

“Mutual Love”

Luke 1:37-38a, 40-55, 2:19, “Hebrews 10:1-18, Matthew 22:37-40

Pastor James York

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“True blessedness is a pervasive joy that comes from trust and belief in the fulfillment of God’s word.” According to Pastor Mary Lewis.

After Gabriel told Mary that she would deliver Jesus. Mary believed God. The gospel of Luke explains. **Luke 1:40-45 NRSV “Mary entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child, [John the Baptist], leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”**

“True blessedness is a pervasive joy that comes from trust and belief in the fulfillment of God’s word.” Scripture’s favorite topics are love, joy and grace. Mary shows us how to accept and receive grace, envision, ponder and share grace.

Initially Mary was confused by Gabriel’s good news of our savior Jesus. Next she had questions. Gabriel responded. **Luke 1:37-38a NLT “For nothing is impossible with God.” Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant, and I am willing to accept whatever God wants.”** Mary accepted God’s grace.

God is constantly offering us grace. God continuously showers us with love. Yet, God honors our free will and does not force us to accept. A gift can only be enjoyed if it is unwrapped and accepted by the recipient.

We suffer a lot of pain, guilt and hate because we often reject grace. Richard Swenson says “I don’t think most of us realize what a weighty emotional burden it is to judge others, [judge ourselves] and to be judged in return. It is a form of emotional and spiritual suicide—like chopping a hole in the bottom of your lifeboat because you don’t want the other person [or yourself] to be rescued. Grace, on the other hand, treats people [and yourself] not as they [or you] deserve, but better than they deserve. Grace preempts accusations, freeing both parties. When we extend grace to our enemies, they receive a shockingly unexpected glimpse of the Kingdom. And, at precisely the same time that our adversary is released, we are as well. Why would anyone wish to go around carrying a donkey on their shoulders when they could ride instead. Why would anyone wish to be harsh when they could instead be free? Grace not only revives, grace lifts us to heaven.”

Many people reject grace with a discontentment gap. If you were to draw a line representing the person you want to be and another line representing the person you are, there will likely be a gap. One of the purposes of scripture is to make us aware of this gap. If this gap makes you discontent, sad, guilty, and pushes you to relentless struggle to bridge the gap then you are rejecting grace.

Accepting grace fills you with joy because you are certain that God bridges this gap. You are set free from guilt, the pressure of earning love, the need to be righteous because God bridges the gap. This freedom allows you to flourish. Out of gratitude you strive to move closer to the person you want to be, however God always is there to bridge the remaining gap with grace.

Hebrews explains how in the Old Testament days people were overwhelmed, felt guilty and held captive by the gap but now in Jesus by accepting grace we are set free. **Hebrews 10:1-18(NLT) “The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. That is why, when Christ came into the world, Jesus said to God, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. Then Jesus said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God—as is written about me in the Scriptures.’” First, Christ said, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them” (though they are required by the law of Moses). Then Jesus said, “Look, I have come to do your will.” God cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect. For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But Jesus, our High Priest, offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then Jesus sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. There Jesus waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering Jesus forever made perfect those who are being made holy. And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For the Holy Spirit says, “This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” Then God says, “I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.” And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.”**

Mary accepted God's grace, envisioned God's grace then sang about grace. **Luke 1:46-49 NRSV "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name.**

Accepting, envisioning, and sharing grace is a continuous spiral. Without grace there is a discontentment gap in most if not all of our relationships. If you were to draw a line representing the person you would like another to be and another line representing the person they are there will likely be a gap. You can reject grace by trying to change them, control them or hate them or you can accept grace by loving them as they are and praising God for grace which bridges the gap. Grace enables you to love others with the gap. Jesus came to release us from the vicious cycle of having to offer up frequent sorry offerings so that we can joyful live the life God desires for us.

The second half of Mary's song proclaims God's grace in all relationships. Some people hear it as God turning the world upside down. Irene Nowell "thinks it is a song of mutuality. What is subversive is not just that the powerful are brought down, but that the lowly are lifted up. Mary's song proclaims a new world order in which people meet on the same level. Mary's song can only be good news if its message is not reversal but mutuality."

Mary sang, **Luke 1:50-55 NRSV "God's mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation. God has shown strength with God's arm; God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. God has helped God's servant Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."**

God's grace lowers some, humbling the arrogant, reducing power to those who abuse, taking away wealth from the greedy. God's grace raises others, establishing us all on the same level. Everyone is loved, cherished and blessed.

J. I. Packer says "We dishonor God if we proclaim a Savior who satisfies and then go around discontent." When we reject grace we are bombarded with discontentment in ourselves and discontentment with others. Rejecting grace suffocates freedom, destroys peace, robs joy, makes us miserable and spoils our love. Rejecting grace poisons relationships with jealousy and competition.

Accepting grace enables our love for God to flourish. We strive to love, serve and live God's will out of gratitude. Our life becomes prayer and worship. We grow in our ability to see God in our lives and to unwrap and savor more and more of God's blessings. Thanksgiving for God's grace illumines us and enables us to shine.

Accepting grace enables our love for ourselves to flourish. We can be certain that our best is always good enough for God because grace will bridge the gap, complete us and make us perfect.

Accepting grace enables our love for others to flourish. Aware of our own need for grace enables us to be graceful to others. We know grace will perfect their imperfections and cleanse them of their faults so we can celebrate their goodness, beauty, and love .

When Jesus was asked, “What is most important in life?” **Matthew 22:37-40 NLT** “**Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”**

Jesus’ answers reveals the mutual love Mary sang about. We are to love our neighbor as our self. It is wrong to love another more than our self. It is wrong to love our self more than another. It is wrong to love another, or our self, more than God. Grace enables mutual love to flourish. The original covenant with Abraham and Sarah was a gracious, mutual, love covenant. All the people of the earth will be blessed by them. Mary ended by singing about God’s original covenant.

After the birth of Jesus scripture points out. **Luke 2:19 NRSV** “**Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.**” Mary pondered God’s grace that enables mutual love. God brought together wise men and shepherds, a priest and a peasant girl, a mighty King, David and a prostitute, Rehab, wise and simple, rich and poor, believers and nonbelievers.

Accepting God’s grace filled Mary with love and enabled her to love. Do you think Mary was able to love King Herod who slaughtered all those babies, causing her family to flee and who beheaded John the Baptist? If Mary failed to love Herod then grace bridged the gap. Do you think Herod was represented in Mary’s song as one of the powerful who God took down from the throne and cleansed with grace? How about the Roman’s who crucified her son? Are they examples of those who are brought down and set on the same level to be mutually loved? It is much easier to love and ponder the woman at the well being lifted up, the disciples forgiven and commissioned, the hungry crowd lifted up with a satisfy meal. All our brought to the same level of completeness where all share mutual love and all are mutually loved by God.

Accept grace, envision grace, share grace and ponder grace and you to will be filled with joy perhaps singing like Mary. **Luke 1:46-55 MSG** “**I’m bursting with God-news; I’m dancing the song of my Savior God. God took one good look at me, and look what happened—I’m the most fortunate woman on earth! What God has done for me will never be forgotten, the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others. God’s mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before God. God bared God’s arm and showed God’s strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts. God knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud. The**

starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold. God embraced God's chosen child, Israel; God remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high. It's exactly what God promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now." Amen