

Awakened to Praise

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[0:00] Good morning. So before we get started, I want to know if you could help me with something. It doesn't matter how many times I preach, there is something about the weightiness of bringing God's word to people where I just get crazy nervous.

Speaking in front of people, not an issue. Speaking God's word, I want to puke in the bathroom. So if you would, will you just kind of participate with me for a second? How are you all doing this morning?

Good. Good. Fine. How are you? Ah, thank you. I was waiting for it. I'm very well, thank you. I'm good. I was going to give you all a coach on how to actually have communications with people. It was a trap. You passed. It's good. One of everybody. Thank you for that. But it's funny how often we can have that exact same conversation, isn't it? Someone asks how we're doing without giving much thought.

We give the expected answer. If you run into somebody in the aisle of the supermarket or meet an acquaintance on the street, they ask, how are you getting on? And almost before your brain has time to register the question, the reflex kicks in.

[1:11] Hi. Fine. Or if you're feeling particularly expressive, you might even add in a, not bad. And it's remarkable easy how we have that same exact reflex when we come to church on Sunday mornings.

We shake off the cold, rainy weather, hang up our coats, grab a hot drink, and settle into conversation. And when someone asks how you are, you smile and nod and say, I'm fine. Good. Good. We take our seats and everything looks completely sorted. But beneath that mask, if we're honest with ourselves and with God, when was the last time our hearts felt even a quiet flicker of genuine praise?

How easily we can slide into the numbness of routine. We can turn up, help set out chairs, sing songs from memory, listen to the sermon, all while having hearts that struggle to feel genuine praise.

We reach for the I'm fine mask as an emotional shield. We keep things surface level. Nobody sees the fatigue. Nobody asks the hard questions. And we keep trying to manage the life in our own strength.

[2:27] Yet that defense keeps us isolated, quietly carrying burdens we are never meant to bear alone. And perhaps the deeper question is this. How can our hearts grow so cold towards God whose promises we know?

And what could awaken them to praise once again? If you would turn to Luke 1, 39 through 45. It's on page 1026.

Before we jump in to read the text, if you don't mind, I'm going to pray one more time. Mostly for my own heart. So, Father God, we beg of you to give us grace here.

Let us see your word. Let us understand its truths. Give us confidence to the Holy Spirit to apply it to our lives. Let my words fade away quickly.

Let your words stand true forever. Use me. Make me useful here. But God, make your Holy Spirit work in our people. Including myself.

[3:38] To know you more. Come be with us, Lord. Amen. All right. Jumping in the middle of the story. At that time, Mary got ready and hurried down to a town in the hill country of Judea.

Where she entered Zachariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leapt. The baby leapt in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In an allowed voice, she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women. And blessed is your child you will bear. But why am I so favored that the mother of

my Lord shall come to me?

As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her.

And today, we're going to start with how this passage holds up a mirror to the spiritual struggle we all know too well. That even faint hearts can grow cold to praise.

[4:43] Now, before we look at what happens when Mary arrives, I want us to just think back for a moment about the house she's walking into. Earlier in Luke, he doesn't introduce us to people who have abandoned God.

He introduced us to Zachariah and Elizabeth. Two people described as righteous before God and walking blameless in the other commandments. They were faithful servants. Yet, they had lived with the grief of being childless for many years.

Elizabeth was barren. The years had slipped away. And now, they were both advanced in years. On top of the personal grief, there was a heavy silence in the nation. Four centuries without a prophet.

Without a fresh revelation from God. Life was ordinary, routine, slow, and quiet. So, when the angel Gabriel suddenly appears beside the altar of incense in the temple, announcing that their prayers had been heard, and Elizabeth would bear a son, who would prepare the way of the Lord, Zachariah stumbles.

Faced with God's promise, Zachariah looks at his physical impossibilities and struggles to believe. He asks for proof in verse 18. How can I be sure of this?

[5:53] For I'm an old man, and my wife is well along in years. Because he doubted the promise, he was unable to speak until the things took place. So, Zachariah returns home mute.

And in verse 24, we find that Elizabeth conceives, but she remains in quiet seclusion for five months. That quiet home holds up a mirror to our own hearts.

One of the quietest dangers we face as Christians is not that we suddenly renounce our fate and walk out in open rebellion, but it's something far more subtle. We begin to mistake the quietness of an ordinary life for the absence of God.

The Christian life is largely made up of ordinary days. You wake up on a great Tuesday. You make school lunches, drive through a commuter track, wash dishes, walk the dog, answer emails, pay bills, and fold laundry.

It's domestic, routine, and mundane. And in a church plant, things can feel just as ordinary. You've been gathering together in Winchboro for a few years, from living rooms to the bowling club, to the community center, to random offshoots like this one today.

[7:11] You set out chairs, you plug in the sound system, you prepare refreshments, and you care for the children. And in just a few weeks, me and my family have noticed the quiet, faithful perseverance firsthand.

And that's something worth celebrating. Because there's so much of the Christian life that is made up in ordinary faithfulness. But whether you're involved in church planning or simply going about your everyday lives, we face the temptation to mistake the ordinary for what is insignificant.

When life and ministry feel ordinary, our hearts can quietly slip into unbelief. We begin to measure God's presence and faithfulness by what we can see and feel.

There is no dramatic spectacles, no emotional highs, no immediate visible fruit. We begin to assume that God is not doing anything. And isn't it how remarkable, how easy we forget what we know to be true.

We confess God is faithful. We believe his promises. We know what he's promised to his people. And he's promised to be with them. And yet we go through our ordinary days as though he's left us to ourselves.

[8:25] Our hearts slowly grow cold to praise. We lose sight of the wonder of who God is and what he has promised. The things that once stirred our hearts to rejoice can begin to feel familiar, distant, and insignificant.

And when that happens, I think there are two ditches we can easily fall into. For some, we begin to drift. Life feels heavy, dull, and dry.

So we quietly check out. We drift towards the numbness of screams, of work, consumer comforts, looking for the world to relieve our, give us the relief our soul craves.

But there's another ditch on the other side. Instead of checking out, we keep going through the motions. We keep turning up. We help set up the chairs. We sing the hymns. We read our daily Bible passages to check a box.

But inside, the wonder has evaporated. We find ourselves serving out a mechanical duty perhaps even carrying disappointment because life is hard and the fruits of the labor isn't always visible.

[9:39] In both cases, in both ditches, we put on the I'm fine mask. We keep our heads down. We smile politely over tea and guard our hearts so that nobody sees the flatness inside.

Why does this happen to faithful people? Spiritual weariness is not necessarily sin. Sometimes a sense of dryness is simply a result of living in a fallen world.

It comes from deep grief, prolonged disappointments, physical illness, chronic pain, and the sheer exhaustion of caring for families and working demanding jobs. Psalms 103 reminds us how God, that God knows how we were formed.

He remembers that we are dust. He knows our weakness and he does not despise us for being weary. But the spiritual danger there is how we respond to the weariness.

In dry season, our fallen hearts can tempt us towards self-reliance. We subtly conclude that if our faith is going to survive, we have to carry the whole load ourselves.

[10:47] We assume that we are personally responsible for drumming up the spiritual warmth, maintaining our own joy, and keeping up appearances for everyone else. You know what happens when we try to live that way?

We wear ourselves out. The Christian life begins to feel like something we have to hold together through our own efforts rather than a life that's resting to the care of our Heavenly Father. And at the same time, it drives us to isolation.

Because we feel like we must look sordid, we dare not admit that our hearts feel flat. We sit in our chairs and isolated in a crowded room, trying to survive on our own strength.

And here's what we need to understand. We can't make our hearts come alive simply by trying harder. We can do all the right things, keep up the routines, and still find ourselves struggling to rejoice.

So where does true joy come from? To answer that, let's see what happens when Mary arrives at Elizabeth's home. Here in this text, we have these ordinary circumstances of this family.

[12:00] And God is faithfully bringing his promises to fulfillment. What our cold hearts cannot produce on their own, God is bringing to life through his son.

And here's the great truth that this passage demonstrates. The presence of Jesus Jesus awakens true praise. Again, consider the setting. Mary gets ready and hurries to the hill country of Judea. She enters Zachariah's home and greets Elizabeth. There's no angelic choirs in the sky. There's no temple liturgy, no incense, no trumpets. Mary enters an ordinary home in an unnamed village and simply speaks of everyday greeting.

Yet the moment the greeting is spoken, the heavy quietness of the home is shattered. Eruption grays forth. Although Jesus is hidden within Mary's womb, his presence immediately awakens joy, recognition, and blessing.

And Luke wants us to see something important. He doesn't tell everyone that everyone suddenly feels joyful. He draws our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. First, what happens to Elizabeth's child?

[13:13] Verse 41. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. And in verse 44, Elizabeth confirms, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy.

This was more than an ordinary moment in a womb. Because we remember what Gabriel said early in the chapter, that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born.

So God is keeping his word down to the smallest details. John has not begun his ministry, but God has appointed him to. Yet, even before his birth, when the promised Savior draws near, John leaps for joy.

Joy does not wait for human maturity or religious activities. Praise begins not with our effort, but with God's gracious work as Christ draws near.

But John isn't the only one responding to the presence of Jesus. Look again at verse 41. Luke tells us that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In the verses in 42 and 43, she cries out, blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear.

[14:27] But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord shall come to me? Elizabeth calls Mary's unborn child my Lord. Elizabeth is doing something far more than expressing affection for a young relative.

The Holy Spirit has opened her eyes to recognize what Gabriel announced early in the chapter. The child of Mary is carrying is the son of the Most High, the promised king who will reign on David's throne forever.

God has remembered his covenants. And listen to the humility in Elizabeth's words. Verse 43, why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord shall come to me?

That question brings us back to the moment in David's life. We heard part of it earlier in 2 Samuel 6. Centuries earlier, David, while bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, asked the Lord, how can the Ark of the Lord come to me?

David asked that question out of fear of God's holiness. Elizabeth asked out of humble wonder of God's grace. The Ark is being brought towards Jerusalem. David danced before the Lord with all of his might.

[15:45] Here in Luke, an unborn baby John leaps for joy. David blessed the people in the name of the Lord. Here Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cries out blessings.

The Ark remained in that household for three months. And the Lord blessed that home. And Luke tells us that Mary stayed for Elizabeth for about three months as well. In David's day, the Ark signified God's holy presence amongst his people.

But now, in this ordinary home in Judea, someone far greater than the Ark has arrived. The Lord himself in human flesh. Elizabeth claims no rights, no credential, and no spiritual pedigree.

She is simply overwhelmed by the unmerited grace. True praise is never awakened by what we bring to God. It is awakened when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the staggering reality of the promised king who has drawn near to us.

And that brings us to the heart of what Elizabeth is celebrating. If you look down to verse 45, Elizabeth says, blessed is she who has believed that the Lord will fulfill his promises to her.

[16:59] God is faithful to his promises, and that's what gives us a reason to praise him.

Elizabeth's words highlight the contrast between Mary and Zechariah.

When Gabriel spoke in the temple, Zechariah doubted and asked for proof. When Gabriel spoke to Mary, she received the promise in humble trust. Mary's faith didn't make God's promise certain. She trusted the Lord who could make it. Elizabeth is declaring God is faithful. 400 years of silence does not mean God is inactive.

Decades of barrenness did not mean that God had forgotten his covenant. What the Lord has spoken, he brings to pass. Jesus has come because God keeps his word.

Consider this. Jesus has not performed one single miracle, not spoken an audible word, or even been born, and his presence already is bringing in joy and praise.

[18:00] In him, every promise of God finds their decisive yes. Through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Jesus shatters our quiet numbness, reveals who he is, and awakens our cold hearts to praise.

Now I want us to return for a moment to Elizabeth's question in verse 43.

Why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord shall come to me? What a wonderful question.

Elizabeth, overwhelmed by the promised Messiah, has entered her home, but her question points to something far greater.

Why has the Lord come at all? Why has the eternal Son of God taken on human flesh and entered in this ordinary broken world? Because Jesus came to redeem us and give us his Holy Spirit.

He has come to redeem sinners and bring us back into fellowship with God. It is something that we can never accomplish for ourselves. Our problem runs deeper than lack of a spiritual enthusiasm.

[19:14] We are sinners who need to be reconciled by a holy God. No amount of religious activity, personal effort, or determination can accomplish that.

We need a redeemer. And that is precisely what God has provided in Jesus Christ. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus lived the perfect obedience to his Father.

Where we have doubted God's promises, Jesus trusted them fully. Where we have relied on our own strength, Jesus lived the perfect dependence on his Father.

Where our hearts have failed to love and praise God as we ought, Jesus gave him the perfect obedience and devotion that we never could. And when he went to the cross, Jesus knew what it

was to experience human weakness.

He knew hunger, exhaustion, sorrow, grief, yet he was without sin. And at Calvary, he did not suffer because he was weak. He willingly took up upon himself the judgment of our sins deserves, our unbelief, our pride, our self-reliance, and all the ways we have failed to love God as we ought.

[20 : 30] Christ bore the penalty of our sin in our place. He gave us his life so that sinners like us could be forgiven and brought near to God.

And on the Thursday, he rose boldly to the grave, victorious over sin and death. This is the good news of the gospel. Our standing before God does not depend on how strong our faith feels this morning.

how consistently we read the Bibles or how successfully we manage to keep everything together. Our hope rests entirely on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

But the good news doesn't end with our forgiveness of our sins. The risen Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father and poured out his Holy Spirit on his people.

And I want to see how wonderful that is in light of our passage. The same Holy Spirit who filled Elizabeth and opened her eyes to recognize Jesus as Lord is the same Spirit who is at work in John even before his birth is the same Spirit whom Christ has given all his believers to dwell.

[21 : 47] Think about that. As we read Luke 1, we marvel at the extraordinary things that God is doing in an ordinary home, and rightly so. but we can turn to our ordinary lives and forget that God has not left us to ourselves.

The Holy Spirit has not abandoned his church. He has not withdrawn from our ordinary lives of God's people. He dwells inside of us.

He is not a mere presence as a servant, a silent observer. He is actively working, opening our eyes to the beauties of Christ, strengthening our faith, helping us in our weakness, and stirring our heart to love and praise our Savior.

That does not mean every day we'll feel extraordinary. It doesn't mean that we will never experience grief, exhaustion, disappointment, and seasons where praise comes through tears.

But it does mean that even in those seasons, we have not been left to sustain our own faith through our own strength. The Spirit is at work within us, even when we can't see or feel anything.

[23 : 06] And behind all of this is God's grace. Mary didn't devise a plan to bring the Messiah into the world. God came to her with a promise. Elizabeth did not arrange the Savior to come visit her home.

God took the initiative. The unborn John certainly didn't earn anything to bring joy that filled his heart when Jesus was near. God took the initiative.

The same is true for our salvation. We did not climb our way up to God through our faithfulness.

God came down to us through Jesus. Grace is never our effort climbing up to heaven.

Grace is the Son of God stepping down in our helplessness. Because Jesus Christ has redeemed us and given us his spirit, we are forgiven, reconciled to God, and welcomed in as his children.

Our standing before God rests upon Jesus' finished work at the cross, and our lives are sustained by his Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who filled Elizabeth continues to open our eyes, strengthen our faith, and remind us of God's faithful promises.

[24 : 18] as he has turned our hearts again and again towards the Savior, he awakens the praise. That is the wonder of the gospel. God has graciously drawn near to us and Jesus Christ and not left us alone.

But now we get to respond to that. Because Christ has accomplished this all for us, everything about how we live life changes. is we get to strengthen one another in faith and join together in praise.

Through Jesus Christ, you are not a servant trying to earn your place in God's household. You are an adopted child of the living God. You belong at the king's table.

And because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another. we don't have to pretend that everything is fine. We are free to acknowledge our weakness, lean upon one another, and encourage one another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We see this pattern in Luke 1. God did not leave Mary to carry the weight of his calling in isolated silence. He brought her into the home of Elizabeth.

[25 : 34] And look how Elizabeth responds. She doesn't simply offer Mary a few words of encouragement. She's filled with the Holy Spirit and reminds Mary of what God has promised.

Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her. Imagine what an encouragement those words must affect to Mary. And look what happens next. Just beyond our passage, in verse 46, Mary begins her song of praise. My soul glorifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Do you see what's happening? The Holy Spirit fills Elizabeth. Elizabeth speaks God's promises to Mary. Mary responds with praise to the Lord. Now the circumstances in this meeting were extraordinary, but God still used everyday ordinary believers speaking his word and encouraging one another to strengthen the faith of his people.

people. These two women did not put on an elaborate religious show. They met in an ordinary home, rejoicing in the presence of Jesus and the promises of God.

[26 : 44] And that's what opportunity is before us as a church family. So what do you think this looks like for our church? It doesn't require some elaborate new church program.

it looks like ordinary people walking in gospel freedom together. And I want us to consider two ways to do that.

Think of what this looks like and it's something as simple as a conversation after service. The old way of self-reliance defaults to that same reflex.

It's safe. I'm fine. We say it when our hearts are heavy or numb because we don't want to make a fuss or look spiritually weak.

But the new way of grace frees us to drop that mask. Imagine standing by the refreshments. And someone turns to you and asks, how are you getting on this week? And instead of reaching for that reflex, perhaps you say, actually it's been a heavy week.

[27 : 51] Work has felt overwhelming. My heart has felt quite flat and I found it hard to pray. Would you pray for me? An instant offering of an awkward nod, instead of offering an awkward nod, they say, I'll keep that in mind, right?

That would be a bad response. The person looks and says, let's think of Jesus right now. You step out of the side of the hall, you bow your heads, and for two minutes, right there, you bring your weariness to the Lord.

Nothing flashy happens. You're right there in the community center. The shield of self-reliance dropped, and two children of God turned to their Savior.

together, together, in the Holy Spirit, we use those ordinary moments, the Holy Spirit will use those ordinary moments to strengthen our faith.

Now, that does not mean you need to share every struggle with everyone, but it does mean that among our brothers and sisters in Christ, you don't have to pretend that everything's always fine.

[29 : 11] you are free to need one another. We see the same grace at work when we walk along someone in a dry season. Both in a church plant and our personal walks with Christ, there are seasons that feel slow, dry, and quiet.

Times when prayers feel like they're hitting the ceiling, and our affections grow cold. The old way of responding was superficial optimism. Keep your chin up.

Things will turn around. Or perhaps we avoid the person altogether because we don't know what to say. But the new way follows Elizabeth's example.

When you notice a brother or sister walking through a dry valley, you do not have to fix their circumstances. You get to sit with them and gently remind them the truth about who Jesus is.

You get to say, brother, your feeling may be dry today, and your faith may be small. But the Savior holding you is infinitely faithful.

[30 : 16] What he has accomplished for you at the cross has not changed. His promises have not failed. He will carry you through this. That's what Elizabeth did for Mary. She directed her attention back to what God has promised.

God's promises to one another. The Holy Spirit uses those ordinary words to lift our eyes off of our own performance and back fix to the Lord.

We don't have to manufacture someone else's joy. We don't have to find the perfect words to solve every problem. We get to point one another to a Savior who has drawn near.

because Christ has welcomed us, we are free from the burden of self-reliance. We get to strengthen one another in faith, and together we get to join our voices in true heartfelt praise.

perhaps that changes how we answer the question we began with this morning. How are you doing? It's a simple question.

[31:28] Sometimes our responses are automatic. I'm fine. Good. But it hides a great deal the weariness we're carrying, the doubts we're wrestling with, or the quiet struggle to bond in the ordinary days of life.

God. Sometimes we carry that exact same instinct into our relationship with God. We try to keep everything together, maintaining our spiritual warmth, and convince ourselves that we are doing fine.

But Luke 1 reminds us of something wonderful. In an ordinary home, in an ordinary village, God was fulfilling his promises he had made from centuries before. The Savior had drawn near. prayer. And through the work of the Holy Spirit, that quiet home is filled with joy and praise. And friends, the God who kept his promises then is the same God who keeps his promises today. Jesus has come. He has redeemed us through his life, his death, and resurrection. He has given us his spirit who continues to strengthen our faith and turn our hearts towards him.

[32:38] So when our hearts feel cold, we don't have to manufacture our own joy. When life feels ordinary, you don't have to assume that God's not present.

When you are weary, you don't have to carry those burdens alone. We have a faithful Savior. We have brothers and sisters who we can both share our burdens and our praise.

Our hearts have grown cold. Our faith may sometimes feel weak, but the faithfulness of Christ has never changed. And because of this, we get to draw near.

And we have every reason to rejoice. In light of that, let's pray and praise him together. Father God, we praise you for ordinary life, for mundane things, for the reality that you have stepped in to a broken world, and you chose to come as a weak infant.

I don't understand that. My mind can't fathom all those things and choices you made. but because of your word, we know it's necessary.

[34:08] You had to live the life that we should have lived so we could be redeemed. So Lord, I pray that you use your spirit to encourage our hearts, to let us know it's okay not to be okay.

It's okay to struggle. because you are holding us in your hand. He would not let us go. And you have given your spirit so that we can know you more deeply, and we can trust you even more. When life is going crazy, you are still faithful. God, we praise you. Let our words praise you this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.