

Songs of Praise

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[0 : 0 0] Now I would like us to look back at that passage we just read together and I hope that in so doing I really do hope that we will be inspired to praise him afterwards also our King and our God and we do have the bullet points if you would like to call them that for the sermon included with the bulletin sheet.

And we did look at the beginning of this gospel last week or a couple of weeks ago and we continue to do so today and I want to make two general points by way of introduction points that we can take from the whole passage together and then look more specifically at the songs themselves these great songs of praise that particularly come from Mary and from Zechariah but also from Elizabeth as well there is a poem of praise as she meets with Mary and the two general points are this we recognise that already at this early stage in the gospel Jesus is the focus.

Jesus is already the focus of the accounts that we are given here he is not just incidental to the account but rather he is all the focus it is a very personal story it is a story about individual happiness and about pregnancy and about birth and all the intensity that is involved in that and yet we recognise through that personal story that Jesus is actually in the very centre of what is happening and when Mary comes to meet with Elizabeth John in her womb the unborn baby leapt in his in her womb when he heard Mary being there and the parallel truth of Mary being pregnant with Jesus and so there is an acknowledgement of Jesus even in that incredible way and more so by what Elizabeth says we read over that quickly don't we we can you go on pass over it it is surely one of the most amazing statements in scripture where she blesses Mary in a loud voice in verse 42 blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me the mother of my Lord she says before the child is born there is this amazing spiritual recognition on Elizabeth's part that the child was to be her Lord was to be her Messiah was to be her Savior Jesus is the centre of attention at that point we recognise that already in Zechariah song that Jesus is the focus of that song that he is the Messiah of whom his son John will be the forerunner and so there is an amazing sense in which Jesus is already before he is even born he is the focus of this chapter he is the focus of the word he is the focus of the truth and isn't that key for us isn't it in our lives that as we gather together to worship today as we live our Christian lives that Jesus is the focus of our lives he is the centre of our lives of our witness of our work of our decisions of all that we are that Christ is crucial to us individually and together as we see this great chapter as it were theologically coupling the old and new testament very closely together with John the last Old Testament prophet Jesus the Messiah we find that Jesus is crucial and that we recognise the centrality of Jesus in everything that we are where is Jesus Christ in our lives today where has he been over this last week that has ended and this new week into which we have entered is he our Lord is he a redeemer is he the focus of our lives or do we need to sometimes come together and repent repent that we haven't focused and haven't spoken with and haven't worshipped and haven't centred our lives and our thinking on the Lord Jesus Christ as Christians that is crucial for us and it's a mark isn't it of where we stand before

God the significance and the centrality of Jesus in our day to day living in the privacy of our hearts and the reality of our lives not a focus from far away but somebody and we'll see that as we go on that is absolutely crucial to our being so I'm going to make another kind of general point and it's linked to this but it's coming in a sense from a different angle Jesus is already the focus of this chapter but we also see here that the kingdom of God is about people just as much as the people here focus on Jesus so the kingdom work focuses on people now throughout this chapter throughout these songs particularly there's great Old Testament themes coming through or a great Old Testament theme the theme of the kingdom the theme of the Messiah the theme of the descendant of David the everlasting rule of Jesus all these themes are coming through in this chapter about the kingdom of God big themes you know important themes themes that transcend life as it were and are going to be significant right on into eternity kingdom of God themes the coming of Jesus but they're interwoven with the most personal of stories the kingdom of God is about people this is a very well it's a very miraculous set of events it's also very ordinary it's very people centred it's all about relatives and neighbors and friends and family and pregnancy and surprises and naming children you know it's not it's not just deep and marvelous and universe changing theology well it is but that is interwoven into the ordinary lives of people God breaking into ordinary lives with this magnificent focus on his kingdom and on his salvation and on what he comes to do and I think that's an important reality

New Testament reality to grasp that we as Christians who are ordinary people are sharing in this kingdom work because the kingdom of God is about people who have been touched by grace it's tremendous and it's exciting that as we gather together and I began that service today with the talk of unity because we are unity united around the work of the kingdom around the king of the kingdom around our Messiah we have a shared task we're on a shared road and we move forward with purpose and with togetherness and with a tremendous sense of God's perspective and the kingdom of God among ordinary people encourages us to fight the selfish gene which is in us all who says no this is the way and I'm going my own way it speaks about a higher goal than simply what we want and where we're going and what we're thinking because we are united behind the Messiah behind Jesus Christ and we have this privilege of so doing and so being and I hope that that might spur us on in our singing together to sing in a really united way in a corporate way in a body way in which we offer our praise to God together so these are two general points but I want to make one specific point from these two songs and particularly these two songs is that God in us provokes praise from us God in us by the power of his spirit provokes praise from us that is the core of genuine and true praise and faith is that we recognize we are what we are because we have been gifted salvation we have the Holy Spirit in our lives we have spiritual life so that true praise whether it's corporate like this together or whether it's private in our own hearts or homes genuine praise is a gift it's a gift from God it involves a spiritual rebirth it involves a new heart because you see naturally our sinful hearts just stick the finger up at God they have no time for worship and praise of God and that's the core sin isn't it it's a core rebellion I will not have this man to rule over me but when we are able to worship and praise it's because he has come and changed our heart and renewed our heart and touched our heart by his grace and by his salvation so that genuine praise to God is deeply spiritual it's not primarily an act an outward act it's not just something that is outwardly corporate like you would go to a if we're doing it corporately like you go to a cinema or you go to a theater or you go to a concert it's not just primarily an outward act but it's something entirely different it's uniquely spiritual because it must well up first of all from our hearts it must come from hearts that are changed because if you notice in when Mary sorry when Elizabeth speaks to Mary and says blessed are you among women we're told that she was filled with the Holy Spirit and then we recognize also in Mary's song that he she says in verse 53 he is filled the hungry with good things speaking of his spiritual blessings and when Zikariah sings his prophetic song he is filled

[11 : 19] with the Holy Spirit so being filled with the Spirit leads to praise God in us provokes praise from us so can I look just for a moment at the common theme that are in these songs and the first is that one is the response of being filled with God when we come together with praise it is because we are filled with the Holy Spirit when we praise God in our knees in the privacy of our own lives and our hearts it must come from being filled with the Holy Spirit Spirit filled praise that is what God is offering or that is what we are offering God and that is what salvation is about enabling us to recognize that God is worthy of praise and worship so maybe for the first time worship reading the word praying to God is no longer a chore is no no going to church again want to drag wish it was different

I wish I was singing was better wish it was brighter I wish it was music I wish it was a decent preacher wish it was all kinds of outward external things that would make it hope to do and great and exciting and yet the first and the fundamental and the core reality is that we praise God because we are Spirit filled because he has changed our life and because we have been redeemed and delivered and he has broken into our dull and ordinary experience with his salvation so that genuine praise must be more than skin deep it must be it mustn't just have that external quality and that goes for our private times of devotion also for sometimes we go through ritual in order somehow to please God and or to stave off superstitious bad things happening but it comes in response to all that God has done filled with God she what Mary says is she is filled with the spirit my soul glorifies the Lord my spirit rejoices in God my Savior that is her response she is filled with God he is her Savior he is her Lord and I wonder in our lives today for you and for me whether praise is alien maybe your experience today is that well I just don't get praise at all

I don't understand why you do it I can't appreciate why it goes on maybe it's just a sing song if we're speaking about our praise together is it instinctive something that wells up from within us charismatic in the real sense of being filled with the spirit yeah our worship privately and publicly in families in homes and individual lives and corporally is charismatic as it is the response of being filled with God's spirit as Mary and Zechariah and Elizabeth was here so where can we learn to praise how can we improve our praise privately or corporately the first place is on our knees that's where we first go asking for his spirit you know can I be filled with your spirit Lord fill me with a sense of your spirit and of your grace and of your goodness and of your forgiveness and of their purpose of your life as we are filled with the spirit the natural response of that is adoration is worship is praise because we are thankful and we're fully gratitude to him for what he has done this as I hope we'll go on to see as well so that one common theme is that it's a response of being filled with God but another common theme of the particularly the two kind of songs that are delineated as songs or poetry here Mary's song and Zechariah song is their scripture based song they're very emotive they're very personal they're very passionate but they're not empty you know they're not simply emotional expressions to God they are scripture based these people

Mary and Zechariah they knew their Old Testament and they couched their praise they couched their worship not just in wordy feelings or in feeling kind of words but in understanding in spirit opened minds as they praise God with reflective truth from his word that they know what God is like and they understand him and they praise him in his own language as it were in the language that he's given through his word they know as you know you can see from this that it speaks about God's mercy extending through generations that he is remembered as servant Israel to Abram as descendants wherever it speaks so much is grounded so much in Old Testament truth and in truth that they knew so that their praise was given a 3D look and deck because it was based on truth and it was based on God's word and as they took God and knew God personally from his word and from his truth so there's these common themes of the response of being filled with God and of being scripture based can I look for a moment briefly at the two songs themselves Mary's which is more personal and then Zechariah's which is both personal and prophetic Mary Mary's theme is glory she is glorying in her God she is magnifying her God my soul she says glorifies or magnifies the Lord that is the theme of this wonderful expressive spirit filled song she's lifting him up high she's not embarrassed she's probably a teenage girl but she's not embarrassed without any learning without any formal knowledge that she has learned but having known the scriptures herself she's not in any way ashamed of worshiping and glorifying and praising God as her Savior and her God that is the great theme of her song isn't it my soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior she has a deep personal faith that she is expressing in this song my soul my spirit the one who has done mighty things she goes on to say Israel yeah but but also for me personal and expressive of God being her Savior recognizing too that she is his servant he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant here is someone with a great model faith isn't it someone who knows her God personally who understands his holiness who knows that she is his servant that she is her calling and that she can praise him and that he is hers God is worthy of being glorified and of being praised and that is the foundation and the core of our own worship I hope

I hope today also can we make that same claim to knowing deep in our soul and in our spirit the salvation of God and the glory of God and the remembrance of God in our lives the service that we can offer him and the wonder of his holiness my Savior but she goes on in wonderful terms to speak of him as her God and reminds us probably in verses 50 to 55 of the kind of Savior he is he's a Savior who brings down the proud and who lifts up the humble he's the Savior who fills the hungry with good things but sends the rich empty away these are really radical and revolutionary statements sometimes they have been taken in revolutionary terms politically but shouldn't be because they are spiritual truths that we are being given here but it's none the less radical and it's no less revolutionary because it's revealing that Jesus Christ can redeem and will redeem and can only redeem those who humble themselves before his salvation and if we remain proud and if we remain rich in the sense of depending on riches for our salvation and if we think power and political power or worldly power is what will save us or what is important then we can never know the Savior he lifts up those who recognize their need the Bible has a lot to say about that has a lot to say about riches what being evil in themselves and the fact that they can grab our hearts and pull us away from any sense of need of salvation they can give us that independence I don't need Jesus I don't need God just as power can power corrupts absolute power corrupts absolutely and it can make us again think well

[21 : 49] I'm powerful I don't need God I'm going my own way I'm going in my own strength but we recognize that God constantly is the one who reaches out to those who cry for help who recognize that spiritual power and spiritual riches transcend anything that this world can give so there's a personal and a cosmic revolution spoken of here Jesus turning the world upside down not to the mighty not to the rich but to those who are humble in heart and he speaks about that throughout his gospels and can I say today that if you will not humble your heart before God you will never be a Christian if you can't worship him you can't bow down and recognize him as Lord and God sovereign even in darkness when things aren't going well for us if we can touch be touched by his love and his grace and his sovereign glory unless we can do that we will never be Christians it's an oxymoron to be a proud Christian can't be can't be we can't be proud and self-centered and also bow the knee to Jesus it simply doesn't go it can't be and if we say I don't need him if we say I'll just offer him my best efforts when I die I've gone to church all my life or whatever and we deny the need to humbly come as sinners before the Savior if we think I'm okay in my own strength we will never become Christians never and that's a sobering and a humbling and a frightening thought that he requires us whoever we are whatever we've achieved whatever abilities we have he requires us to humble ourselves before him recognizing recognizing our sinful hearts and our need for forgiveness and for salvation my Savior she says in my God she brings glory to him with these sentiments Zek and Aya on the other hand brings blessing praise he says in verse 68 be to the Lord the God of Israel he benedicts God he gives him a blessing for who he is he speaks about God's deliverance just as Mary speaks about

God who is glorious and God who is her Savior and God so Zek and Aya speaks about deliverance and again it can be taken in revolutionary terms about being delivered from enemies and sometimes the Jewish nation in bringing forth this kind of prophecy have done so political deliverance as it were but this is not again speaking of political deliverance he's speaking about deliverance from spiritual enemies he's ushering in the kingdom of God which is a spiritual kingdom verses 68 to 70 he speaks about the deliverance that God brings for his people against their enemies redeeming them and enabling them to know forgiveness of sins he's speaking about the Messiah who's going to come and he's speaking about John his son who will be the forerunner of the Messiah you my child will be called the prophet of the most high

God and he is prophetically speaking about deliverance from enemies that Jesus will bring and we see that where do we see that bill bill most on the cross where Jesus wins victory over evil and Satan and the grave and sin and as we recognize and see this prophetic message we recognize that Jesus offers us and speaks to us about deliverance from our enemies not political not external but spiritual enemies and that enemies that are first of all internal enemies within us enemies that are opposed to God in our own sinful hearts he delivers us from the selfishness and the sin and the pride and the greed of our own hearts and the power of evil to bring us down and to separate us from him our freedom was won on the cross death our death and our hell which we richly deserve has been defeated by Christ and taken by Christ on the cross we are to take him as our Lord and Savior deliverance from enemies it's a practical real reality that we don't go around cowering under the darkness of our own hearts and failing God again and again because he has said if God is for us who can be against us that we can be more than conquerors that we're able not to remain under the power of sin and selfishness and darkness but can I say also in conclusion very lastly here that it's not just deliverance from enemies and I think sometimes we think of our salvation in these terms purely negative as it were we say it from death say from the grave say from sin say from evil but it's deliverance to God he speaks in these beautiful terms that

John is going to be the prophet in verse 76 77 who will give the people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness to guide our feet into the path of peace these are positive truths that the prophecy is ending with and we should end with that same positive truth not just deliverance from but deliverance to it's deliverance to God to walking in the light speaking with a friend of mine this week who was enslaved by alcoholism for much of his life and was in the gutter and at the point of death in every way absolutely at the end of everything a social outcast and inadequate in every way and he was saved by Jesus

Christ and yet for the first while of his Christian life he just struggled to understand what it meant to be set free until one day one of his sponsors who was speaking to him about salvation said you know what you're like he said you're like you're in a prison cell a dark dark windowless prison cell and that Jesus Christ's company's opened the door and his light is outside and the door is open and you're free to go but you're still cowering on your knees in the corner in the dark you're not able to recognize and walk towards the light because you're afraid and at that time my friend said that that exactly summed him up that he knew about Christ he knew he'd been set free the door was open but he was just still cowering in the darkness because to him it was in a sense it was it was all negative and he couldn't see the positive beauty of just leaning on Jesus Christ and walking in the light and isn't it sometimes that as Christians we cower in the corner of our prison cell knowing that Jesus is set as free but still in the darkness and and not moving forward into the positive light of his grace and into what's spoken of here is his tender mercy and his forgiveness and his peace and his guidance so often we see it in negative terms about what we can't do and what we oughtn't to do and what we fail to do and we're grief-stricken and we're we're guilt-stricken and we think we're not pleasing God enough we we don't need to please God enough he's already sent his son he has shown the extent of his love and he has redeemed us he's opened the door as we have come to him by faith and he wants us to luxuriate in his light light and in his love he doesn't want us to drag him back into the darkness of our own self-righteousness of our own good works of our own puny efforts he wants us to enjoy him and allow him to transform our life and be filled with the spirit and be filled with his grace so that we are able to live for his glory and praise him I hope we can do that today I hope that if we don't sense him or know him or love him for hearts are small and shrunk and shriveled and dry that we will allow his spirit to fill us and to re-captivate our hearts and re-energize our souls and hydrate that's the word I was looking for hydrate our hearts spiritually so that we can praise him so that we can genuinely praise him in our hearts and in our lives he is a great God and Mary and Zechariah's songs have become scripture for us and we rejoice in that because we recognize that they speak about our God and our

[32:17] Savior the one that we glory in the one that we bless may we do so in our lives and may our hearts be filled with him as we come to worship him I'm going to pray briefly and then we're going to sing a couple of songs together in conclusion and I hope that it can be out of reflective praising hearts that we sing Lord God we ask and pray that you would fill us with your spirit we come empty we come needy we come recognizing that being Christian is not simply our own choice our own decision our own mental assent but it's something miraculous something spiritual something that brings us to our knees symbolically and often physically in worship and in adoration that there is someone more important than me in the world someone who knows me better than I even know myself someone who is unique and who is individual and who is sovereign and who is God we look forward to studying him more tonight when we think of the Trinity and that glorious truth of the Trinity and may that truth also help us to praise you more but Lord God we ask and pray today that we will be filled with your spirit and that we would be enabled to praise you and that it would be real and genuine as we come recognizing you as our God and our Savior who has delivered us from darkness but has delivered us to himself and that we belong to your family to your kingdom and that that would unite us together that it would give us a sense of purpose and direction we thank you for the privilege of being able to share our Savior with friends who are coming along to Christianity explored and also maybe through our work contacts or our student friends or our neighbors help us to be able to share Jesus and the glorious truth of Jesus with all into whom we come into contact help us then we pray bless us as we sing to you and may it be a sweet sound that rises to heaven as an offering of thanksgiving and sacrificial praise we ask it in Jesus name Amen