

Luke 1:37 - Nothing will be impossible with God

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[0 : 0 0] Well tonight I'd like us to turn back to Luke chapter 1 and we're going to be looking at the section from verse 26 to verse 37 but we're going to focus especially on the words found in Luke 1.37 where Gabriel said to Mary, for nothing will be impossible with God.

I'm sure many of us are familiar with this chapter, these are the verses that record for us the moment when Mary was told by Gabriel that she was going to be the mother of Jesus Christ.

It must have been an absolutely extraordinary experience for her and we perhaps easily forget the fact that Mary would have been very very young when this took place and I think it's definite that she would have been a teenager, highly likely a young teenager. So she would have been a younger when this took place because she was engaged to be married and the common age for getting married in those days was a wee bit younger than we're used to. Maybe even 14 or 15, 16, maybe something like that. A young girl and something very very very remarkable took place in her experience.

I'll put the verses on the screen there and I won't go through them in detail but I'll highlight a couple of points. Not surprisingly the initial greeting from the angel left Mary shocked. She was troubled at the saying she tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be as you can see in verse 29 and so the angel comes she's shocked she's trying to figure out what's going on and then the angel explains why it is that she is the favored one. He says do not be afraid and then explains that she's going to conceive and bear a son who is to be named Jesus. He will be great and 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. A massive promise, remarkable, remarkable words and understandably Mary says how is this going to happen and especially she says how is this going to happen because I am still a virgin.

And we have to notice here that Mary is simply using her rational intelligence. She's saying how can this happen? The angel has just described something that was impossible and we must always remember that the people in the Bible are not irrational and God never expects us to be irrational.

[3 : 1 6] This is one of the great myths that people label Christianity with that we are irrational people believing in things that make no sense. Absolutely not true. Mary although she was young had a measure of common sense and she said how is this going to happen because for me to conceive a child is impossible. But the angel replies and he tells Mary three things. He tells first of all what's going to happen. He says the Holy Spirit will overshadow her. So this is not going to happen all by itself as if by magic there is going to be the involvement of an external party.

God himself will overshadow her and then the angel gives an example of something similar that God has already done. He says behold you're relative Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son. This is the sixth month with her who was called Baron. And then finally the angel sets forth a principle which is really what is answering Mary's question. This will happen because nothing will be impossible with God. And right there the angel is setting forth before us a theological principle that lies at the heart of the coming of Jesus Christ. Nothing is impossible for God. And that's very important for us to recognise because in the coming of Jesus which we we naturally tend to think about at this time of year in the coming of Jesus there is a lot that looks impossible. And I want us to think about that together tonight and in particular we're going to focus on three areas one by one. Three things that from our point of view and in many ways seem impossible. So first of all it's impossible for a virgin to conceive. As we said

Mary was very young and as a young unmarried virgin conceiving a child was impossible. And yet the angel says that's what's good to happen. And to give Mary proof he refers to Elizabeth who is a barren and b old and yet she is six months pregnant and we read about Elizabeth's experience in verses five to 25. And I think it's very significant that Elizabeth's experience has been highlighted because we are being pointed towards a theme that has recurred again and again throughout the Old Testament scriptures and that is the theme of women who can't have children. Now that's an incredibly difficult thing for anyone to experience and there are some people who would give anything absolutely anything to be able to have a family and yet they can't. And that is as a very private thing but a very very difficult thing for anyone to experience. And if anyone has experienced that never ever forget that God understands and never forget that you can pour your heart out to God at any time regarding any of these things.

But nevertheless it's a theme that occurs throughout scripture and ultimately along with everything else in the world that is not good it can be traced back to the fact that sin has entered into the world. After Adam and Eve sinned at the very beginning their sin brought a curse into the world, a curse that has brought so much pain in so many ways for so many people and that that has manifested itself in all sorts of ways and you all know that that's true because I'm sure every one of you has experienced pain and sorrow for one reason or another.

And physically, emotionally and spiritually that curse has affected every single part of life and one area in particular that it's going to affect and that's one area that's mentioned in Genesis is that women will experience pain in childbirth, all women will experience pain in childbirth and it's I think clearly obvious that further from that some women aren't able to bear children at all and it's part of the effect of the curse. Now I also want to just point out here before I go any further that I'm not in any way saying that it's wrong for people to choose not to have children or who never get married, who remain single all their lives. That's a different thing altogether, completely different and the Bible never says that women are incomplete if they don't become mothers because throughout church history there have been countless numbers of amazing servants of God who have never had children. So I'm not saying anything like that but I just want to make that clear. However, the point that has been highlighted is that the problems associated with childbearing like everything else that's wrong with the world can be traced all the way back to sin coming into the world and the curse that that brought. So Adam and Eve sinned that brought a curse, however it also brought a promise from God and that promise is contained in the words of

[9 : 11] Genesis 3:15. I will put enmity between you and the woman between your offspring and her offspring, he shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel. Now there is an unbelievably important word in there, in fact it's so important it's there twice. It's the word offspring and that word is telling us that a descendant of the woman, a descendant of Eve, is going to crush the serpent and that's ultimately pointing us towards the victory of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of evil. But the word offspring is immediately telling us that God's plan of salvation is bound up with childbirth and I think that is the reason why Eve is called Eve.

If you look at verse 20 in chapter 3 it says the man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living. Now in giving his wife that name Adam is recognizing that it is through his wife's offspring that there is the hope of life. Adam knew that through eating the fruit he had brought certain death into the world but he realizes that his wife is not the mother of the dead, she is the mother of the living all because of the promise that God had made. And so God's purpose is bound up with the woman's offspring therefore it's bound up with childbearing and that manifests itself in the importance that's given to family throughout the pages of scripture, in particular the family of Abraham. If you read through the Old Testament it's one big story about a family, a family that eventually becomes a nation called Israel but it's still a family.

So God has made this promise, part of this promise is offspring, offspring logically involves childbearing. In particular God's purpose is going to be focused through Abraham but when we get to Abraham we immediately discover a big problem. God makes a covenant with Abraham at the heart of that covenant we again have the promise of offspring. God says to him look towards the stars if you're able to number them that's what your offspring is going to be. However Abraham's wife Sarah can't have children she's barren. And so then you've got God's purposes coming down from Genesis chapter 3 towards Genesis chapter 12 it all looks good it all looks great and then it's hit by this problem.

We're looking for offspring Sarah can't have offspring. And so in order for God to accomplish his purposes he needs to overcome the barrenness of Sarah's womb which he does and Isaac is born.

Isaac grows up, Isaac gets married, he his wife Rebecca she also needs to have offspring and yet the same trouble is there. Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren and the Lord granted his prayer and Rebecca his wife conceived. We see the same again with Jacob's wife Rachel the same with Hannah, Samuel's mother and the same with Elizabeth in this chapter again and again and again God has to overcome barrenness in order to accomplish his purpose.

[13 : 11] God miraculously restored many women to be able to carry children all of which were a key part of God's purposes. Now here's where I want you to think about it because you might not agree with me and it's okay if you don't agree with me. It is okay if you don't agree with me but.

What is the ultimate miracle in terms of conceiving? Not Sarah, not Rebecca. The greatest miracle of all is Mary.

The greatest miracle of all is a virgin conceiving and I think that it's a strong case to be made that throughout the Old Testament God is accomplishing his purposes through miraculous pregnancies and it comes to a climax with the greatest miracle pregnancy of all.

Mary's and there seems to be this theme running through scripture and you have to ask yourself the question why is that there? Why is that there? Not every woman struggles to conceive in fact thanks be to God it's something that that many people don't struggle with. Why is it that there's all these women there seems to be a kind of concentration of of barrenness in God's purposes? Why is that there? Why is God doing this? What does it tell us? Well it tells us one of the most important truths in Christian theology it's telling us that salvation is all about what God does. The plan of salvation from Eve to Sarah to Rebecca to Elizabeth to Mary would never have happened if it was not for God's direct deliberate miraculous intervention in other words without

God it would have been impossible and here we are being reminded about many of God's wonderful attributes in particular we're being reminded about his power and his grace. God is showing his power he's showing that he is powerful enough to overcome the damage that sin has caused and every time the frailty of human flesh threatened the plan of God through a barren womb God intervened and showed how powerful he is God shows his power but alongside that God shows his grace whereby when we were helpless when we needed it he came to do what we couldn't again and again he intervenes he provides he overcomes he acts he uses his power he does it all and that is a great reminder of the fact that salvation is never about what you do for God it's about what God does for you and that's our really really important thing to remember sometimes we think about Christian testimonies don't we people they talk about how they become a Christian and very often we talk about our experience and we'll say I I experienced this I felt that I heard this I thought that and that's understandable we do want to talk from personal experience we'll say I this I that I this

[16 : 58] I that that is okay I'm not saying that that's wrong but first and foremost our testimony should say God did this and God did that because it is all about what God has done throughout scripture there were women for whom it was impossible to conceive the pinnacle of that is Mary it is impossible for a virgin to conceive but as Gabriel says nothing will be impossible with God so as we said God initiates a plan of salvation in the aftermath of the fall at the heart of that there is offspring however as the Old Testament progresses the promise of us offspring reaches a higher level not only is there going to be a descendant but that descendant is going to be royal and that's what happens with David he was Israel's greatest king and the throne of God's people was promised to his descendants we read about that in 2 Samuel 7 it's a very important chapter in the Old Testament God says to David when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your father I will raise up your offspring there's that word again offspring after you who will come from your body and I will establish his kingdom he shall build a house from my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever so God's plan of salvation includes a king who is going to reign however in the days of Mary it looked impossible for God's king to reign we looked at this a little bit last week I'll just recap it briefly at the time when Mary and Elizabeth were pregnant the nation of Israel was barely a nation at all it was under Roman rule having previously been subject to numerous rulers and conquerors none of whom were descendants of David so you've got a big problem here the Old Testament says David's descendant is going to reign Mary and Elizabeth look at the world around them and they say he's not reigning and he doesn't look like he's got the slightest chance of standing up against Rome and so right now God's kingdom looks like it's failed and any chance of a descendant of David becoming king looks highly unlikely if not totally impossible but what does the angel say he says he will be great and will be called the son of the most high and the Lord 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 now isn't it really interesting of all the things that the angel could have said to Mary about the coming of Jesus Christ this is what God once highlighted this child is going to be king not just any king but the promised Davidic king who is the fulfillment of all that the Old

Testament promised and to and is they like like Mary it must have been amazing to think God's king is coming we're going to get our nation back and that was the expectation that the people had they thought that the Messiah was going to come and be their king and even though the presence of Rome and the weakness of the nation made that look impossible yet this was their hope that God would send his king and reestablish this nation and of course the big question is can God do it can God do it well the amazing truth is that God can actually do far far more putting a Davidic king on the throne of geographical Israel at this time looked impossible but God did far far more than that what God actually does is put the promised Davidic king on the throne of the whole universe and that means that not only does Jesus rule over Israel he rules over every other kingdom as well he is the one who is the blessed and only sovereign the king of kings and the Lord of lords and that's exactly what the Old Testament promised if we look at it in more detail Isaiah 49 look what it says but I said I've laboured in vain I've spent my strength for nothing and vanity yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God and now the Lord says he formed me from the womb to be a servant to bring Jacob back to him that Israel might be gathered to him for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has become my strength he says is it too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserve of Israel so let's say one thing the king will restore Israel but there's more I will make you as a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth thus says the Lord the Redeemer of Israel and his holy one to the one deeply despised abhorred by the nation the servant of rulers kings shall see in their eyes princes and they shall prostrate themselves because of the Lord who is faithful the holy one of

Israel who has chosen you all of this is pointing to the fact that not only is Jesus going to reign over Israel he is reigning over all nations and it's a reminder that when it comes to God's plan of salvation it far exceeds our expectations not only is God putting a child in Mary's womb but this child is going to be raised up to a position of absolute sovereignty Jesus is coming to be king which of course is why he said the kingdom of God has come when he began his preaching ministry and all of that is reminding us that God's salvation is big it is big the whole of creation was marred by sin and God's plan is to restore the whole of creation back to what it was meant to be it was never just about the land of Judah it was never just about ethnic Israel it was always about all peoples and all of creation and that's why we must never ever think that

Christian theology is just a small block of teaching that we can use as a sort of top up as we go through life neither is it this kind of crutch that we should turn to in order to make us feel better we must always remember that Christian theology is big it is the explanation of life it is the destiny of the universe it is the book of law of the king of kings it is the revelation of God Almighty and it must must must be what governs our whole world view and by that means that we have got to take it seriously because God is not asking us just to kind of have a wee bit of an allegiance or a wee bit of a respect God is God now it is absolutely irrational to say that there is a God and then put it have no effect on your life it's just bunkers and all God is asking of us is that we would just have a bit of sense and realize that he is God of all he is the one in whom we live and move and have our being and he is the one who reigns over everything he rules with perfect wisdom he has absolute authority he governs with uncompromising fairness and he bestows upon us immeasurable love he is the perfect perfect king but he is king and that drives us to two options we either bow before him or we rebel against him and that's the question are we for him or are we against him that's that's the question and all of this is highlighted by Gabriel because he says his kingdom will have no end that means that they will never ever ever ever ever be a moment when Jesus is not king he is the heir to the throne of God's kingdom and on the cross he won a definitive victory over all the enemies of the kingdom of God now he is exalted now he is victorious that's what the resurrection tells us Jesus rose from the dead he is exalted he is king nothing can threaten him nothing can overpower him he has absolute sovereignty absolute authority and his kingdom will never end and here is where we see the difference between Jesus and everybody else because you can look at other people at earthly rulers and they can seem very powerful back then

Rome looked powerful 300 years earlier Greece looked incredibly powerful nowadays Donald Trump looks powerful but there's one thing that none of these rulers can do none of them can reign indefinitely it is impossible for their reign to last but Jesus is different with Jesus it's impossible for his reign to stop he will reign forever because God has done what seemed impossible in fact he's done far far more so it looked impossible for a virgin to conceive it looked impossible for David's descendant to be king but Gabriel tells us a very simple but very important theological principle nothing will be impossible with God but there's one more thing that I want us to highlight and this is the most impossible thing of all it's impossible for a virgin to conceive it's impossible for the

[28 : 02] Davidic king to take the throne of the universe but lastly it's impossible now really listen to this it's impossible for God to be with us impossible for God to be with us that's a theme that runs right through the bible from the moment that Adam sinned go back to Genesis 3 Adam and Eve rebelled against God they disobey his command they they reject his rule and the inevitable consequence of that is that humanity and God are separated Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden there is now an alienation that means that God and humanity dwelling together is no longer possible God drove them out of the garden it's possible for God and humanity to be together and you go through the Old Testament and you'll see again and again and again that there are massive restrictions on the contact between God and humanity every time God appeared on earth there were massive restrictions he appeared at the top of Mount Sinai when he delivered the law and Moses says don't go near that mountain don't touch it don't go near he came to dwell in the holy of holies right in the middle of the tabernacle and the temple and again do not go near do not go near God there's massive massive restrictions in terms of contact between God and humanity and all of that is because it's impossible for a holy

God to be among a sinful people and that seems straightforward enough God is holy and pure we are sinful the two cannot belong together and I often think of the example of a hospital theater where you do operations you go into that operation I don't know anything about surgery my father was a doctor I inherited nothing from him except bad handwriting but but from what I know of hospital stuff you go into a hospital theater what do you have to do you have to wash your hands like mad and you see them they're doing stacks like this washing washing washing washing washing washing washing washing washing washing washing washing washing because you cannot go into a theater operation if you're anything other than sterile is there any exception to that rule in hospital theater no there isn't you drop something on the floor just pick it up and use it no you don't you just say oh by the way I want to come in I haven't washed my hands I'll be fine I was changing a tire in the car but it'll be fine no it is uncompromising cleanliness and that's just a tiny illustration of the fact that a pure perfect God cannot be in contact with sinful people it's just part of the perfection of God it's not

God being horrible it's God being perfect it's God being perfect and so that seems straightforward enough God is perfect he cannot come into contact with imperfect humans so there's a separation but there is one problem that is driving a change in that situation one force that is is if you like niggling at that scenario at a basic level it seems that God and humanity can't be together and that's that but there's one thing one thing that's still there do you know what the one thing is God wants to be with you and although God can't be with you if you're sinful he wants you he wants to fix this problem he wants to restore that relationship God's great desire is that humanity would be with him and that everything would be restored to what humanity had at the very beginning therefore at the heart of God's plan of salvation is the goal of God being with us again and as we said that plan of salvation has been worked out through the offspring of Eve it's tied in with childbirth and the covenant of Abraham with David that promise of offspring was named raised to a new level so that the offspring was going to be royal but now here in Luke chapter one we see that the promise has been raised to the highest level of all the offspring is not just going to be royal he's going to be divine as it says in Luke 1 32 he will be great and will be called the son not of Mary the son of the most high God himself is coming for hundreds of years hundreds of years it was absolutely impossible for God and humanity to be together but yet do you remember what the virgin's child is going to be called you shall call his name Emmanuel and what does Emmanuel mean it means God with us yet again God is making the impossible possible and this is where we just see the absolute astounding goal of God's plan of salvation he's coming to be king of the universe he's coming to reign forever in utter splendor authority and majesty but the most amazing thing of it all is that he wants you with him he wants you to be with him and that's God's goal for us for all eternity that we will be with him in the new creation and yet in order for us to be with him in the perfect new creation he has come to be with us in this broken creation and through coming alongside us through dying in our place

Jesus has opened up the way for us to be with God forever and I hope that you can see how impossible all of this is how impossible it all seemed if you could stand beside Mary in Luke chapter one you would say it's impossible for a virgin to conceive if you were standing in the remnants of the nation of Israel you would say it's impossible for God's Davidic king to come and reign and standing in this broken sinful world that seems so wrecked at so many levels you think it's impossible for God to be with us and for us to be with him but the glorious message of Christmas and of the coming of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is that nothing will be impossible with God and boy that should make us burst with joy and thankfulness for all that God will do for us nothing will be impossible for God when it comes to saving you and never ever forget that never forget that that when the Bible talks about salvation it's not talking about God just doing just uh something that God does people say that oh God forgives that's his job God will just forgive because that's the way it is Bible's talking about salvation that sounds all very very nice never ever ever ever think like that when God came to save you he moved heaven and earth doing what seemed impossible so that you could be saved he did it all for you because he wants you with him never ever forget that nothing will be impossible with God and may that be the motto of both our congregations in the year ahead as we seek to reach out to carol as we seek to serve as we seek to grow closer together as we seek to grow in faith as we seek to tell people the good news of Jesus we look outside and we think oh man it's so difficult may God write on our hearts that nothing will be impossible for God without God salvation looked impossible but with God nothing is impossible and the coming of Jesus Christ proves it and all of that leaves one last question is it possible for God to save you well i think we know the answer let's pray oh god we thank you so much that you have done what to us seemed impossible and that's because you are God we are limited we live in a realm that is limited limited by laws limited by by cause and effect limited by forces and we ourselves are limited lord but you are not because you are God and you have done for us what we could not do for ourselves and we marvel that you are the god who is able to do these things

but we marvel even more that you are the god who wants to do these things because you want us as your people and we pray oh god that we would just look to you and lean on you and never forget that nothing will be impossible with you bless it be your name god amen