

Marys Song

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us to turn back to Luke chapter one together. Let me read again verses 46 to 48. Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, but he has looked on the humblest state of his servant, for behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

So as we approach Christmas and look forward to it together, we're going to do a short series called Four Songs for Christmas and all four of these are found in Luke chapters one and two.

We're going to look at Mary's song, which is in one, 46 to 55. We're going to look at Zachariah's song in 168 to 79. The Angel's song in 214 and then Simeon's song in two, 29 to 32.

Each of these are short sections of the narrative that Luke records in chapters one and two and they're all set out in poetic form and commentators and theologians will often describe these sections of scripture as hymns.

And I don't know if they were originally sung or said, but they're definitely poetic and they're very beautiful. And I want us to look at them because each of them captures many of the key truths that lie at the heart of the coming of Jesus and therefore the truths that lie at the heart of the gospel.

[1 : 24] And we're going to look at two today, Mary this morning, Zachariah tonight. Next Sunday evening, we'll look at the Angel's song and then in two weeks time in our morning service, we'll look at Simeon's song.

We can summarize what these songs are teaching as follows. Mary's song is teaching us that Jesus is born to cause disruption. Zachariah's that Jesus is born to bring deliverance.

The Angel's song that Jesus is born to give us delight and Simeon's song that Jesus is born to transform our departure.

And as we approach Christmas, I want us to think through all of these together. So today we're looking at Mary's song, which is telling us that Jesus has come to cause disruption.

Now, maybe disruption wasn't the first word that came into your mind as Neil read that passage for us. And maybe it even sounds a little bit controversial.

[2 : 20] What do I mean by that? Well, that's what I want us to think about today. And we're gonna do so under two headings, two questions. How does Jesus cause disruption? Why does Jesus cause disruption?

So thinking about this question first of all, I wanna suggest four ways in which Jesus causes disruption that we can see in this passage. The first is maybe the most obvious one to say that the coming of Jesus definitely disrupts Mary's life.

Up to this point, as far as we know, Mary's life was pretty normal and pretty unspectacular. She's a young girl, she would have been a teenager, she's engaged to be married, life is normal.

And then all of a sudden an angel appears and everything changes. We see that recorded for us in 26 to 29, an angel appears and says, greetings, oh, favored one, the Lord is with you.

But she was greatly troubled at this saying and was trying to figure out what was going on.

Everything is disrupted. And Mary's left thinking what's gonna happen?

[3 : 31] How's Joseph gonna react? What are people gonna say? Is there gonna be controversy? What does all of this mean? And in many ways, you see something amazing in Mary that there's this massive disruption in her life in these verses and then going down to verse 38, as Morris explained to her, she has a beautiful response of faith and obedience where she says, I'm the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.

And then as we read, she went on to see her relative, Elizabeth, who's pregnant with the baby who would be named John and would grow to be John the Baptist.

There's this wonderful meeting between the two mothers to be and as we read, even the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. Mary's life is definitely disrupted. Second thing I want to suggest is that the birth of Jesus actually disrupts all of human history. And this is incredibly important for us to note if we're thinking about history, if we're thinking about the world, we have to recognize the monumental importance of this event. And in many ways, this is the great truth that lies behind all of these songs. As the angel explains, this child is going to be born and this child is like no other.

[4 : 52] He's the son of God, the son of the Most High. He's going to take the throne of his father, David and of his reign, there will be no end.

God's kingdom is being established. And the key point is that this changes everything. This is the center point of history.

This is the turning point of history. The coming of Jesus changes everything. And this is fundamental to our understanding of the gospel. The world is lying broken because of sin. All of humanity stands guilty before God. We are all helpless in the face of death, but God intervenes.

God comes. Everything changes. And Jesus is here to conquer death. Jesus is here to establish his kingdom in the world that has rejected God's rule.

[5 : 55] And this is the moment that the whole of scripture has been waiting for. Up until this point, the message had always been, he is coming. Now we are at the moment when they are going to be able to say, he is here.

Everything is changing. And this is also really important for understanding how the Old Testament and the New Testament relate to one another and how the Old feeds into the new.

As we'll often say, the Old Testament functions as a shadow. And so a shadow is connected to the reality, just like my shadow is connected to me. The shadow looks like the reality, just like my shadow is the same shape as me.

But the shadow is not the reality. It's pointing towards the reality. And it's never the final answer. And the Old Testament was never meant to be the final answer.

It's always pointing towards the full reality that's going to come. And you see this in loads of different ways. So you look at all the Old Testament shadows. You see the nation of Israel. You see the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the ceremonial laws, the Sabbath on a Saturday, the Passover, the circumcision.

[7 : 01] All of these things are coming to an end. In fact, Jesus is going to disrupt all of them. And the religious leaders in Israel are going to hate him for it. But that's what he's come to do, because all of these things are just a shadow.

They're no longer needed because the full reality has come. This is the center point of scripture, the center point of human history. Jesus has come to disrupt it all.

Thirdly, and I think I want us to spend a wee bit more time thinking about this, because this is maybe more relevant to us today, Jesus' birth is going to disrupt the typical human approach to understanding religion.

And this, again, is so, so important for us to think about. It's so often for people, and people kind of out there, like just in the world around us in our society today, will put Christianity alongside just all the other religions in the world.

And they'll say, well, this is just another religion and another religion that causes problems. And the same kind of emphasis. And so Christianity is just lumped in with the rest of them. But what this song reveals to us, and what the whole gospel reveals to us, is that Jesus has actually come to disrupt all of that typical human understanding of religion.

[8 : 19] He's actually come to say something completely different to how we tend to approach the way that humanity relates to the supernatural. And this is something that we see very, very clearly when we look at the actual words of Mary's song.

Because if you see it, if you look, you'll see that she speaks about the coming child, about what God is going to do, and about how God is going to scatter the proud.

He's going to bring down the mighty. He's going to fill the hungry, and he's going to send the rich away empty. And these are such important things to think about, scattering the proud, bringing down the mighty, sending the rich away empty.

All of this is disrupting the typical human approach to thinking about religion. Because it's all touching on the typical conclusions that we tend to come to in relation to the big issues of life and the big questions of faith and religion.

Because the typical way that people think is this. People think that the individuals who push themselves forward are the ones who should be followed.

[9 : 29] People tend to think that the ones who've got status and power are the ones that we need to impress. And people tend to think that being wealthy is a sign of God's favor.

People have thought like that for centuries. People still think like that today. Maybe you're thinking, well, I don't think like that. And maybe you don't. But you probably do.

Or you probably have done at certain points in your life. And so a great example of this kind of pattern of behavior is something that you see in school very often.

If you think back to your own school days, maybe you're still in school, how often is it the case where you have a confident, tough, self-interested child and there's a whole crowd of other kids desperate to follow them.

They're like the ringleader. And other kids gravitate towards them, want to follow them, and want to be accepted by them. And you actually see the same pattern in adults, whether it's at work, among friends, in relationships.

[10 : 36] People who often will present as proud, self-interested, determined, looking to raise themselves above others. So often, other people will gravitate towards them.

People will be anxious to be in with them. And often in life, you see examples where actually they're kind of tougher and harder and sometimes more judgmental you are, they're better.

And this is why you see, if you look in school, you look in the workplace, you will very often see that bullies are pretty much never loners because they'll always have a following.

And it happens in lots of different parts of life. And it can definitely happen in matters of faith and religion. People push themselves forward. People want their own agenda to be the thing that matters.

Most people like to exalt themselves. People like to be in control, and others follow them. And you might think, well, I don't think that's true. But well, how many people today worship celebrities or politicians or maybe even a family member, somebody that they look to?

[11 : 48] Somebody who's just exalted a few notches up everybody else and everyone gravitates towards them. That's the kind of pattern of religious behavior that people follow.

And we end up worshiping somebody that isn't God. In the same kind of way, we find ourselves desperate to impress the people who have status, marry things about the mighty from their thrones.

The people who have power, people who have status. Again, this happens in school, in work. It happens in our social lives. It definitely happens in regard to matters of religion.

We want the important person to notice us. We want the right connections. We want the right following on social media. And we think that if we get noticed, if the important person notices us, or if we get some kind of status, it's a sign of God's favor.

For example, all our services are live-streamed. They all go on YouTube. If this sermon went viral, and by the end of the week, there were 1 million views of this sermon online.

[12 : 55] It's not going to happen. But if that did happen, everybody would think, you've got an amazing minister. Everybody would think, oh, he must be a great preacher.

Everyone would think, whoa, who's that guy? And I think Jesus would say, I could not care less. And yet we gravitate towards that kind of numbers game, status, power.

We associate it all with God's favor. We do the same thing with wealth. That's something that humanity's done for centuries. And so, whether it was way back in Greco-Roman religion, or in all sorts of different ways, across even Christian church history, people gravitate to the idea that if you're rich, successful, it's proof that God likes you.

And we apply that in relation to nations. So nations will be successful, and they'll think that that's just proving that they're especially favored by God.

It can happen among churches. It can even happen among individuals. We equate social and economic success with spiritual favor. And that happens all the time.

[14 : 04] Now, you may not do that in the kind of positive direction of thinking, well, the richer I am, the more God favors me, but you probably do it in the opposite direction.

Where if something goes wrong in your life, if you feel like things have not worked out properly, or you feel like you're struggling, then you think, well, that's probably because God doesn't like me. And so we can often fall into that trap either in one direction or the other. In all of these ways, and in many more, these are the kind of religious conclusions that people will come to.

You see it in the world of our universe. You see it in relation to lots of areas of life that wouldn't necessarily fall into the category of religion, but it's all this idea that for things to go well in my life, for things to be good, it's all down to getting the right connections, the right achievements, the right status.

Mary's song is telling us that Jesus has come to disrupt all of that. So he's gonna scatter the proud, and the know-it-alls, the ones who think that, in their hearts, that they're just a step above everybody else.

[15:16] Jesus is gonna expose that kind of selfishness and arrogance. Jesus has come to bring down the mighty from their thrones, and instead, he's gonna exalt the humble, he's gonna exalt the nobody's, he's gonna care more about the collective masses than the individual celebrities, and he's gonna send the richer way empty, and fill the hungry with good things.

Now, all of that's easy to misunderstand. It's not saying that it's wrong to be well-off, not saying that it's wrong to occupy an important job or position in society.

It's not saying that it's wrong to have at least a reasonable level of self-esteem and self-confidence. What it is teaching us is that if we think that God is impressed with what the world around us is impressed with, then our understanding of the gospel is wrong.

These ideas that pride, self-promotion, that that's the way to succeed, or the idea that status is impressive, or the idea that wealth should be taken as a token of assurance, all of that is everything that Jesus has come to disrupt.

In fact, he's come to turn it all upside down, and the great confirmation of that is the cross. Because in the views of society around, the cross meant that this man was a total failure.

[16:47] He was a reject, a criminal, and a spiritual kersh, an embarrassment to everything that he stood for, and yet in reality the cross was the fulfillment of everything that God had planned.

And the cross opens the way for every reject to find reconciliation is the place where the kersh of sin is undone. And this is teaching us so much about how the gospel works.

It's so important for us to recognize this, because it's reminding us that the posture that Jesus values is not the one that sticks your chest out and sticks your nose in the air. No, the posture that Jesus values is the one that comes to him and says, I have messed up my life.

I've failed badly. I feel totally unworthy. I feel like I've got nothing to offer you. And Jesus says, that's exactly what I'm looking for. That's exactly who I've come for.

And all other self-focused, self-promoting, arrogant nonsense is everything that Jesus has come to disrupt. And it really makes perfect sense, because if we're resting on our pride, on our status, on our might, on our wealth, all of that is actually saying to God, look, I've got something that you should notice.

[18:12] And yet the posture of the gospel is coming to God and saying, I've got nothing. And the crucial point is that that is never humiliating.

And it's a danger that you think it is, because that idea of coming to God and saying, I've got nothing, you think, well, that's a bit humiliating. It is not humiliating. It's utterly liberating, because it immediately takes away the pressure on you to impress God, to get yourself to a certain standard, or to be something that actually none of us can ever be.

It's not humiliating, it's liberating. And do you know what? You can look around and see it yourselves.

You can see there are people who are worshiping Taylor Swift or Donald Trump or some other celebrity or their job or their sport or whatever.

People are worshiping these things. They're living for these things. I don't want to sound harsh, but I think that's humiliating to make some person who's just a person the most important thing in your life.

[19:44] It's only worshiping the Son of God that sets you free and where we discover everything that we need.

So Jesus is disrupting all the ways in which people tend to think about religion. It's very, very important for us to think about. And then, fourthly, Jesus has come to disrupt our lives.

Now, that maybe sounds a bit off-putting. And if I say, follow Jesus so that your life can be disrupted, it's not really a strong selling point, but it's actually incredibly helpful and incredibly important.

A good example of this is you think about every message you've received to eat healthily, every time, or to be healthy in your life, every time you get a message to eat healthily or to exercise or to do something, what is that message trying to do?

It is trying to disrupt your life. It's trying to change the way you eat or the way you exercise or the habits that you've been following. It's trying to disrupt, it's trying to disrupt in a good way.

[20 : 50] And the gospel is doing exactly the same thing to us spiritually. Jesus has come to disrupt our lives. I want to say to you that there are two kind of lives that need to be disrupted.

The first is the messed up life. And that mess can happen in many, many ways. Some people's lives are outwardly messy, outwardly chaotic, and that could come in loads of ways, whether it's through addiction or through bad decisions, broken relationships or spectacular failures.

Some people's lives, everyone knows and everyone can see that they're a mess. But for most people, the mess is on the inside. And the outside is tidy. But in our hearts, we're crippled by anxiety.

We're feeling like we're constantly being judged. Maybe our self-esteem feels like it's in pieces.

Maybe our hearts are aching, even if all the time we're trying to put on a smile on the outside.

For so many people, life has not turned out the way they wanted it to be. And the way things are now is not what they intended or imagined or ever wanted.

[21 : 59] And the key thing that you need to hear is that Jesus has come to disrupt that. In other words, he's come to intervene. He's come to offer you an alternative. He's come to put you onto a new path.

And it does not matter how weak or poor or ashamed you feel about yourself, Mary has just told you that that's exactly who Jesus has come to save.

And as you read on in Luke's Gospel or in any of the Gospels, one thing that's absolutely clear, again and again and again, is that Jesus goes and helps the people whose lives are messed up.

The people who are being rejected, shunned, judged, criticized, Jesus goes straight to them. And that's telling you that no matter how much you might feel that your life is a mess, no matter how much you feel like you have stuffed up, no matter how much you feel like becoming a Christian is just a ship that sailed long ago in your life.

No matter how much you feel like that, Jesus is calling you to come to him today and he's saying, I'm not gonna leave you in that mess.

[23 : 05] And so yes, I'll disrupt your life, but he will disrupt it in a beautiful way. And that's because he's calling you onto a new path, a better path, a path of hope, of healing, of purpose, of restoration and of incredible, unspeakable joy.

And so Jesus has come to disrupt the life that's messed up and that will bring the most amazing transformation. But it's not just the messed up life that needs disrupting.

The other life that needs disrupting is the picture of perfect life. Maybe that's the life that Mary thought that she was gonna have.

She was engaged to the local carpenter. Maybe she's thinking, oh, he could build me a nice house and maybe have kids that'll enjoy life together. They'll be settled, they'll be secure. Maybe a couple of times go to Jerusalem or travel to other parts of the country to see family.

Everything just looks like it's all gonna come together nicely and all of it gets disrupted. She gets pregnant, they have to go to Bethlehem. The king tries to murder her child. They even have to flee to Egypt for safety.

[24 : 17] Everything gets turned upside down for Mary and everything becomes far better than she ever imagined. Not in terms of society's expectations and not even in terms of every day being a good day because Mary suffered a lot of heartbreak but all of it was worth it because her savior has come.

That's why she could say all generations are gonna call me blessed. And maybe this is one of the most urgently needed messages in our culture in the Isle of Lewis today because in so many ways our lives are actually pretty good.

In so many ways our lives are actually very good. We've got lots of nice stuff, we've got nice houses. We've got good opportunities, we've got excellent schools. We've got amazing healthcare

and most of us are gonna spend the next three weeks eating far more than we need to and far more than we're maybe even able to.

And these are not bad things, these are wonderful things. They're blessings to enjoy, they're precious things to share. But if that picture perfect life is where all of your hope lies, then Jesus needs to disrupt your life.

Now I don't mean to make your life, but he needs to make your life awful. I don't mean that at all. What I mean is that if we are just living for making sure that everything stays perfect, the way we want it to be, if everything's just nice, our house and our job and our bank balance and whatever else, and if all our hope is in that and if we are not giving a thought to our relationship with Jesus, then we need to be disrupted because we need to wake up.

[26 : 12] Our lives are full of many wonderful things, many picture perfect moments, but these are just moments. And your whole life is actually just a moment.

It's a moment that's passing very, very quickly and all of us need to think about eternity. And Jesus has come to disrupt us, to make us think about that.

And that kind of disruption is unsettling. It's not nice to think about, it's not easy to think about, but it's so important and it is actually the best thing that can ever happen to you.

But to see that, we need to answer very briefly and this will be much quicker. We need to answer our second question, why is Jesus causing disruption? To answer this, I wanna go back to Mary's song one more time.

And I want us to notice three things that she says about God. She tells us three things about Him. She tells us that God is mighty.

[27 : 32] She tells us that He is holy and she tells us that He is merciful. And these are three attributes of God that explain why Jesus is disrupting our lives.

He's disrupting our lives because He's mighty. Now at one level, that's because when you come before God, you come before the one who is bigger and stronger and more powerful and greater than anything else we will ever encounter.

The oceans are just like a drop of water in God's hands. The vast galaxies of the universe are like the span of His hand. The highest mountains are like specks of dust and you only need a tiny glimpse of God to realize how small we are.

And so God is utterly mighty, but the incredible thing about the gospel is that God's strength disrupts us because He is using that strength to save us.

And so you might feel like God is knocking you. The truth is He's actually grabbing you. You might feel like God is shaking you. The truth is He's rescuing you.

[28 : 35] You might feel like God is stretching you. The truth is He is grabbing your hand and He's leading you on a better path. He's disrupting you because He is strong and He is using that strength to pull you off a path that leads to hell and to bring you into the security of His family forever.

He disrupts us because He's mighty. He also disrupts us because He's holy. This is actually maybe the most disruptive thing of all because the holiness of God immediately leaves us feeling exposed. God is morally perfect. He's utterly righteous. He's impeccably pure. And the moment we are confronted with that, we realize how utterly unworthy we are.

You see that again and again and again in the Bible, people who are confronted with the holiness of God, they immediately just think, oh my goodness, I cannot, I am nothing. And that's why Mary and so many other parts of the Bible can speak about the fear of the Lord.

You see that in verse 50 there, those who fear Him. And that's just a beautiful phrase because it's reminding us that God is to be loved and respected, loved and respected.

[29 : 46] And this is actually something that we do in so many parts of our lives. This is maybe a silly illustration, but my three favorite things in my kitchen are my stove, my kettle, and my coffee bean grinder.

I use them every day, all day, and I love them. I need to respect them because two of them can burn me and one of them can cut my finger off.

And there's a love and a respect. And I mean, if, I think, like you see a coffee bean grinder as an illustration for God is maybe the worst illustration that I've ever used. But you know what I'm trying to say, that if that's true of something so insignificant in my kitchen, oh, it is true of God.

He is holy and that disrupts our lives. But the amazing thing about God's holiness is that it's not just what He is. Holiness is what He wants for you as well.

And so as He disrupts our lives, He's doing that to call us away from everything that corrupts us, everything that spoils our lives, everything that stains our relationship with Him with ourselves and with one another.

[30 : 54] And if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, please, please remember that. When God disrupts your life to steer you away from something, He is never doing that to make your life rubbish.

He is doing it to get the rubbish out of your life. And you see that again and again and again with the moral commands that scripture gives us, it's all to steer us away from things that harm us.

Let me give you some examples. A good one for this time of year. God commands us to exercise self-control with alcohol. So God doesn't say you can't drink, you can, absolutely. But He says to exercise self-control, not to drink to a success, not to drink to excess.

Why is God saying that? Is He saying that because He wants to rid all society of fun and laughter?

No. You say that I don't want you to have a hangover. I don't want you to get into a fight and I don't want you to have a one night stand that you never wanted in the first place.

God commands us to be generous with our money. Why does He do that? So that you'll have less to enjoy? No. It's so that you can taste the joy of being kind to others, which is far more satisfying than anything you'll ever buy for yourself.

[32 : 06] God commands us to rest on the Sabbath. Why does He do that? To stop you enjoying yourself and to restrict you? No. It's so that you can have a break and you can have a rest without feeling guilty.

And in a thousand other ways, God's holy commands are steering us towards something better.

And last of all, and maybe most importantly of all, most amazingly of all, Jesus disrupts our lives because He is merciful.

And it's so important to see that because that is the motivation behind what He is doing. He's not coming to dominate you or condemn you or to prove Himself right in front of you or to embarrass you or to criticise you.

He is coming to show you mercy. And it's absolutely crucial that we remember that. And if He is disrupting your life just now, and maybe He is, maybe He's disrupting your life as a Christian, challenging you to think about your priorities in life or the decisions that you're taking.

If He's doing that, He's doing it to show you mercy, to bring you back to Him, to set you on a better path. And if you're feeling that just now, and if you're feeling a sense of shame, do not ever lean into your sense of shame.

[33 : 27] Lean into His mercy, lean into the fact that God is doing this to be merciful to you. And if you're not yet a Christian, maybe God is going to disrupt your life, maybe He is already disrupting your life, and maybe you feel unsettled, maybe you feel uncertain, maybe things that once seemed so good in your life don't seem like that anymore, maybe you're more conscious than ever that there is a gap in your life, a hole in your heart that only God can fill.

Maybe you feel like God is turning things upside down in your life. Why is He doing that? Why is He disrupting your life? He's doing it because He wants to show you mercy.

In other words, He's doing it because He loves you. So, Mary's song is telling us that the birth of Jesus causes disruption.

And maybe that word right there is the thing you are most scared of. Maybe that's what you are most scared of in terms of becoming a Christian, or maybe professing your faith, or maybe getting more involved in the life of the church.

Maybe that's the thing you are most scared of that it's going to disrupt your life, and it's going to be too much, and you're terrified of what that word might mean. Well, if that's the case, I have one final thing for you to think about.

[34 : 58] As Mary sang this song, she is pregnant, and nothing disrupts your life like a baby. And I've seen quite a few smiles, because lots of people know what I'm talking about.

You ask any parent, did this baby disrupt your life? They're going to say yes. And then you ask them, do you wish you could go back to the life you had before?

And they will say never. That is absolutely what it is like when you become a Christian.

And so please, please think about that today. Amen, let's pray together.