

Let It Be To Me According To Your Word

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 1, verse 26-38.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

! And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.

He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

[1 : 07] And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? Last week I preached from Isaiah chapter 9, primarily from verses 2 and 6, which presents us with three realities that must be grasped to understand the true meaning of Christmas.

If you recall, it was that a world is in darkness. Our world is in darkness. A great light, though, has shone. A child has been given, and that child's name is Jesus Christ, who is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

[2 : 27] If you remember, I also shared an illustration about how some gifts are harder to receive than others. They're the kinds of gifts that force you to admit your flaws and your needs.

And I also shared that there was never a gift offered that makes you swallow your pride to the depths that the gift of Jesus Christ requires you to do.

Christmas means, Christmas reminds us that we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death of God's only Son could save us.

To accept the true Christmas gift, you must admit that you are a sinner and that you need to be saved by grace. That you can't do it.

That you are flawed. It is in being brought low like that and surrendering your life to God that you are born again. And so today, we continue with that theme by looking at the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

[3 : 34] Mary's reaction to the news that she would bear the Son of God, the Savior of the world, is a demonstration of true humility. The kind of humility that the gift of salvation requires to be received.

And it's the kind of humility that should be demonstrated at all times with the redeemed lives that we have received by faith in Jesus Christ.

And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that salvation is a gift of God's grace that must be received and lived with humility. Salvation is a gift of God's grace that must be received and lived with humility.

Christmas time is a gift of humility.

from Aunt Clara. It's clear from Ralphie's facial expressions that something is terribly wrong with the present. Begrudgingly, he lifts it out of the box and pulls out a pink bunny suit.

[4 : 59] And to make matters worse, his mom instructs him to go upstairs and put it on. Ralphie protests, but then receives a guilt trip from mom for his ingratitude for all the hard work that Aunt Clara put into sewing that Aunt Clara put into sewing that bunny suit for him.

So Ralphie mopes upstairs and he comes back down with a look of mortification as his father delivers the classic line, he looks like a deranged Easter bunny.

It's an awful present. But imagine if Aunt Clara was in the room to see Ralphie's reaction.

She'd be heartbroken. All the time, all the effort she spent making that suit only to see her nephew's traumatized expressions. It would have ruined her Christmas.

And you know, unfortunately for many people, that's what their celebration of Christmas hinges on.

This expectation that if they don't get what they want, Christmas is ruined.

[6 : 09] But Christians should never have such an attitude. In knowing what we received from God by faith in his son, Jesus Christ, we should, of all people, be most humble.

Indeed, salvation comes as a gift from God that must be received humbly. It is the person who is truly repentant of their sins, seeing their flaws and their shortcomings, their inability, and acknowledging their desperate need for a Savior who understands how great and gracious is the gift of due life in Jesus Christ.

And so my hope this morning is that the Holy Spirit will use his word to encourage you to live humbly and to not take for granted the salvation you've received as a believer.

Or if you are an unbeliever, to not reject so precious and important the gift of God's grace is to send his son to die as an atoning sacrifice on the cross to save sinners.

In our passage today, Luke records the moment when Mary received news that she would bear God's son. It is news that troubles her.

[7 : 27] It's news that perplexes her, but that she ultimately humbly assents to. And I think Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, intends for us to see in Mary an example of what responsive faith looks like.

It's humble.

Angels is commonplace. As if angels just suddenly appeared all the time to everyone, but that's not the case. Yes, angels appear in the New Testament and the Old Testament, but not all that often.

In fact, so far as we know, at this point in Mary's life, at this point in the history of Israel, it had been about 400 years since God had directly spoken to anyone.

From the close of the Old Testament to the opening of the New Testament, God had remained silent. But now, he sends an angel, a messenger, with some amazing and astonishing news to an unlikely place.

[9 : 04] As the rest of verse 26 says, Today, Nazareth is home to about 20,000 people. But back in Jesus' day, it was much smaller.

It was a tiny village out in the hill country. And it wasn't a village with good reputation either. In John 1.46, Philip informs Nathanael, We have found him, speaking of Jesus, of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth.

And Nathanael replies scornfully, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee. Galilee was home to the country folk.

The city dwellers looked down on the people who lived in Galilee. But even people from certain parts of Galilee looked down on those who were from Nazareth.

My first job in ministry was at the House of Prayer Rescue Mission in Chillicothe, Missouri, in Livingston County. And Chillicothe was a rural town with a population of about 9,000 people.

[10 : 20] I'm originally from Kansas City, so for me, that's the country. That's small. That's the boonies. But in Chillicothe, to the southeast, was a town called Ludlow, with a population of just over 100.

Some of the people we ministered to lived in Ludlow. And I remember taking Danny down to visit Ludlow one day. And to the people in Chillicothe, Ludlow was the backcountry.

You know what I'm saying? That was the Nazareth to those people. There was a post office. I remember. I think there might have been a stoplight. But what I do recall is we were chased from street to street by a pack of dogs just following our car around.

And so when I think of Nazareth, I think of Ludlow, Missouri. Nowhereville. This place that no one or few people know of or would think anything special could ever happen there.

And it was in this insignificant town, this humble village, that an angel appeared. Verse 27 says, To a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

[11 : 37] In Bible times, Jewish marriage customs regarding a couple's engagement were very different and much more stringent than those that we are familiar with today. Marriages were arranged by the parents of the bride and the groom, and a contract was then signed by the parents after the bride price was paid, at which point that contract was considered binding, and the couple was considered to be married, even though the actual ceremony and consummation of the marriage hadn't occurred and wouldn't occur for as long as a year after the contract was signed.

And so during that betrothal period, the couple had little, if any, contact with one another. So it's important for us to understand that Joseph and Mary were considered at this time to be legally married before Jesus was born.

We'll be more on that later, but for now what we see God doing here is something that we don't expect God to do. He chooses an insignificant town, an insignificant couple, an insignificant girl who is probably somewhere between 13 and 16 years old, and he has this surprising message delivered to her.

The angel, in verse 26, came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. In the Greek, O favored one is one word, which literally means full of grace.

The same term is used by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 6 to describe all believers. Let's look at that. There he's speaking of believers, says, Now there he has blessed us.

[13 : 35] That literally reads he has highly favored us. Same word as the one spoken to Mary here in the Beloved. As we'll see in a moment, Mary was trying to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

Almost like she's looking over her shoulder to see if there's someone standing behind her that she's unaware of who the message was truly intended for. And it's like she does that and then she points to herself and she asks, Who, me?

Mary is not a dispenser of grace, as the Catholic Church wrongly asserts. She is a recipient of grace, just like all whom the Lord has saved.

And I don't know about you, but the longer it's been since the Lord has saved me, the more I've come to know him and his word, the less worthy I feel of the grace that I have received from him. I wasn't good enough. I definitely wasn't smart enough. God saved me. God saved a sinner like me. I'm more surprised by that than anyone.

[14 : 43] All of us whom God has been gracious to save should have that same kind of astonishment, that God would be so gracious to people who are so sinful.

In salvation, we are humbled by the depravity of our sin and the reality that we have received such tremendous grace to be saved from it by Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite Christian hymns is O Little Town of Bethlehem. And the last verse begins like this.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in. And listen to this part.

Be born in us today. That's a bold statement. But it's accurate. Every Christian in that way is like Mary.

[15 : 42] Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ should be as equally surprised that they, with all of their flaws, with all of their smallness, with all of their insignificance, would receive such an amazing gift, of all people, then Christians should be the humblest.

Thinking and knowing me, of all people, I've been made to receive such love and be embraced eternally by God's grace.

Next, we see that God uses those who respond humbly to Him. God uses those who respond humbly to Him.

You know, an accusation that is often levied against Christians by unbelievers is that we are not critical thinkers. And that we've been duped somehow into believing all of this religious stuff.

As if we have no rational reason for what it is that we believe. However, Mary's reaction to Gabriel in his message says otherwise.

[16:54] Look at how she responds to Him in verse 29. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. Notice that Mary doesn't say something like, Wow, this is awesome.

I'm talking to an angel right now. This is really neat. No, the text tells us that she was not just troubled, but greatly troubled.

Troubled by His words and she tried to discern what they meant. And the word discern is an accounting term. Or maybe it's translated as wondered in your text.

It means to make an audit. But Mary is adding these things up in her mind. She's weighing them out. She's being intensely rational here.

She doesn't immediately accept this message. She doesn't immediately believe it. She's trying to ascertain how this can be. And so what we see here is Mary is using her intellect.

[18:00] Now, modern people tend to have an arrogant attitude towards ancient people or ancient texts. As if those people back then were dumb and extremely superstitious. But Mary's response doesn't support that thought.

Neither did the responses of Jesus' disciples when they saw His empty tomb. They marveled. They discerned. They used their reasoning to understand what had happened or try to understand what had happened.

And so Mary is responding much as you would expect anyone to respond if an angel showed up suddenly and started talking to them. She was troubled.

She was afraid. Yet she saw the evidence. And so she questioned. She used her reason. She asked questions.

But here's something interesting. Earlier in Luke's gospel, Gabriel, the same angel who appeared to Mary, appears to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

[19:08] And the angel says that even though Zechariah and his wife are old, they are going to have a son. Now look at how Zechariah responded to the same angel and his message to him.

Luke 1, 18 through 20. Zechariah said to the angel, We read that.

And we read Mary's account with the same angel. And we think, well, wait a second. Right? That doesn't seem fair.

Both of them had questions. Both of them expressed doubts to the message that they had received. But Zechariah is shut up until his son is born and not Mary.

Did Gabriel wake up on the wrong side of the bed that day whenever he visited Zechariah in the temple? What's going on here? Well, the difference has to do with how they expressed their doubts.

[20:32] Mary's doubts sought answers. Zachariah's doubts expressed a defense against the possibility of their being answers.

For example, there are a couple of phrases commonly heard in the church whenever anyone tries to do anything different or new.

Those expressions are, first of all, well, we've never done that before. Or we've already tried that and it didn't work.

Both of those phrases communicate a kind of doubt that is closed-minded. A kind of doubt that is certain that it can't be any other way. And that's the kind of doubt Zechariah had.

But Mary's doubt expressed an open mind. Her doubts were open to the possibility of there being answers. And, you know, maybe as a kid or as a teenager growing up in the church, you've asked a question only to have your teacher or your youth pastor say something to you like this.

[21:41] Well, you shouldn't doubt. You shouldn't have questions. You just have to have faith. I think that the best teachers are the ones whose students aren't afraid to ask them their questions.

Who aren't afraid to express their doubts because they're seeking answers. You know, how many times did Jesus do this with his disciples?

They would hear him teach. They would hear a parable. And then they would go to him and they would ask him for an explanation. And Jesus never said, well, you know what? You just need to have faith. Don't ask any questions. No, he broke it down for them.

He explained it in ways that they could understand. He rewarded their questions with answers.

Mary's healthy doubts, her humble confession that she needed more information was rewarded.

And Gabriel answered her question. He gave her the good news in verses 30 through 33. The angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus.

[22 : 49] He will be great and he will be called the son of the most high. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom, there will be no end.

Luke chapter 1 verses 46 through 55 record Mary's song of praise to God after she meets with her relative Elizabeth, the wife of Zachariah, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. And through that meeting, God's message to her is confirmed. And that song that she sings reflects a young woman who was incredibly intelligent and theologically astute. She knew that this child she would bear would be the long-promised and long-awaited Messiah. But at this point, she still had questions.

Verse 34, and Mary said to the angel, how will this be since I am a virgin? Mary still finds all this hard to believe, but she doesn't stop the conversation.

[23 : 58] She responds humbly by seeking more information. And, you know, I think the church needs more people with an attitude like Mary's here. Mary was open to God's word despite what her feelings were telling her.

And despite what she thought, she knew about God. She was willing to relinquish sovereignty over her life. She didn't hear that and she didn't say, nope, nope.

That's not what I signed up for. That's not my plan. I have other things in mind for my life. I can't go along with this.

I refuse to give up that kind of control. Some people use doubts to stay in control of their lives. They become naysayers.

And such attitudes are unhealthy for you to have and they're unhealthy for the church or any organization. God is a big God who loves doing extraordinary things through little people.

[25 : 02] And using the weak and the unlike me, his bigness is put on greater display. Mary is a case in point of that. One thing I encourage you to do this year is to give up that control.

If you haven't already, that you desire to have to be the master, the Lord of your own life. Say yes to God, whatever he asks, and you won't be disappointed.

Not saying it won't be hard, but you won't be disappointed. It's okay to ask questions. It's okay to seek answers. But acknowledge God's right to be in complete control of your life.

Respond humbly to him. In the instruction of his word and the prompting of his Holy Spirit. The Bible reminds us over and over and over again that you aren't too old.

You aren't too young. You aren't too insignificant. If you respond humbly to God, if you relinquish control of your life to him, he'll use you in mighty ways to bring him glory.

[26 : 13] And now thirdly, God is worthy of our humble service. Verse 35. And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. By the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of God the Father, a body was prepared for God the Son who would be brought forth by Mary.

Jesus' incarnation being both truly man and truly God means that he is our perfect Savior. As God, he is able to supply us with the righteousness that we could never achieve.

As man, he was able to supply to God the sacrifice that we owe for our sins, committed against him. He is the Lamb of God whose death propitiated God's wrath for our sins.

Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to be saved. He humbly laid his glory aside that we might receive glory.

[27 : 21] Jesus underwent a human birth so that we might experience a spiritual birth. If anyone was humble, it was Jesus Christ. And he demonstrated it and he practiced it perfectly.

Philippians 2, 1 through 11. This is written to some church members that are in conflict and having problems. And Paul says, If that's the case, you've forgotten who Jesus is and the kind of life that he lived and what he ultimately came to do for you.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the

form of a servant.

[28 : 33] Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

God is worthy of your humble service because of the lengths that he went to to humble himself to save you.

It cost Jesus a lot to save you so that you could be forgiven. He endured the humiliation of adding a human nature to his divine one.

He stooped even lower by being born in a manger. And even still further, as he allowed men to handle him, to hit him, to curse him, to spit on him, to beat him, and to crucify him.

[29 : 45] And even further, he became the object of God the Father's wrath on the cross. He bore the shame of our sins as he was forsaken on the cross for it.

And he did so knowing full well what that meant. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as he was sweating drops of blood, Jesus prayed, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of our Savior, but let's not forget that he came humbly to die humbly, to be our Savior.

In Jesus' prayer, not my will, but yours be done, some 30 years after Gabriel's announcement to Mary, it sounds very similar, doesn't it, to what she says, how she humbly responds to being the one who will bear God's Son.

Verse 36 through 38, So again, Mary doesn't grit her teeth as she surrenders begrudgingly to God's will for her life.

[31 : 22] She doesn't say, can't you find someone else to do this? Or, well, you know, God, you hold all the cards, what choice do I have in the matter? When she says, I am the Lord's servant, she is grounding her obedience in the reality that God is God, that he is creator, he is keeper, and he deserves to be served.

We do not have the knowledge, the power, or the right to tell God what he must do. Mary humbly surrendered her will to God.

And think about for a moment, what was being asked of her? Because I'm sure Mary did. She was about to have a child. And at this point, Joseph didn't know.

It could mean that he would leave her, which he didn't, as he likewise surrendered to God's will. But it meant people in their town, and this is a small town, remember, they were going to add things up. The baby was born on this day. You two were married on that day. Hmm. The whole community would think and say things about Mary and Joseph that weren't true.

[32 : 52] And, you know, she was going to sound crazy. Think about that. God hasn't spoken to any of us in 400 years, but guys, he's spoken to me here in Nazareth, and what he's told me is that I'm going to be the mother of his son, who is going to be our Messiah.

They would have thought, not only is this girl a sinner, but she's delusional. She's crazy. She faced the stigma of an unwed mother, and to be accused of a sin in that culture, which carried the penalty of death by stoning.

She knew those things. And yet, she said, I am the Lord's servant.

I trust God. I trust his word. This may mean and will mean a life of disgrace for me, and potentially worse, but whatever comes, I accept.

Mary understood that in humbly surrendering to God's will for her life, as low as she already was on the social ladder, this would mean going even lower.

[34 : 22] But she embraced it, and the Lord has exalted her for it, hasn't he? She's a vivid illustration of Jesus, her son's own words in Matthew 16, 25 and 23, 12, where there he taught, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

In Matthew 23, whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Christmas reminds us that the way to go up is to go down.

The way to have life is to lose it. The way to have peace is through surrender. Jesus knew nothing of selfish ambition. He gave his life to give you life, and he rose on the third day victorious, having achieved his mission.

And so I ask you, in light of all of that, is he not worthy of your service? Is he not worthy of everything that you've got?

Is there too great a sacrifice that he calls you to that you can't make? Do you know him as your savior?

[35 : 39] Do you treat him as your lord? I'm going to share an illustration to you that helped me put things into perspective.

One thing that freaks me out is outer space. That just scares me. You know, when they talk about how big and how vast it is, and all the stuff that's flying around out there, it terrifies me.

I thank God for his word, because I know who's controlling it all. You know what I'm saying? But it terrifies me. This illustration says, if the distance between the earth and the sun, 93 million miles, was no more than the thickness of a sheet of paper, right?

Here's a sheet of paper that thick. Then the distance from the earth to the nearest star would be a stack of paper 70 feet high. The diameter of the Milky Way would be a stack of paper over 300 miles high.

And keep in mind that there are more galaxies like ours in the universe that we haven't been able to number. More than the grains of the sand on the seashore.

[36 : 43] And Hebrews 1.3 says of Jesus, He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

He spoke it. He holds it all together. Now let me ask you, does that sound like the kind of person you ask into your life to be your assistant?

If Jesus is really like that, and he's like that, how could you ever treat him as a consultant to your life, rather than as the supreme Lord of your existence?

And if he tells you to forgive people, how could you not forgive them? And if he tells you to be giving and to be generous and to serve him, how could you ever live selfishly?

[37 : 54] How can you determine to live your life seeking the world's treasures that will one day fade away more than him? How can your Christmas ever possibly be ruined knowing this?

The main point of application from this message is that the Christian's response to God should always be, I am the Lord's servant.

I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to your word. Whatever it is, whatever his word tells you to do, whatever he puts on your heart to do.

You can ask questions, you can have doubts like Mary, as long as they're healthy, but ultimately, in the end, whatever that is, the only response that he is worthy of receiving from you, I am your servant.

I love you, and I trust you, and I know how much you love me, and I know how much grace I've received from you.

[39 : 08] So let it be to me according to your word. Two application questions as we close. Number one, Zachariah and Mary have similar experiences with the angel Gabriel.

How do their responses differ? We went through some of that, but think about what are the consequences? What are the consequences? Certainly one is better than the other.

Question number two, what is God calling you to humbly surrender to him today? It could be a number of things, but I'm sure you know, and I know God knows.

What is that one thing that you're holding on to? What is that one piece of property in your life that you're like, no, I'm the landlord over this? He's worthy of having it, and he'll have it.

What is it? Finances? Afraid to share the gospel with somebody? Unwilling to forgive someone? Serving in the church in some way or in some capacity?

[40 : 17] It could be a number of different things. I encourage you to think about that. What is God calling you to humbly surrender to him today? And my hope and my prayer for you is that through his word, as you've seen, you, like Mary, will say, I am the Lord's servant.

I will do what you say. Let it be to me according to your word. And the other thing is, even if you get a pink bunny suit for Christmas this year, your Christmas can't be ruined if you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Let's pray. Lord, there is no one as humble as you.

None. God, we know that you've called us to live humbly. We see why we should live humbly. It's clear in your word. It's clear from the salvation that we've received that was a gift of your grace that our works could never achieve.

All we have is you. All we have is your grace. God, forgive us that so often because of our sin nature, we allow ourselves to lose sight of how humble we ought to live.

[41 : 33] We think that we are owed things or we think that we'll find pleasure in pursuing things of this world. And we just have too high of a view of ourselves.

Even when it comes to this time of year where we're celebrating your incarnation, to think that our celebration could be ruined because of small things that don't have any kind of eternal impact.

God, I pray for us that we, like Mary, would have the same attitude towards you. That whatever you say, whatever you ask, whatever you command of us in your word, that our answer would be, I am the servant.

I am the slave of the Lord. And let it be to me according to your word. And God, if anything, we know that you can be trusted.

We know that you can be trusted with our lives. We know that you can be trusted with tomorrow and with our future and our eternity. Lord, thank you that we can do that. And we pray, I pray that we would live lives right now that communicate that reality to one another and to this world that they would know the hope that we have in your son, Jesus Christ.

[42 : 52] In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.