

Joy in God – Part 3: Grand Reversals

To Know Christ and to Make Christ Known (Luke Series)

Luke 1:46-56; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; November 3, 2013

Introduction

Let's read Luke 1:46-56. This is called *The Magnificat*, the song of Mary. It is a song of joy in God. Joy in God is an all-satisfying happiness in God by grace through faith in what He has done, is doing and will do in and because of His Son, Jesus. So far we've seen that joy in God is crucial to the glory of God in our lives. And we have seen that joy in God is the result of faith. And this faith is in the help of God and in the love of God. Today we want to see one other aspect of our faith that is important to our joy in God.

A World in Which the Rich and Powerful Oppress

We live in a world where the rich and the powerful oppress others for their gain. They oppress (1) the weak and poor and (2) the people of God who are usually part of the weak and poor classes. And their oppression can be fierce and brutal.

Do you ever groan over the oppression and evil and suffering that takes place in this world? Do you ever wonder why the rich and powerful seem to go their way, independent of God and running over people in their way, without consequence? Do you wonder why the wicked prosper and the people of God suffer so much? Do you ever long to see things change?

The Ways of God

There are six 'aorists' in Mary's song that are 'prophetic' aorists that point especially to the future, but also reflect what God has done in the past and is doing in the present. These aorist verbs characterize the way God works and especially what He will ultimately do through the life and ministry of the Messiah.

'He *has done* mighty deeds with His arm' (51)

'He *has scattered* those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart' (51)

'He *has brought down* rulers from their thrones' (52)

'And *has exalted* those who were humbled' (52)

'He *has filled* the hungry with good things' (53)

'And *sent away* the rich empty-handed' (53)

God does not simply make rich or powerful just so He can bring them down and send them away empty. Nor does God simply make people poor or weak just so He can lift them up and fill them. God does not treat people like farmers treat pigs – fattening them up just for the slaughter!

But the Bible highlights two realities:

1. The rich and powerful are less likely to look to God and trust Him and more likely to oppose God and His people.
2. The weak and poor are especially recipients of His grace because God intends to glorify His wisdom and power and grace in the salvation of those the world despises. (James 1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-11)

Eschatological Reversal

One of the major themes of the gospel of Luke is what has been called ‘eschatological reversal.’ Throughout Scripture we have God revealing His ways to us and one important way of God is to effect ‘grand reversals.’ He has done it in the past, He is doing it now, but He will do this in a greater and more final way in the future. The way of God to effect ‘grand reversals’ in history will one day be seen in its ultimate manifestation in a complete and final ‘eschatological’ or ‘end time’ reversal at the final judgment of God.

These grand reversals include:

1. The humbling of the proud and the exalting of the humble.
2. The dethroning of the powerful (rulers) and the enthroning of the weak (ruled).
3. The emptying of the rich and the filling of the empty (poor).

We can see this theme of grand reversal in stories in the OT, especially:

- The Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)
- The Story of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)

We can see this theme of grand and eschatological reversal in Luke in these passages:

- The ministry of the Messiah (Luke 2:34)
- The defining of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 4:18-19)
- The Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-26)
- The Principle of the First and Last (Luke 13:22-30)
- The Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
- The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)
- The Story of the Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-27)
- The Exception in the Story of Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10)
- The Parable of the Vine Growers (Luke 20:9-18)
- The Nature of Greatness (Luke 22:24-27)
- The Resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:1-7, 26, 46, 52)

So what do we need to do?

1. Turn from being in the category of the proud and powerful and rich. (James 1:9-11; Luke 18:9-14)
2. Turn from revenge. (Romans 12:17-19)
3. Trust that the grand reversal will come. (Luke 16:19-21)
4. Wait for it. (James 5:7-11; Luke 13:22-23)
5. Submit to the category of the humble and weak and poor. (James 2:5; Luke 6:20-26)
6. Love our enemies. (Romans 12:20-21)
7. Find joy in the promise. (Luke 24:26, 46, 52)

The good news of Jesus Christ is the good news of a great unexpected reversal or unexpected turn from the bad to the good that brings great joy!

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A World in Which the Rich and Powerful Oppress

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'Read Stephen Neill's *A History of Christian Missions*. On page 161 he describes what happened in Japan when the gospel came there in the 1500's. The emperor began to believe that the incursion of the Christian faith into their religious sphere was so threatening that they must end it. And he did end it, with absolutely incredible brutality! It was over for the church in Japan. And I don't doubt that the hardness and difficulty of Japan today is largely owing to the massive (though short-term) triumph of the devil in the early 1600's. Twenty-seven Jesuits, fifteen friars, and five secular clergy did manage to evade the order of banishment. It was not until April 1617 that the first martyrdoms of Europeans took place, a Jesuit and a Franciscan being beheaded at Omura at that time, and a Dominican and an Augustinian a little later in the same area. Every kind of cruelty was practiced on the pitiable victims of the persecution. Crucifixion was the method usually employed in the case of Japanese Christians. On one occasion 70 Japanese at Yedo were crucified upside down at low water and were drowned as the tide came in. I cried 3 days ago when I read that, because I've got a good enough imagination to picture the lapping water with your wife on one side and your sixteen-year-old on the other.'

(John Piper, *Doing Missions When Dying is Gain*)

Today is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. (Psalm 73; Revelation 6:9-11)

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‘Let us understand, that she does not ascribe to God a despotic power – as if men were tossed and thrown up and down like balls by a tyrannical authority – but a just government, founded on the best reasons, though they frequently escape our notice. God does not delight in changes or elevate in mockery to a lofty station, those whom he has determined immediately to throw down. It is rather the depravity of men that overturns the state of things because nobody acknowledges that the disposal of everyone is placed in His will and power. Those who occupy a higher station than others are not only chargeable with disdainfully and cruelly insulting their neighbors but act in a daring manner towards Him to whom they owe their elevation.’ (Calvin)

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James 1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

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It is not wrong to be rich or powerful. The problem is to be proud (independent of God and opposed to God) and rich and powerful.

It is not better to simply be poor or weak. The blessing on the poor and weak is given when someone is humble and poor and weak.

The 'rich and powerful' as a category will not be condemned, only those who are proud and unbelieving.

Neither will the 'poor and weak' as a category will be saved, only those who are humble and believing in Jesus.

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Lazarus means 'God has helped' (trust in God to help in the future as if it was already done)

- The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)
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The Good News of the Great Reversal or Eucatastrophe

The good news of Jesus Christ is the good news of a great unexpected reversal or unexpected turn from the bad to the good that brings great joy!

'Eucatastrophe' (the unexpected, sudden reversal for good) is the paradigm of Christian hope.

Flieger explains, “*Katastrophe* is the dénouement of classical Greek tragedy, coming from *katastrephēin*, ‘to turn down or overturn,’” so that “eucatastrophe” literally means “the good overturning” (SL 27).

"I coined the word 'eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears (which I argued it is the highest function of fairy-stories to produce). And I was there led to the view that it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back. It perceives – if the story has literary 'truth' on the second plane (...) – that this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made. And I concluded by saying that the Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story – and produces that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love." (J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letter 89*)

‘The eucatastrophe in *The Lord of the Rings* comes in the third book, *The Return of the King*. When Frodo reaches Mount Doom, he is overcome by the seductive power of the Ring and refuses to cast it into the fire. Instead, he slips the Ring on his finger. All seems lost and Sam is near despair. But then Gollum, a pitiful creature enslaved by the Ring’s power, emerges from the darkness, bites the Ring from Frodo’s finger and falls into the cracks of doom, to perish in the fire. Gollum unwittingly fulfills a higher purpose, and the Ring is destroyed. Exhausted and near death, Frodo and Sam are rescued. When they finally awaken two weeks later, they discover that the good wizard Gandalf (who had perished earlier in Tolkien’s tale) is alive again. Sam, bewildered and overjoyed, says, “Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to become untrue? What’s happening to the world?” That is eucatastrophe—the happy turn of events, the undoing of this tragedy, *the good news*.’ (True Forms blog, by Pat)

‘As Gollum’s fate depends on his history of treachery and lust for the Ring, Frodo’s fate depends on his earlier mercy. Though he fails to destroy the Ring, his true victory comes in *The Two Towers*, when he shows pity on Gollum and spares him his life (J. Tolkien 601). Wood believes that pity marks the central virtue of the book and is its highest Christian achievement (*Gospel* 149), while Kocher asserts that divine providence “not only permits evil to exist but weaves it inextricably into its purposes for Middle earth” (48). Tolkien himself says, “The ‘salvation’ of the world and Frodo’s own ‘salvation’ is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury” (*Letters* 234). A single act of mercy enables the fortunate turn that saves the Quest. (*Just a Fool’s Hope: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Eucatastrophe as the Paradigm of Christian Hope* by Margaret Bush)

The eucatastrophe of the eschatological reversal is guaranteed by the mercy shown to sinners in the cross of Jesus!

One day justice will be done – finally and fully.

Oppression will be overthrown.

God's people will be delivered.

And we will be exalted and will rejoice forever in the 'grand reversals' purchased by the cross of Christ! (Revelation 19:1-3; 21:3-4)

Are you poor in spirit?

Are you rich in good deeds?

Are you looking to Jesus for righteousness and humbly following Him as Lord?

Are you waiting for the grand reversal with joy?