

MY SOUL PRAISES THE LORD
(The Song of Mary)

Luke 1:39-56

Key Verses: 1:46,47

"And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....'"

There are two songs of praise in verses 39-80. One is the song of Mary, and the other is the song of an old man, Zechariah. They are just like two soloist singers in an opera. The exquisite soprano voice of a young girl is heard, then it is followed by the peaceful baritone of a white-haired old man. In this passage, we learn how our souls can rejoice in God and when we can write poems about the holy God. Last time, we studied the birth of Jesus foretold to Mary. Mary was supposed to be the mother of Jesus. It was difficult to accept. But she accepted it. Now let's see how she begins to carry it out.

First, Mary visits Elizabeth (39-45).

Mary was a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. Her marriage problem was solved in favorable circumstances. After engagement, the mystery of romance crept into Mary's heart. Since then she whispered many times a day, "Joe, I want just to see you." When Mary heard the angel's message, she realized that she was a very ordinary country girl who wanted to live an ordinary life. But God was with her. Mary simply chose to do the will of God after hearing the angel's tidings (Jn 7:17). In response to the angel's message, Mary said in verse 38, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Her absolute obedience came from believing in the word of God absolutely. This part reminds us of John 14:21. It says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Mary had the fear of God in her heart. So she loved God with all her heart and with all her soul and with all her strength (Deut 6:5). Because Mary loved God, she was ready to obey God absolutely.

Humanly speaking, Mary was in deep dilemma due to the angel's message. If she were a worldly woman, she might have visited Joseph first and cried many tears for her adverse circumstances before Joseph. But Mary did not go to Joseph. Instead, she visited Elizabeth to see the work of God in her, as the angel had said. Mary's act of faith was more than beautiful. Her act of faith is quite different from

Eve, who was utterly spoiled by God's abundant blessing; thus she caused her husband Adam to disobey the holy command of God (Ge 2:17). In her act of faith, Mary gave up her beautiful dream of marriage. In her act of faith, Mary gave up Joseph, who had a kingly bearing. This reminds us of George Whitefield's (1714-1770) friend. His name was Howell Harris. He was in love with a widow named Elizabeth James--and she was also in love with him. But when he prayed for George Whitefield, he realized that George needed a person most suited to help him. Mr. Harris found one. She was his fiancée. So Mr. Harris introduced her to George. Mr. Harris saw that they had never awakened from the mood of honeymoon. Mr. Harris was the same as Mary who gave up Joseph.

But it was not easy for Mary to visit Elizabeth, who lived in a mountain village a long distance from Nazareth. To get there, Mary would have to travel through mountain passes, where there were many possible dangers. Another problem was the generation gap between them. Moreover, it was a moment when Satan was attacking her with full-fledged force to stop her obedience to God. Satan tried to make her feel very sorry for Joseph and cry endlessly, saying, "O Joseph, Joseph." Satan bullied her by using the disappointment of family and village people. She could have been frozen by Satan's whispering. How nice it would be for us to get a Ph.D. without taking any examinations! How nice it would be for us to do God's work without any hindrance of Satan. But when we want to do God's work, Satan is right there to hinder us. Satan must have surrounded Mary not to practice her act of faith. When Mary was ready to obey God's will, God helped her to do so. Mary won the battle before fighting. Then God gave her strength to visit Elizabeth in that situation. How easy it is for all sinful people to go to Joseph, forgetting all the words they had learned. But Mary remembered the word of God through the angel's message. God helped her go to Elizabeth to see what God had done in Elizabeth. God is with those who are holding on to the word of God. When we are in a spiritual crisis, it is important for us to remember God's word. But most of the time, we fail to do so. We must remember God's word in a time of crisis, as Mary did.

Still, it was not easy for Mary not to go to Joseph to talk about the matter. But when she had the angel's message, God enabled her to visit Elizabeth as the angel had said to her. Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth (39,40). It was an act of faith. One act of faith is better than bubbling 10,000 theological arguments. Her act of faith overcame her destiny. Her act of faith led her into the providence of God. With God's help, Mary finally knocked at the door of Elizabeth's home. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her leaped in her womb (41). Probably, the baby in Elizabeth's womb welcomed Mary as gladly as Elizabeth welcomed her. Look at verses 42,43. "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?'" A white-haired grandmother bowed her head down to the ground before an unwed girl and called her, "the mother of my Lord." It seems funny that a grandmother treated a young girl in such a humble way. It is possible only in the spiritual world. In verse 42 Elizabeth says, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" At present, unbearable hardship was reality to Mary. It was to become the mother of Jesus before her marriage. But Elizabeth counseled and convinced Mary that to become the mother of Jesus is blessed. And the baby Jesus in her womb is the most blessed. In reality, his birth was to save men from their sins. So it is the most blessed in the sight of God. Elizabeth was a white-haired old woman. But she felt that she was greatly honored to see the mother of Jesus with her own eyes. In this way, Elizabeth counseled her that Mary was blessed by God. Look at verse 45. "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" Elizabeth did not stop counseling Mary to overcome the present situation. Elizabeth also counseled her to believe that the word of God is absolute and that those who believe in the promise of God are blessed. Elizabeth's spiritual counseling made an environment for raising the mother of Jesus.

Second, Mary's soul praises the Lord (46-47).

Mary was convinced that God was working in her life. Look at verses 46,47. "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....'" When Gabriel first said to her, "You will be with child" (31), she was afraid. But now she was convinced that God was doing a great work in her life to use her as the mother of Jesus. When God's message through the angel was confirmed by Elizabeth's counseling to believe what the angel had said, Mary burst into songs of praise. There are 150 Psalms in the Old Testament. Most of them were written by King David. King David did not write these psalms of praise only when his situation was good and favorable. He also wrote songs of praise to God when he was in the midst of human agonies, even when he was running for his life. David wrote songs of praise at a time of defeat and at a time of victory. He could sing songs of praise anytime because he had the fear of God in his heart. The most happy time for mankind is when we believe that God is our shepherd. In Psalm 23:1-2, David said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters...."

Verses 46-47 say, "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....'" This stanza is a burst of rapture, in which her full heart overflows. When she was pledged to be married to Joseph her soul did not rejoice.

Instead, she enjoyed the dream of marriage and talked to herself secretly, "Joe, O Joe, I want to see you just one more time." This kind of joy is an emotional and temporal one. Such a joy has no guarantee after marriage. But when Mary's heart was moved by God's message through the angel, and she came to know that Jesus is great because he is the Son of God, her soul rejoiced even if she had to pay the cost of being the mother of Jesus. Mary's soul rejoiced when she came to know that the kingdom of God is forever. Mary's soul rejoiced when she came to know that her God is mighty but he is merciful. They say that the heart is the door to one's soul. Her soul praised God when she had God in her heart. Fanny Crosby was a very pretty, artistic woman. But she became blind as an infant. For the time being, she became a slave of her destiny. Soon she met Jesus. Through Jesus, she restored her peace of mind. Through Jesus, she was convinced that she has eternal life. Through Jesus, she could see the kingdom of God. She became a most famous hymn writer and composer. This indicates that those who have God in the center of their hearts have true joy. Otherwise, human beings are doomed to be miserable all the time, even in the favorable circumstances.

Third, Mary praises God because God gave her a mission (48-49).

Look at verse 48. "...for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed..." Here, a personal testimony from her soul comes pouring out. Mary was humble. She was nothing but a village damsel, poor and obscure. She wondered why God's eyes had fallen on her, and why God favored her. Mary was happy in her soul in the realization of God's choosing her. Mary was happy that God chose her as the mother of Jesus. But her blessing involved her to watch all the suffering of her beloved son Jesus. Finally, she had to stand beneath the cross of Jesus to watch crucified Jesus. Her pain of watching her son on the cross was as painful as a sword piercing her soul (2:35). Mary had already experienced the pain of a broken relationship with Joseph. Now she had to pay the high cost of being the mother of Jesus. But she was not miserable because God gave her a mission to be the mother of Jesus. Mary had spiritual eyes to see from God's point of view. Read verses 48-49. "...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." For the time being, Mary will suffer as the mother of Jesus. But in the future she will be the most blessed one. That's true. Down through generations, people were abundantly comforted, even to think of the beauty of Mary. The people of the former USSR adopted atheism, by the force of the system. But there were innumerable underground churches. The country has kept more than 500,000 pictures of Mary drawn by artists. All people of all nations see Mary as the most blessed woman.

Fourth, Mary praises God because he is merciful (49-50).

Look at verses 49-50. "...for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." Mary was a mere country girl. But she was mature enough to see God in history. There are two clauses which express God's twofold character--"the Mighty One" and "His mercy extends." "The Mighty One" is Almighty God with whom nothing is impossible (37). The Mighty One is the Creator God. Our God is the ruler of history. In view of history, absolute power corrupts people absolutely. This became the vicious cycle of human history. But our God is mighty, he did not use his power over the helpless. Our Mighty God uses his mighty power through his love. Look at verse 50. "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." It is full of grace and truth that our Mighty God sent his one and only Son Jesus as a ransom sacrifice for our sins.

Fifth, Mary praises God because God rules the world (51-53).

Look at verses 51-53. "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." In this part, Mary praises the Mighty God who rules world history with justice and mercy. Praise God! Nobody has heard that the powerful rulers ruled their people with justice and mercy. But our God rules his people with his justice and mercy. For example, his chosen people abused his long-suffering patience. But God did not condemn them. God justified them through his Son Jesus Christ (Ro 2:4).

Sixth, Mary praises God because he keeps his promises (54-56).

In the last part of her song, Mary was overwhelmed by the faithfulness of God who kept his promises spoken through his servants. Look at verses 54-55. "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." Mary was thankful for the faithfulness of God, even though his people were terribly unfaithful. God did not have to keep his promise to those terribly unfaithful people. But he kept his promise by sending his Son as the Savior of the world.

May God bless us to have God in our hearts so that we can be pleasing to God and we can be happy all the time.