



TIME OF GRACE®

Christmas Stress: I Might Have Too Much Pride

Study Notes

Summary

What do you think about yourself, especially compared to others? How we answer that question reveals a lot about us. Because, Pastor Mike says, God will flip it: God will smash the pride of people who think they're so good. And those who know they're not will be raised up. Why does God do this?

- How to erase _____.
- **Luke 1:39-45** — ³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"
- It's not about _____, or _____. It's about _____.
- **Luke 1:67-80** His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ 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, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." ⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

- To erase _____, know his _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Review Luke 1:57-66. The people Elizabeth and Zachariah did life with “shared their joy”. In what ways has doing life with your group this last year produced the fruit of joy? How does more joy affect our other roots? (see verses 65 & 66)
2. Read Luke 2 every day this week leading up to Christmas Eve. Take time to prayerfully consider all of the different characters — their role, their words, their actions. Share your takeaways with your group, spouse, or family.
3. 2nd Corinthians 9:15 says, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” In a season of giving and receiving gifts, consider the words you would use to describe God’s generous gift to you in Jesus.
4. Have you invited “your one” to worship with you this Christmas Eve? If not there is still time — reach out and invite them to hear the good news about Jesus.

Homework

Luke 2:1-7

Time of Grace Ministry
Christmas Stress: I Might Have Too Much Pride
Luke 1:39-45; Luke 1:67-80
December 18, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

Now, all these professors and teachers that I had in Bible college and in Seminary, they taught me that at the very heart of the Christian faith is a God who flips it. But if you honestly look at the things that Jesus said, and the people to whom he said it, what Jesus was always, always, always doing was flipping people's expectations.

Alright, the people who thought that they were good, and they were alright with God, and they weren't like those people, Jesus flipped it. And he said shocking things, he threatened people, he said in his own words that they were in grave spiritual danger. And then all these other people who you think would have no chance, he flipped that, too. Prostitutes, tax collectors, shepherds, the lost, the broken, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the excluded, the prodigal son. See, he would take those who were totally - like had lost their chance with God, and he'd flip it. And he wouldn't give them a ladder to get their way back to be right with God, he would declare in the moment that they were already good with God through faith in what he would do. I was taught that when you minister to people, when you pastor a church, what you should be doing 90% of the time is flipping it. Telling people who think they're good, that they're not. Telling people who know they're not good, that they are.

What do you think? If it was me and you at the coffee table, and I promise not to use the phrase grave spiritual danger, and I asked you what you thought about you, and other people, and heaven, and hell, what would you say about yourself? Now, the way you answer that question is -- it is so profound that -- here's what I've learned.

When religious people get in the room and they think a lot about their own behavior, it gets really ugly, real fast. I've been in so many Bible studies where the problem is 'those people'. "Can you believe those people? Have you seen what's happening in America with those people?" And it becomes, so quickly, so unlike Jesus and everything he stood for. It makes me throw up just a little bit in my mouth. And what I want to try to prove to you today is that the Christian faith flips it. That before it's too late, God wants to take that attitude, that pride, and he just wants to smash it to little bits. And then he wants to take you, when you're broken, and lost, and embarrassed, and ashamed, he wants to raise you up to places that you never, ever thought would be possible, not just for the sake of your own humility, but for the sake of your happiness in eternity.

So, here's my premise today. If you have to go to the bathroom, or you fall asleep, or you change the channel watching at home, I'm going to try to prove to you from the Bible that Jesus is in the flipping business. Right?

The Gospel of Luke, which is this complete, well-researched record of the life of Jesus, comes back to this theme dozens, and dozens, and dozens of times, that what Jesus did when he walked on this earth was flip it. And it turns out that we don't have to go very far in the Gospel of Luke to find a story to prove it. Because in the very first chapter, on the very first page, we meet Mary. So, the very first story of how God flips it. Listen to what Luke writes starting in chapter 1, verse 26. "In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy," Elizabeth was an older relative of Mary. "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendent of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 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.'"

This great, powerful angel, humbles himself and comes to the little town of Nazareth to no name Mary, just planning her wedding, a virgin pledged -- probably a teenager in her culture. And what's Mary's reaction? She is greatly troubled. She does not say, "Finally, the virgin Mary." No, she's greatly troubled. She wonders if she's in trouble with God. But did you catch what the angel said twice? "No, Mary, don't be afraid. You are favored. Greetings, you who are highly favored! Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God." Favor is another word for undeserved love. Like, you shouldn't get it, but you get it. And Mary got it. God sends one his most important angels to this humble place because he was about to flip it. Gabriel said to Mary, "Mary you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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. '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.'"

Wait, "The power of the Most High will overshadow you." Well, what does that mean? Mary's not pregnant, and then like a cloud passes over her head, and suddenly there's a baby? And how does that work if like half of your genes come from your mom, and half your genes come from your dad, so you got, you know, dad's eyes and mom's nose. Did Jesus just look entirely like Mary? The Holy Spirit is a spirit, he's not a physical person. How could he help create a physical child? And the answer is, I don't know. I don't know. This is a one-of-a-kind conception because Jesus of Nazareth was a one-of-a-kind kid. His very start was a miracle, because what he would be would be a miracle. Somehow the Holy Spirit was involved, so the child that came out of her was not sinful like Mary, but sinless. "The one to be born of you," the angel said, "will be called the Son of God." The Holy one to be born, this is Jesus.

There was an old prophecy that said, "A virgin would be with child and give birth to a son. He would be Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'" The Holy God would be among us. And I love how Gabriel put it, "No word from God will ever fail." I love Mary's reaction to this stunning news, verse 38. "'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.'"

Then the angel left her." Like, you can kind of plan on getting pregnant. You can try. She's busy, poor girl, planning a wedding, now she's going to have a baby. And oh yeah, how are you going to explain that to Joseph? I mean he knows, right? He knows that they have not been together. What is she going to say to him, and what will her neighbors say? You ever been in a very religious, very small town before? Like, her life is going to get so difficult, so complicated, not to mention being the mother of the sinless, holy, Son of God, the promised descendant of king David, and here's what she says, "You first. I am the Lord's servant." Before her son would grow up to teach the Lord's prayer, she paraphrased it, "May your word to me be fulfilled, Father, your will be done."

Humble Mary from this humble town is exalted to become Mary, the mother of God. If you would visit Nazareth today, you would see a beautiful reminder of this story. I want to show you a picture, in the middle of that city you would see this. That towering roof in the middle of the city, that is the massive Basilica that was built over the place where they think Gabriel appeared to Mary. It's called the Basilica of the Annunciation. The original church dates back to the 300's AD, just when Christianity became legal. What you're looking at here is a renovation that happened in the 1960's, and if you'd ever see it, it is a beautiful church. What I love most about it wasn't the towering roof or the big stone walls. What's so cool about the Basilica of the Annunciation is that there's this courtyard around it, and on the outer walls of the courtyard are mosaics from almost every country in the world. African countries, Asian countries, South American countries, all have created their pieces of art to depict Mary, the Mother of God and her little son, Jesus.

I want to show you another picture, what we see inside the church. It's a cavernous church with a big altar where they celebrate communion in the middle. There are chairs and a choir set up, and there's this black iron gate, you can see just below that arch, because below that arch is the original, tiny town -- this village, where Mary lived. God took a nobody from nowhere, and he made her a somebody from somewhere. That's why Mary busted out in her famous song. And soon after the angel Gabriel left her, Mary hurried off to see Elizabeth, her pregnant relative. They celebrated the children within them, Jesus with Mary, John the Baptist with Elizabeth, and Mary was so overwhelmed by the goodness of God that she busted out in a song, some of you grew up singing it, it's called the Magnificat.

And here's what she said. "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. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 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 rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.'"

Right, Mary's soul was so happy. She was, like, jumping with joy. Why was she glorifying the Lord? The short answer is because the exalted God didn't mind the humble state of Mary.

Because the great God did great things for a woman who had not done great things. Because all Mary had was a receptive heart and a fear of God, and God extended his mercy. The rich would be cast down, rulers would pass from their thrones, but Mary would be remembered forever because God exalts the humble, he lifts up the hungry, and he remembers to help those who serve him.

So, case study number one. If you want to remember my big idea for today, write this down. You can write this down at home, too, that God flips it. Mary's story is proof that the Christian faith flips it. So, let's practice. I'm going to machine gun, rapid fire, tell you a whole bunch of stories from the Gospel of Luke. Here's what I need you to do, I need you to put out two fingers like this, go ahead, all of you, you're working with me, alright, little scissors. Now, when I tell you a story that sounds like, "Wait, it's upside down." I need you to do this, alright? If you have carpal tunnel, you can take this one out, but all the rest of you have to play along with me, okay?

There are a bunch of shepherds, poor dirty, third shift workers, and they became the first witnesses of the birth of God in the flesh. The prodigal son took his father's money, he squandered it on parties and prostitutes. He came home and said, "I'm not even worthy to be called your child." And the father ran off the back porch and said, "My son is home, he's alive, we're going to celebrate." A very rich and very good man came to Jesus. He said, "Jesus, what do I have to do to be saved?" He said, "Keep the commandments." The guy said, "I have." Jesus said, "Leave behind your wealth and follow me." And the guy went away.

Zacchaeus was the worst tax collector of all. Worked at the crossroads of two interstates, hustled people out of so much money. He climbed a tree because he was so short, and no one made way for this terrible sinner until Jesus saw him and said, "Come down, I'm staying at your house today." The most religious men circled the cross of Jesus, spit at his feet, they mocked him to his face, and then soon they would stand before his mighty throne. But a thief on a cross next to him, had nothing to offer, he was dying because he was bad. And he said, "Have mercy. Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And then Jesus died. The light of the world extinguished in darkness, until Sunday came. And the angel said, "He's not here. He's risen, just like he said."

And I could tell you 15 more stories just from the Gospel of Luke. The whole point of the Christian faith is that people who think they're so good are cast down, and people who know that they are so not, are raised up. You might be nobody from nowhere, but in Jesus you can become somebody who's going somewhere.

So, let's talk about you. I asked you before, I'll ask it again, what do you think of you? I don't know if my timing or my tone is right, but I'm not going to sugar cookie coat it with you today. If you have believed the self-esteem message of modern American culture, if you look in the mirror and say, "I am good. I'm worthy. I deserve it. Hell? Not me. Heaven? Obviously." If you get together with friends or family, and it is so much easier to vent than confess, according to Jesus, you are in grave spiritual danger. God has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts, he said. See, the only reason you and I can end up thinking that is because we've forgotten this one thing that Mary said. Mary said, "Holy is God's name." I think the reason that we get

deceived into thinking we're good people is because we keep thinking of their names instead of his name. We think about the things that other people do that we honestly don't. We think about the decisions other people make, the temptations that we resist, and compared to their names, if there was an order, I don't know how you'd figure that out, but it might be true. Morally, some of us are better than others. Some people make good decisions, and some people don't. Some people give into temptation, and other people don't.

But Mary said that's not the point. The point isn't to look at them and then look at yourself. The point is to look at God and then look at yourself. Imagine this, imagine if the all-knowing God spliced together a one-minute video of the worst moments of your life. Not like a Lord of the Rings three-hour video. Just one minute, that's it. Just like, jump cuts, you know, it's that worst moment with your siblings, or the most rebellious thing you ever said to your dad's face. The camera following the URL that you typed in, the link you clicked, the thing you said when you thought it was just you and your best friend. Like, the worst decisions you made when you were drinking too much, the worst things that ever came out of your mouth when you thought no one was listening, the worst things that swirled through your heart. If it was just one minute -- and let's leave God out of it, if it was just us, and those 60 seconds played on that screen, would you even breathe? I wouldn't. Would any of you be able to stand up after that minute was over, grab the mic and say, "I'm a good person?"

And that's not even the point. The point is, if you would be embarrassed, mortified that sinful people would see that, what about God? Because God can't relate to that. "Holy is his name." Jesus doesn't say, "I've been there." He's the holy one of God. The way you feel about some of those monsters who show up, like, you think, I would never. That's how God feels about all of it. God says, I would never say that, I would never do that, I would never be that unkind, that unloving, that impatient, never.

So, give up the delusional belief that we are the good ones, that they are the problem. Come to God in deep repentance and humility. Because here's what Mary knows, you will end up so happy if you do. You know, the problem with thinking you're good is that you have to prove it every day. The good part about knowing you're not is that you throw yourself before the throne of Jesus. And Mary says this, "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." When you come humbly before Jesus, it says, "He lifts up the humble." When you fear him, you say, "I don't deserve to be in your presence." Mary says, "God's mercy extends to those who fear him." When you say, "God, have mercy on me, I'm empty, I have nothing to offer you." Mary says, "God has filled the hungry with good things." When you say, "God, help." Mary says, "God has helped. God has remembered to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just like he promised."

I love how this picture puts it. Jesus is the light of the world. He is the king of heaven. He is clothed in righteousness, love, and purity. We are so often in the shadows of darkness, we deserve the thorns and punishment of God, but Jesus, he flipped it. He clothed us in himself. He crowned us with glory and righteousness. So now, when I look in the mirror, I say, "I am the worst sinner I know, and I'm loved, I'm forgiven, I'm saved, I'm safe, I'm sanctified, I'm justified, I am holy, I am a son of God, I am dear to God, I am beautiful to God, God delights when he

thinks about me, his face shines upon me, not because I deserve it, but because Jesus did, and through Jesus I have what he had." Friends, there is such unbelievable joy when you come to God with nothing, because he offers you everything, because he gives you Jesus. I'll let our Savior have the final word. "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but everyone who humbles himself will be exalted." Let's pray.

Ah, Jesus, thank you for mercy. I thank you that we don't have to fake it. Thank you that we don't have to come to groups, and Bible studies, and church, and just act like everything is good and all our decisions have been good. We can be so radically honest because your love reaches to the bottom.

Thank you, Jesus, that you didn't come to make Pharisees a little bit better, you came to make tax collectors and prostitutes holy in God's sight. Thank you that your word of grace and forgiveness isn't just for the good half of us, it's for all of us. Thank you, God, that you so loved the whole world, that you gave your only Son Jesus, that whoever believes in him should not perish but, right now, have eternal life.

Jesus, thank you for picking Peter. He was a trainwreck of a human being, and he became great in your sight. Thank you for picking Mary. Nobody knew her name, and now we all do because you are merciful and kind. Thank you that you were known as the friend of drunks, and tax collectors, and sinners, so those of us who have been drunk, who have sinned, who've loved money more than you would not believe, that our chance is over. Thank you, God for being you. One who lifts up the humble, reaches to the bottom, and while we were still sinners, gave your Son, Jesus for us.

Finally, God, I'm praying for courage this Christmas season. If church that we invite people to is just about some nice songs and a nostalgic feeling, it will do nothing for us. But if it is about God coming to the bottom, being born in a trough, showing up as great God in a little town called Bethlehem, being raised in a tiny village of Nazareth, then that means something so good for us, God. It means it's never too late. It means none of us are too far gone. It means no matter what has happened, what is still happening, we can come to you, and something shocking and beautiful will happen, you'll lift us up and seat us with Jesus.

We love you, God, but we believe that you love us infinitely more, and you loved us first. So, we pray all these things today in Jesus' name. And God's people said amen.