

A Favoured Woman

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[0 : 00] Turn with me again please to the Gospel of Luke in chapter 1. Luke chapter 1. We can read again at verse 28 where the angel Gabriel came to her, to Mary, and said, Greetings, O favoured 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 favour with God. Now I'm told it was the kind of thing that every young Jewish woman wondered, Will I be the mother of the Messiah? They all knew a Messiah was coming, he was going to be born some day. They all looked forward as a people to that day. They all hoped for His coming, prayed for His coming. But nobody knew who his mother would be. And I'm told it was something that every Jewish girl wondered, might it be me? And whether they wondered in the sense that that would be a good thing, or whether it terrified them, that might be an awful thing.

[1 : 19] I don't know, I've just heard that. Maybe they still wonder that, given that the Jews are still waiting in the Messiah, they don't think Jesus was that Messiah.

So they're still waiting for the Messiah. So maybe it's something that every Jewish girl still wonders. Maybe it's something that Mary wondered. But even if she did, I don't think she could ever have imagined what that would involve.

I don't think there was probably any expectation amongst anybody that when He came it would be a virgin birth. That wasn't something that I don't think that she or anybody else would have been expecting, or the way Jesus' life panned out thereafter.

Probably when they had the messianic expectations, they're thinking of it a great leader, a great king, a great military leader, somebody who'll make Israel great again, get rid of the Romans, back to the days of David and Solomon when nobody messed with them and it was a great power.

And I guess that's probably the kind of ideas they had of what life would be like when the Messiah came. I don't think there'd be too many that would imagine that the life Jesus ended up having was what they were going to expect from a Messiah.

[2 : 38] But Gabriel appears to Mary and says, it's you. You're going to be the one. You are going to give birth to the Son of God.

And God's words have to be believed and she completely acquiesces in it. I don't know how outrageous in some ways this is all going to sound to her, but she ends up saying verse 38, behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to you, Lord. That's faith. Whatever God wants is fine with me. I go along with it for my part.

I go along with it. Maybe there's an element over, and it's thinking, why me? Maybe in the humble sense of why me? Maybe in the horrific sense of, oh no, not me.

And it could be that. Because she'll be in the position here where I believe it because it's the Word of God. I believe you're bringing me the Word of God. I believe God. But who's going to believe me?

[3 : 48] When I start showing a bump and telling people I'm going to have a baby and they know I'm not married, who's going to believe me when I say, yeah, it's nothing to do with Joseph. An angel came to me and told me I was going to have a divine, miraculous birth.

It's like, yeah, right, you know, the eyebrows are going to raise and the fingers are going to point. Isn't that one of the things that troubles folk even right up to the present day when we hear stories of people being abused by their bosses at work or abused by Hollywood moguls or whatever?

Who's going to believe me? It's my word against his. Who's going to believe me? That's the fear of a speak out. Who's going to believe me? And there must be an element of that with Mary. Who's

going to believe this story?

And yet she's willing to say, as it were to God, if that's your will, I'll go along with it. Let it be to me according to your word.

That tells us something about the kind of person that Mary is. The angels' words are persuasive. You are favoured. You are blessed in a way that nobody else has ever been blessed.

[5 : 02] Greetings, we're favoured when the Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favour with God. And she realises from the outset that this is a great blessing.

And verse 48, All generations will call me blessed. She knows that she's been given the most amazing privilege that any human being could ever have.

She's known in some circles as the blessed virgin, as though she was a virgin all her life thereafter. She's called the mediatrix, and people will put her on a par with the Lord Jesus himself.

And they'll pray to her. And they'll pray to the Virgin Mary in a way that she's only a human being. And yet they'll pray to her as though she is some kind of divine person herself.

She'll get given names like the Queen of Heaven and the Mother of God, which you can see a theological germ of truth in a title like that, and yet so confusing and so misleading in so many other ways.

[6 : 29] She'll get called the immaculate conception, which sounds fine in a way because you think, yes, Jesus' conception is sinless and perfect.

That seems a fine name to go along with. The immaculate conception sounds very Christian. And then you realise that when the Pope uses a phrase like that, they come up with it in 1854, what they're talking about is that it's Mary who's born of a virgin, and they're calling Mary the immaculate conception that her mother, St Anne, as they call her, she's supposed to be in the one that had a virgin birth, and Mary is the product of a virgin birth, and that's why she gives birth to Jesus, the virgin birth.

So it's a title not referring to Jesus, the immaculate conception, is a reference to Mary. We had a Greek speaker from Athens Bible College come to Nerm, 15th of August this year, I know it was that date because he told us today back home in Greece on the 15th of August, it's Mary's day, it's called Assumption Day.

This is the day supposedly that Mary ascended into heaven in the same way that Jesus ascended into heaven at the end of his life, that Mary didn't die as a normal human being would, but somehow rose into heaven.

And that became a papal pronouncement in 1950, absolutely no biblical basis to it, except that that's what is now being taught about Mary that she ascended into heaven as Jesus did.

[8 : 14] Some people put Mary on a pedestal she should never be on, and she herself would never have wanted to be on. Probably this is part of ourselves, a bit of a Protestant backlash where we end up disrespecting Mary more than we ought to do, because others have respected her more than they ever ought to have done, and we get in danger of taking this lovely lady and almost being disrespectful because of the things other people have said about her.

Mary herself would be horrified at some of these things that have been said about her and about the way she's been spoken about, and the way she's been revered across the centuries.

It's not her fault, certainly not the Bible's fault. Mary was no Roman Catholic and wouldn't go along with much of Roman Catholicism on the subject. She's an ordinary, normal girl who's put into the most abnormal, extraordinary circumstances.

And what I want to do tonight is just to look a wee bit at the character of Mary. We get different glimpses of her through the Gospels. There are other snippets as you go through the New Testament that we'll probably ignore tonight, but there are sections of the Gospel where she appears.

And just to look at these briefly, about six of them, trying not to take too long. The last two will be very short, so if we're running out of time, you can at least be consoled that the last two are quite short.

[9 : 48] So six things, if we can say, about this woman, Mary, from what we see of her in the Gospel. First this, she believes, she errs, she trusts, she worries, she suffers, but she perseveres.

We'll go through these things one by one over the next few minutes. Let me start with this. She believes, she believes. So what do we know about Mary? We know mostly what we read in these opening chapters of the Gospels, the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, the kind of things we've

read tonight.

Most of our doctrine and theology about Mary is largely based on the angels' visit at Nazareth, the birth of Jesus, Bethlehem, and the presentation of the baby Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, all in the early chapters of the Gospel.

Most of what we see comes at that point. Her story at this point is so different from any of us. Her experiences are so different from any of us, and yet in so many ways she's such an ordinary, normal, down-to-earth kind of person.

We're given to understand culturally speaking that she's probably a very young woman. She's betrothed to this man, Joseph, and apparently the culturally speaking, that in that culture folk, maybe 14, 15, 16, that sort of age, would be the kind of age people would be trothed at. So she's probably a very young girl.

[11:31] She's a believer. You can tell that from her whole disposition, the way she receives this news, the way she accepts it as from the Lord. She knows her scriptures.

When she quotes this, she doesn't quote it, sorry, when she says this song that begins in verse 46, what gets called Mary's Magnificat, a lot of it is based on 1 Samuel, chapter 1 and 2, where Hannah has been told by God that she's going to have the baby, Samuel, the child she's longed for, and much of the language of Hannah's song, if you go back to that, is what Mary is saying in her song here.

So she knows her scriptures, it's in her head, and she comes out with it here, as she also receives miraculous news of having the baby gifted by God.

She's a woman that knows her Bible. In all likelihood, she's poor, or relatively poor, when they take, when herself and Joseph take their newborn son to Jerusalem to present him before the Lord, there's two possible offerings that they can place.

They can offer a lamb, that's for more well-off people, or two turtle doves for people that are not quite so well off. They give the two turtle doves. So that tells us that they're not what you would call well-off people.

[12:53] On the other hand, he's a carpenter, which we'd suggest to you, that he's probably verging on middle-class, working-class, blue-collar type of fellow, so they won't be very poor, and they won't be very rich.

They're just somewhere in the middle, just kind of ordinary, normal folks. But she comes over as such a lovely character, a devout, character, a humble, character who's amazed that this is happening to her.

She knows she's a sinner. Again, there are those that would say, when Mary's not a sinner, I'd probably those that would call her the Immaculate Conception and say, no, she herself is sinless. Well, that's not the way Mary saw herself, again, at the beginning of that song, verse 46, Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

She sees God as her Savior. A sinless person doesn't need a Savior, and she acknowledges I need a Savior, and God is my Savior. So there's nothing in her that says I'm a sinless person, and nobody should say that about her.

[14:03] And she must wonder and gasp at what's all going on here. It's intriguing that when the angel speaks to her, and tell her it's going to happen, do not be afraid, Mary, you're found favour with God, behold, you are conceiving your womb and so on.

And the angel speaks for another two or three verses there. It's as if she can't quite take this in. You are conceiving your womb and bear a son, you shall call his name Jesus.

He'll be great, and he'll be called the son of the Most High. And the Lord will give to him the throne of his Father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary hasn't taken in any of the last lot of words, and all she has are mines back in the first bit.

How's this going to happen? I'm a virgin. How am I going to give birth to a child? And it's as if the rest hasn't really sunk in yet, she's still back on that first gating.

It wasn't from the doubts that Zechariah had in chapter one. If you go back to that, you remember he can't speak until after John the Baptist is born.

[15:11] He's told they're going to have a son. How can I know this? He said in verse 18, I'm an old man, my wife has advanced in years, and the angel said, it's going to happen, and you're not going to be able to speak for the next nine months until he's born.

His doubt is there. He doubts what he's been told. This is not what's going on with Mary. She's not saying, I don't believe this, she's saying, I believe it, but I don't know how it's going to happen. How can this be? And she's not doubting in that sense, she's just questioning. I don't understand how can it happen, but I do believe it, and I go along with it, let it be to me according to your word. But there's two sides to her great blessing, and I think she knows that even from the outset, when she goes to Jerusalem and meets there with the old man Simeon in chapter one and two, yes, chapter one later on in this bit, sorry, no, it's chapter two, when she meets with the old man Simeon, and he says, you know, he prophesies this child is going to be great, but a sword will pierce your soul also, he says to Mary, a sword will pierce your soul also.

There's going to be suffering involved for you in this. Yes, you've got a great privilege, but there's another side to it. I believe these words were fulfilled when she stood and saw her son being crucified and suffering as no man ever suffered, it was like a sword piercing her very soul.

[16:51] There's two sides to this, even though it will mean that she is going to be a real blessing to the world, she's going to be used in the most remarkable way because of her son, who's going to be used in the most remarkable way.

And for all her mind must be spinning through all these days. One of the things I think is so lovely about it is she's drinking in everything that's happening, she's drinking it all in and measuring it in her heart.

The words were told in chapter 2, firstly after the shepherds had been to Bethlehem, in verse 19, chapter 2 verse 19, all who heard the shepherds talking about it wondered at what the shepherds told them, but Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart, she treasured them in her heart.

And we get that again in verse 51, after they lost the boy Jesus down in Jerusalem and he eventually comes home with them, and he came to Nazareth and was submissive to them, verse 51, and his mother treasured up all these things in her heart, twice were told, that all these things that's going on, she's drinking them in, and she's treasured up these things in her heart.

The things that God is saying and doing are so precious to her, and that's where you and I ought to be like Mary. Am I treasured up God's things in my heart?

[18:19] Are you treasured them up in your heart? What God is saying and doing? The things of God, are they so precious to you that you treasure them up in your heart, and you turn them over in your mind, and they're a blessing to you, and you think about them and you meditate on them, and you say, I'm not wanting to forget this.

That was Mary. Some people think that on a human level, the reason we've got these stories in our Bible is because Mary treasured up all these things in her heart, and later on she would tell Luke, who would write it into his gospel, all under the influence of the Holy Spirit, of course, but on a human level, Luke comes to see Mary.

Does his research, he tells us that at the beginning of his gospel, I've looked into all these things for myself, spoken to people. I think he spoke to Mary and said, tell me about all these things that you treasure in your heart, about the day the angel came, tell me about the day the shepherds came, tell me what happened in Jerusalem, and she says, let me tell you, because it's all in there.

Treasure it all up in your heart, the Lord's goodness, and the Lord's grace to you, and don't forget it. She believes. In the second place is this, she errs.

She errs. What does that mean? Well, at 12, Jesus is taken to Jerusalem, we've got that, we've got that, chapter 2 verse 41, his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover, and when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom.

[19:53] It was a good family custom within this little family that they went up to Jerusalem every year at Passover time. That's the kind of people they were. They did what the Old Testament law said, they ought to do, they followed and were faithful to the word of God.

Every parent, every parent has a huge sense of privilege and a huge sense of responsibility. God gives his children to look after them.

And Mary and Joseph, they're looking after the Son of God. One thing to look after any child, you're looking after the Son of God.

I remember when our own firstborn came home from hospital thinking, I don't know anything about how to look after a baby, I don't know how to hold it, I don't know how to feed it, I don't know what to do with anything, tie not a killing.

That's the thought that's in your head, how can I not kill this child? They must have been the same when they were firstborn, they don't know anything really. But it's the Son of God, it's not just their own son, it's the Son of God.

[21 : 03] Don't lose him. And what happens? At 12 years old they take him to Jerusalem and they lose him. He's different, he's other than a normal child, they have other children by this stage, no doubt.

Jerusalem is the very place where he was going to get killed as a baby, you remember that, the wise men weren't to go and speak to Herod because he intended to come and kill him. Jerusalem is the place where the Herods live and although that Herod is dead, there's another Herod in place who later on killed John the Baptist.

These people are hostile to the Gospel and they've lost the Son of God in the Viper's den, as it were, in Jerusalem.

The very place that you wouldn't want to lose him. They're privileged, but they can't presume on the privilege and they've got to be so careful about how they bring up their child.

And of course when they find him it's such a great relief. When his parents saw him there were astonished by the fact that he's in the temple talking to the priests and the teachers of the law who are sitting there listening.

[22 : 14] He's asking them questions and they're amazed at his understanding and his answers. And he said, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress, says Mary, why have you treated us like this?

And as a part of Jesus it seems to be saying, whoa, remember your place? Joseph is not my father. I'm here in my father's house. My father's house, where would you expect to find me other than here?

This is my father's house and I've got my father's business to do. Where else indeed would he be? And you can imagine how distressed they are, but so relieved, of course.

And despite all they know, they know about his supernatural origins. They know about the virgin birth. They know about the angel's visit. They know how the Holy Spirit came in overshadowed Mary and she became pregnant.

And even then they struggled to understand. And as they told her, did you not know I must be in my father's house, verse 49? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

[23 : 31] For all that they know all that, they're still struggling to grasp what it is that's really going on here. Nevertheless, for all their erring, for all their mistake, for all their carelessness, you might say, in losing him, he comes home with them and he submissive to them.

And that tells us again something about the kind of parents they must be. These are people that are God fearing, people trying to walk in the ways of God. And Jesus can be submissive to them and he can be obedient to them as his earthly parents.

And they help him to grow. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart and increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

They helped him and they nourished him and they enabled him to grow from a baby to a child to a boy to a young man. What a blessing these people must have been to the young Jesus.

They're faithful. Yes, they make mistakes, but they're faithful to their task and faithful to the vows and what's been entrusted to them. And again, that should just make us ask of ourselves, should I be any less faithful?

[24 : 49] Should I be any less diligent in looking after the children God's given me or the children God's given you or us as a church to be faithful to our church family as well as our own family and to make sure that we are as diligent and responsible seeking God's grace as we can be.

Do we pray for the children that have been baptized in their own congregation, our own Sunday school children, the work that goes on? Do we pray for them? Surely we have a collective family, a responsibility toward these things.

Mary and Joseph took it seriously and it hurt them, I don't doubt, when they made mistakes along the way. Thirdly, there's this, she trusts, she trusts.

Where do we go on with that? And then we go on to John chapter 2. That's when we meet her again the next time. 18 years go by and the next time we see Mary, it's at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

There's no further mention of Joseph through all the Gospels, the traditional belief as he must have died by this time, which would mean that Jesus is now the eldest in the family, possibly the breadwinner.

[26 : 08] He's invited to a wedding, and Mary's invited to the wedding. I think that tells us perhaps just another little insight into the kind of person Jesus was. He's sociable, he's friendly, he's blessed, folk want him to be at these social occasions, ties in with what we read at the end of Luke chapter 2.

He increased in wisdom and in height and in favour with God, where you'd expect all these things, and in favour with man. He increased in favour with man.

How many Christians do you know that people look at them and think they're weird? It shouldn't be like that, but sometimes it is. They're weird. For anything like Jesus, we shouldn't be.

Jesus increased in favour with man. As he grew up, he was a popular person. He might like to think he's ostracised and cast out by his community. He increased in favour not only with God, but with man.

Mary is as a young man and as a young couple, and they want him at their wedding. Just gives us a little insight, I think, into the kind of person he is. But I problematise, he's, of course, with a wine, they've won out of wine.

[27 : 21] And Mary knows exactly where to turn to in that moment. And though Jesus seems to protest, she knows who's the person that can do something about this.

And she turns to him and she says, they have no wine. And Jesus says, women, what does this have to do with me? It sounds a bit discourteous in our language, isn't it, women? What does this have to do with me?

My hour has not yet come. And there must be an element where he's saying, why are you expecting a miracle here? What do you expect me to do about the fact they've made a mistake in how much wine they've ordered?

Why are you coming to me with that? I've never done a miracle before. You've never seen me do any miracles. Why are you telling me about this? The time has not come where I've ever done a miracle.

Now, I'm guessing he knows that he's about to do a miracle. But he's querying her. What makes you think that I'm in a position to do something about this?

[28 : 33] But the time has come exactly for him to do it, although she's got no basis for knowing that. But the time has come. And he is about to do an amazing miracle. What's intriguing from our point of view at this moment is, he says, women, what does this have to do with me?

My hour has not yet come. Why are you expecting a miracle? I've said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Do whatever he tells you.

That's faith. That's of the essence of faith, isn't it? She's never seen a miracle. But she knows who he is.

She knows he's capable of doing it. Could you sum up the Christian life better than Mary does at that moment? Do whatever he tells you.

That's, if you're looking for a motto in life, if you're looking for something to guide you through life, let me suggest there's a good place to start. Do whatever Jesus tells you.

[29 : 35] You can only know that by knowing what he tells you and knowing what the Word of God says. But here's a motto for life. How should I live my life? How can I be pleasing to God?

Do whatever Jesus says. Do whatever he tells you. That's what Mary's conviction was. Anything he says is worth listening to. Anything he tells you, do it.

And you'll not be sorry. You'll be glad you did it. She has a basic trust in the person of Jesus. And she can say with all conviction and all honesty, whatever he tells you to do, do it.

And because they did, and they filled up with jumps of water, the whole occasion was transformed. The wine, the water was transformed into wine. The wedding disaster was turned into a wedding time.

The whole day is transformed. What was going to be an awful day turns out to be a great day. And the whole occasion is transformed because they did what Jesus said. Isn't there a little picture in that of our own lives and what they can be and how Jesus transforms every life?

[30 : 55] Every person who trusts in him, their life is transformed because they did and they do what Jesus tells them to do. It's so ordinary, it's so simple.

And yet it's life changing. And if it's life changing, it can be eternity changing. Do whatever he tells you, she trusts. Forfe.

It's this, she worries. She worries. Where are we going with that? Well, if you turn back to Mark chapter 6, Mark chapter 6 for a moment.

Said already, I don't know what Mary or anybody else thought a Messiah was going to be. Clearly as you go through the New Testament, we find there are people who get very hostile church people that Pharisees describes the teachers of the law.

He's certainly not what they think a Messiah should be like. And they're going to end up crucifying him for saying the kind of things he says and doing the kind of things he does. Clearly whatever they're expecting of a Messiah is not what Jesus turns out to be.

[32 : 06] But they're not the only ones. Several New Testament characters, gospel characters seem to get caught out by the same thing. Whatever they're expecting to be, he's not necessarily that.

So we know from passages like Mark chapter 6 that Jesus is not an only child. He has at least four brothers. We get it there, chapter 6 verse 3, where the people are saying, isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon are not his sisters here with us.

So he's got at least four brothers and he's got at least two sisters. And there's another bubble burst for those that say Mary was a virgin all her life. No, she wasn't. She has at least six other children. But it's also telling us that, in a sense, how ordinary Jesus is at this point. Here he is. He's just at the outset of his ministry. He's saying things that are making people's ears pick up and think, whoa, what was that?

He's doing things that people are thinking, wow. And they're saying, who is this? This is just Joseph's son. He's like the boy next door that they'll land down the road, the son of the carpenter.

[33 : 26] Who is he? Well, what's he going around saying and doing these things for? And it tells us something about just how ordinary he is and how ordinary he's perceived within his own community at this point.

And if you turn back a couple of chapters to Mark chapter three, you'll find that as he goes around, and here's an example, the people are gathering now, the staff are to gather out to hear what he's got to say, sometimes in such large numbers, that he doesn't even get a chance to eat.

Now that's the kind of thing that worries many as a mother. And my boy can't even get a chance to eat what's going to become of him. But the crowds are so intense that sometimes there's not even the opportunity for him to eat.

He went home, verse 20 of chapter three, and the crowd gathered again so they couldn't even eat. And when his family heard about it, they went out to seize him, to kind of grab him and get him out of there because they were saying he's out of his mind.

Even they don't understand his own family can't figure out what's going on, why are people flocking to hear him and to crowd in and in this way and follow him wherever he goes.

[34 : 41] And he can't even get a chance to eat, and maybe sleep, and maybe rest, and the kind of things that families worry about. Now we're not told specifically there that it was his mother, but then you jump forward a few verses to verse 31.

And here we are, so it's virtually the same passage. And we're told his mother and his brothers came and they're standing outside and they sent to him and they called him and the crowd was sitting around him and they said to him, your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you. And he answered them, who are my mother and my brothers? Is it not? He says to always sitting around him, this is my mother and my brothers.

Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother. And the implication when you put all these things together is that Mary seems to be struggling a bit here.

Yes, she knows who he is, yes, she knows his supernatural beginnings. Yes, she knows he's destined for something special, but her mother heart is thinking, what's going on here?

[35 : 46] I don't get it, I'm worried for him. And I don't know, is her faith kind of wavering and wobbling a bit here? A bit like John the Baptist when he's thrown into prison and he's hearing stories about the things Jesus is doing and he sends his disciples to see, is that really the Messiah?

He knows it is. And yet the stories he's hearing is making his faith waver and wobble, but maybe it's in the darkness of the prison, maybe it's away from any friends and fellowship, whatever it is.

Something about his faith seems to be wavering and wobbling a little. Again, it doesn't seem to be the kind of Messiah he was expecting. He'd prophesied and been telling everybody, flee from the wrath to come.

The Messiah is coming, run, danger. This is going to be awful, you're in trouble. And then the Messiah comes and he's so gentle and he's so kind and he goes around making the blind see and the deaf hear and the lame walk and doing all kinds of things and he's like, that's not what I was expecting.

Maybe I got it wrong, maybe this isn't the Messiah. That's the way John's mind seems to be in the prison, did I make a mistake? And that seems to be what's going on here with me.

[37 : 00] And it's as if a faith is wavering and wobbling a little. Jesus says, whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother, and what Mary is doing the will of God, I actually done a very good job doing the will of God.

But even the strongest believer, sometimes the faith will waver and wobble. And maybe the strongest believer here tonight knows what it is to have your faith, sometimes waver and wobble when things go badly or lots of bad things happen in a short time.

But still faith, true faith can still waver and wobble. Sometimes I like to think that as we go on, my faith will just get better and better and stronger and stronger and deeper and deeper.

And sometimes it doesn't, sometimes it goes, yeah, when something bad happens or more likely it goes, I think that's mine, kind of up and down like that through life.

Faith wavers and wobbles and I think there's an element of that with Mary. And at this particular point she doesn't really get it and she's thinking, what's going on here?

[38 : 14] I do trust God but I just can't see exactly what's happening. And I think she's just an example to as somebody whose faith wavers and wobbles a little sometimes.

If that's you, if your faith is wavering and wobbling a bit at this time or any other time, remember you're in good company and all the Bible characters, they're all like that. And everybody ever speaks to every faithful Christian, if they're being honest, they'll say, yes, I've been there, I know what it's like.

Ups and downs, I'd love to be always on a high, always going up, never doubting God, never doubting His ways, never doubting His love. But it's not being like that and there's sometimes a waver and a wobble.

And I think Mary just reminds us here that that's normal and it happens. And we can take comfort in that and it doesn't have to make us think, I can't bear real Christian.

It happens. She worries. Two short ones, I promise you two short ones to finish with. Number five, she suffers, she suffers. And this takes me away to the very end of the Gospel story.

[39 : 23] Thousands of people at different times followed Jesus. At times he fed the 5,000. 5,000 people got food from next to nothing.

A few tunasang which is sort of equivalent. Some bread, some rolls, some fish. And 5,000 people were fed. Might even have been 20,000. Some people say there's only 5,000 men and there would have been women and children. Maybe there was 20,000 there.

Thousands followed Jesus where he dealt with the crowds followed him. And then you come to Calvary and there's virtually nobody and they've all gone.

And there's very few following him all the way to the cross. But one of them is Mary. And the Bible tells us specifically that the mother of Jesus, Mary, stood at the foot of the cross.

Probably with her sister who was there also. Married it. And I think it's there that she knows what it means.

[40 : 26] That Simeon said in the temple 30 odd years before, a sword will pierce your soul also. And I think there that must be what it's like for her.

Her greatest trial. She's seen her son, her baby, her firstborn, her own beloved son, suffering on the cross as no man ever suffered.

Going through what no man ever went through. It must be the greatest trial of her faith. But she's there. She hasn't run away. She hasn't walked away.

She hasn't said, I can't face this. I'm off. She's there. She's there to the bitter end. She's there to see it through. Perhaps John took her away before the very end.

You remember from the cross he commits his mother into John's care. John, here is your mother. And to Mary, your son. He'll look after you now.

[41 : 30] Joseph's dead, presumably. Jesus is moving into the realm of his life. Although she can't see exactly where that is yet. John will look after you at the other brothers.

I don't know, is it? Because at this stage maybe they're not believers. But her faith comes through that suffering as well. Her faith that sometimes we've ever been wobbled is faced with the greatest trial she's ever been faced with.

She comes through that one as well. And if she can come through that, an experience beyond harrowing and beyond horrendous, such as you and I will never have to face.

If her faith can come through that by the power and grace of God, so can yours. Whatever you go through, whatever you have to go through, whatever you're called to go through in life.

If she can come through that, you can come through whatever it is. Mary is a great hope and help and example to us, even at that worst moment in her life.

[42 : 44] Lastly, she perseveres. She does get through that. How do we know she gets through? Because we see her once more. We find her in the Book of Acts chapter 1. This is after Jesus has risen from the dead, after Jesus has risen into heaven.

And he tells his disciples, now go and wait in Jerusalem until God sends what he has promised, which turns out to be the Holy Spirit that comes on the day of Pentecost.

Last reference to Mary comes in Acts chapter 1. No mention of her dying, no mention of her ascending into heaven, wherever all that came from. But the believers that are left after Jesus has gone back to heaven, they're waiting, they're hoping, they're believing, they're praying to Jesus, who they now know is the divine Son of God.

And who's with them? Mary. She's right there. When they had entered, this is verse 13, they returned to Jerusalem, when they had entered the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas were following you and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the zealot, Judas the son of James, the eleven remaining disciples after Judas has killed himself.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers, who would seem to have now become believers in the resurrected Christ, his brothers that seem to have doubted him as he goes through the scriptures.

[44 : 19] And she's just there, she's just with the others. She's not like on a throne in the middle of this room with everybody falling on their feet around her. She's just as it were, a face in the crowd.

She's just another person in this group of perhaps 120 believers, just another one, another ordinary disciple. And she's there and she's met with these people.

And they're praying to her son and she's praying to her son. And that's the last we see of her, that's the last we see of Mary.

She's not too big to mix with the others, she's not too important to fellowship with them, to worship together, she's just there. This ordinary girl with the extraordinary life and the extraordinary experience.

And she's there and she's just part of the church and part of the people of God. And just hoping and persevering and going on through all she's been through. She's just, she's still going on.

[45 : 21] She's looking to the Lord and that's the last we see of her. What a lovely picture to say, that's the last we see of her. It's the last you see of me, as you can say, he was walking with the Lord.

And he loved the Lord and he was with the Lord's people. That would be amazing, that would be the most wonderful legacy. It's the last thing I can say about you, the last we saw of him, the last we saw of her.

She was still going, he was still pressing on, still growing in grace, still wanting to know the Lord, still believing, hoping, praying, worshiping, expecting, devotedly following the Lord.

That's the greatest thing that can be said of you and only God knows what comes thereafter. She's such a simple ordinary woman and yet she is such an example to hold up, isn't she?

Pray for a faith like Mary, yes it might waver in wobble at times, yes you might make mistakes at times, yes you won't get it right all the time. But you can get there, you can trust and believe and put your hand in the hand of God and say, help me and bring me through to the end.

[46 : 35] And you know what he brings his people safely through to the end. Pray in a way, pray to be like Jesus, pray to be like Mary. You know, he's just such a faithful follower of Jesus and spends her life devoted to him.

Pray for a similar faith and the Lord will bless you with that simple, childlike, trusting, wavering, wobbling but genuine faith.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this Lady Mary and all the gifts she was given and all the blessings she was given, all the difficulties and trials and heartaches she had to go through and yet the last receiver, she still emerges as a faithful disciple.

May that be true for every one of us here, for all whom we love, for all whom we pray for, for all that we long to do and see in our own lives, in our own communities around us, Lord, may there be many who become faithful followers of Jesus and walk with him all their days.

May that be true of every one of us here in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.