given the gift of children, it is not just any calling, it is a divine calling to be parents, whether biological parents or adoptive parents, the calling.

Parents are chosen by God, and God will sustain all those sleepless nights in crushed bladders.

Elizabeth attests that Mary is the humble vessel, and further, Elizabeth is likewise a humble vessel, being used the same way as Mary, six months along, but within her is a child that's already proclaiming the prophetic fulfillment that is being born and created within Mary's womb, already preparing the way of the Lord.

leaping for joy. What a scene. Especially if we consider in verse 45 the tense that shifts in verse 45. Elizabeth sort of turns from second person, like, look at you! And now she turns to third person in verse 45 as to speak to an audience.

[17 : 39] She's introducing the purposes of God to the world. She says, and blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

If only Zachariah could hear. all I could imagine with the excitement going on in that entryway is utter confusion.

Amazement, but utter confusion. And quite possibly dismay from the onlooking Zachariah, Elizabeth's husband. Because as we understand it, because of the previous episode, angel appeared to Zachariah.

Zachariah didn't believe. He grew apathetic to the promises of God. Cynical even.

And Zachariah's disbelief was judged, making him mute. And within the actual word, we could actually say that he was deaf and mute.

[19:00] Only the Lord knows that a bystander of something that he could have participated in if he only believed.

If you're here today thinking that you just wandered in for a little Sunday morning pick-me-up, you're here to witness the gospel and salvation of Jesus Christ in a real way that requires your faith to believe in.

God brought you here to hear the message of the gospel that God loves you and that in Jesus Christ you can have salvation in him. Only by your faith.

Don't be a bystander as the promises of God are being unfolded before you. Be a vessel of faith and I hope that this text gives you hope.

The passage sort of takes a transition in this other part and we see a vessel of mercy and that takes us all the way to the end from verse 46 all the way to 56.

[20:19] As Luke continues to sort of prime us any guys with your lawnmowers you know how to prime your engine you know it gets ready for the engine twist if that thing works but he's priming us for the body of the gospel for the message of his gospel we're only in chapter one there's more to come he's priming us he thought that it would be worth noting the paradoxical nature that Mary was experiencing that she was experiencing personally and the plans in store theologically for the world Mary begins to resound a song that will weave throughout the pages of Luke's gospel this song which is magnificat a Latin word that means magnify that's the first word that was translated here and I magnify the Lord my soul magnifies the Lord and it is beautifully woven through the tapestry of scripture and Luke makes it reverberate through the pages coming up throughout till we get to the end of his gospel these are the words of scripture songs like

Hannah songs like Deborah songs like David's song these were all customarily sung at feasts we don't memorize too much anymore other than those songs from the 90s that won't get out of our heads even if we put ourselves under hypnosis and they knew these songs you know the song of Deborah yeah you know and you just start singing it the song of Deborah song of Hannah these were on Mary's heart stored deep rooted scripture stored in Mary's heart and I'm sure she was singing those on the three and four day trek all the way to Elizabeth's house notice she pours it out she writes her own song notice the mercy that's been poured out upon Mary mercy is repeated twice in this song towards the end and

Mary says my soul magnifies the Lord she exalts the Lord makes him great and my soul my spirit rejoices in God my savior very personal you should sense that in verse 48 she says for he has looked on the humble estate of his servants in other words in a world that looks down on youth you're a teenager yeah okay you know one day you'll know right I'm a young pastor and trust me I know that what it's like to be looked on as sort of like in a cultural sense of lesser dignity because of my age and actually I've been told that I'm far too young to be a pastor and so I said okay thank you for your comment I'm going to keep I was at Panera I was getting coffee I'm like I'll continue getting my coffee and on we went we know this well the world looks down on youth youth don't know anything right but

God saw her the creator of the heavens and the earth looked down upon this young teenager she was probably 12 to 14 years old here looks down and changed her life this is how God works out Paul says in 1 Corinthians 127 God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong and Mary continues for behold from now on all generations will call me blessed it's not a brag it's a reality it has nothing to do with her but everything to do with God in verse 49 she continues for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name the honor belongs to God as all generations will call Mary blessed that from what not from what she has done because of her submission because of her obedience but actually what

God has done through her and choosing her and so as we realize the mercy poured out upon Mary we are squared up toe to toe with the theological principle that Christ comes to those who realize their need the ones who know they can't humble themselves Mary was a nobody from the middle of nowhere can anything good come out of there where this corrupt city she's from I love that we've

been sharing Augustine I'll give you another one Augustine says for those who would learn God's ways humility is the first humility is the second and humility is the third for those who would learn [25 : 55] God's ways humility is the first second and the third this is a theological reality that is unfolding in Mary's life God is seeking hearts like Mary's who magnify him who enlarge him in their souls and on their lips with the all encompassing passion of their being maybe you've been a Christian for a while today and we sort of fail to recognize God's ongoing mercy in our lives what I'm talking about is like you know that filled joy of salvation of what God is doing in your heart and life is kind of just it seems like God has thrown you in a blender chopped you up because of the twists and turns in life and poured you out right do you recognize

God's mercy in your lives today has your enjoyment of the Lord become past tense rather than present and kind of cynical in anything regarding the future has your enjoyment of the Lord become past tense whether you've forgotten or you remembered either one the passage today not to rekindle that flickering flame Christians those who are in Jesus Christ the joy of God's intervention in our lives is an unquenchable fire even yet sometimes a flickering flame a fire still it is and we see the beauty of a passage like this to remember God's mercy and that our joy may overwhelm our doubt our forgottenness and all of life's twists and turns

Mary moves from naming personal reasons for her magnifying the Lord that are very personal to her and she gives prophetic reasons for making him great she in other words she opens the book she continues to open the book she says yeah my experience is what God's done for me and me and me and sometimes our culture stops there right it's all about what God's doing for you but she opens!

she opens the book and she's like look what he's been doing all throughout history verse 51 through 53 God's mercy brings mighty reversals and we see that in verse 51 to verse 53 he has shown strength with his arm he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate he has filled the hungry with good good things and the rich he has sent away empty these are theological reversals he scattered the proud in verse 51 this is reminiscent of Isaiah 2 that all the proud and lofty will be humbled God will humble the proud brings a social reversal that brings down rulers and lifts up the humble this reminds us of

Daniel 4 where Nebuchadnezzar turns to God and we see the spiritual and material reversal the filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty as Psalm 107 9 says for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things the mercy of God is received not by moral works not by social works not by social justice not by material wealth or even poverty this is not liberation theology as if God has a bias towards the poor Mary's song is a song of old that she is a recipient of mercy by her faith in God's plan for her life rich or poor she closes her song he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy he has spoke to our fathers and to

[30 : 58] Abraham and to his offspring forever this magnificat ends in a complimentary aspect of God's character through the Old Testament he's the mighty hand that overthrows all those who oppose him he's a sledgehammer to a heart made of stone but he is also promise keeper who never backs out God remembers his covenants and his promises to Abraham and fulfills all of them in Jesus Christ completely you see Mary's exaltation celebrates the entire scope of God's saving work that she saw personally and she saw in the book this was good news and the magnificat reminds us that God turns the world's values completely upside down in his kingdom up is down and down is up right do you see yourselves as recipients of God's mercy dependents upon his grace rather than our status or dependent on our works has

God turned our values upside down to align with his kingdom values friends let's not make a false image of God to suit our desires today in the passage with the great reversals morally socially and materially we see how God theologically works in this world we are meeting the one true God in his word today and this is good news for our realignment and for his glory praise God indeed whether through a quiet act of obedience in a shoe store or bold faith like that of D.L.

Moody God can use you to achieve extraordinary purposes in your life the question is are you willing to be humble to God will you be a humble vessel for God we have to remember that faith isn't about our ability but faith is about our availability to God's extraordinary purposes we have to trust in God's plans even when they seem delayed even when they seem hidden even when they don't make sense remembering that your story that God is ushering through this life is part of a greater tapestry!

of his purposes for life at large knowing that God finishes everything that he starts and he has not forgotten you so if you find yourself today in unbelief may you submit unbelief to him if you are fearful with his plans may you submit your fear to him no matter the challenge God is faithful to his promises and he works through humble vessels to achieve extraordinary purposes!

Like Mary and Elizabeth you are not alone in this journey may we bunk up as Mary did together as a community for three months living within the promises of God the verse ends and Mary remained with her about three months three months talking about the promises of God may we not neglect to meet together church reflect on those promises regularly God provides his spirit his word and his people to walk alongside each of us we're not alone on this journey so may the glory of God's power and our surrender be noticeable in us let's pray■