

GOD LOOKS ON OUR HUMBLE ESTATE

(Who is God Looking For to be One of His Bondslaves)

Luke 1:48 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Humility has often been called the single, identifying mark of a Christian. When we see God for who He truly is, we cannot help but be humble before Him. Humble believers never come before the Lord with an arrogant attitude. We never come before the Lord thinking we deserve anything. We never come before the Lord proud of our accomplishments. Rather, as Christians, our only boast is in the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24). Peter tells us that "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). God opposes the one who puffs himself up and thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think (Rom. 12:3). Not only was Mary humble, but much of Mary's "Magnificat" in Luke 1:46-55 deals with how God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. This theme of humility is the prominent theme in Mary's song. That's why she calls herself a **doulos**.

What does it mean to be a **doulos**? In the Old Testament, Hebrew men or women could indenture themselves as a slave or servant for six years, but by the laws of God, they had to be set free in the seventh year (Exodus 21:1-6). There were various reasons for becoming a slave. Perhaps they owed a debt they couldn't pay, or a husband died, leaving his wife a widow without resources. To see to it that no one would be taken advantage of, and forced into slavery indefinitely, God put the seventh year of freedom into place. But what if you liked your position working as a slave or servant, and loved your master, maybe you married another slave and had children, who still belonged to your master, and they were not yet free. In that case, you could become what was known as a "bondslave." Then you were brought before the city judges, and your ear was pierced with an awl, and you promised to serve your master for the rest of your life. The Greek word in the New Testament translated as "servant," "bondservant," "handmaiden," or bondslave is **doulos**. Almost all translations of the Bible translate **doulos** as anything but a slave, but **doulos** means slave. By avoiding the word "slave" because of its negative connotations, we miss something very important about our spiritual identity as believers, and what Mary meant when she called herself God's slave.

As I have pondered this text, Luke 1: 48, God the Holy Spirit led me to examine why the Lord may have chosen Mary to be the virgin mother of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Why did God choose a young girl probably only 14-16 years old? God has riveted my attention to verse 48. These words are, "For He (God) has looked on the humble estate of His servant/bondslave/bondservant; for behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed." What made Mary eligible to be the bondslave of the Lord? Why was she selected? In verse 48, I have discovered three key reasons God must have chosen Mary to be the mother of our Lord. If we can discover these three key elements in God's choice, can we too be eligible to become one of God's **doulos**, one of His slaves or bondslaves? God desires for you and me to be His bond slaves as Mary was. Let's look at Mary's amazing, the Magnificat. What changes must be made in our lives to make us eligible to be chosen of God as His bond slaves? Who is God looking for this Christmas?

GOD IS LOOKING FOR BONDSLAVES WHO COUNT HIS CHOICE OF SERVICE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY OTHER CHOICE OF SERVICE WE WOULD MAKE. (I.)

The key word I have examined and re-examined and exegeted is found in verse 48, “He has looked on or had regard for.” **Epiblepo** is the Greek word which means to gaze upon with favor, to pick out, to choose, to select after a careful study. Think of it! God so carefully selected this virgin maiden, Mary, betrothed to Joseph, to become a pregnant virgin, to carry in her womb the very Son of God. The two words, pregnant and virgin are antithetical words-oxymoronic. God’s choices for how He wants you and me to serve Him are often just as oxymoronic—just as unexplainable, as absolutely unfathomable, as clearly opposed to our preferences and prejudices, as His ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9). Before we start debating or arguing with God about a choice that He has selected for us to perform, think about His choice for Mary. God chose, before the foundation of the world, for Mary to carry His beloved Son, and to appear to all the world around her in Nazareth, as a promiscuous young lady, yet posing as a virgin. Since Mary had not been sexually intimate with Joseph, God chose for Mary to face impending divorce charges from Joseph. Betrothal was so binding in Mary’s day, that it could only be ended by divorce. God knowingly chose for this betrothed virgin maiden, who was living a godly life, to appear as one of the greatest sinners, a woman who could be stoned for her promiscuity. The story is so familiar that sometimes we miss it.

Turn with me to Matthew 1:18-25. Listen to the story. Joseph knew he could not stay betrothed to a woman pregnant by another man. Yet Joseph loved Mary and he didn’t want to publicly disgrace her or call for her death sentence by stoning. Who could God choose to face such an assignment as Mary faced? Give Mary credit not because she was sinless. She was not sinless. Yet give her credit. In this beautiful Magnificat, in verses 46,47, she exults, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Mary needed a Savior too. When Mary highly esteemed the choice of God, which came to her through the angel Gabriel, it was a choice she must have known, could or would end all her marriage hopes, that would end her betrothal to Joseph whom she loved. She knew he would never believe this angel story. She knew him well. It would appear that her story was a cover up for promiscuity, loose living, perhaps with one of the Roman soldiers stationed there in Nazareth. It was too wild a story for any normal person to say “Yes,”—to say in verse 38, “Be it done to me according to your Word.” Mary’s choice to accept the plan of God was clearly a choice to count God’s choice as more important than her being chosen by Joseph to be his betrothed wife.

The Word of God backs up this dilemma. Only God would be able to rule and overrule to stop the impending divorce. Mary’s very choosing of God’s choice over all other choices is why we call her blessed. Millions of believers throughout all generations live in “iffy obedience.” IF the will of God is convenient to do, then we will do the will of God. Doing God’s will in our culture is not the road to popularity/group affirmation. To say yes to God’s choice was to fling away her greatest marriage hopes, to alienate herself from the man she dearly loved. Mary promised to give up the man she promised to be marry, the man she had promised

to be the mother of his children. Beloved, are we willing to be humble bondslaves whom God can use, that He will choose, or do we debate His will? Will we count God's choosing as more important than any other choice? Secondly,

GOD IS LOOKING FOR BONDSLAVES WHO ARE FILLED WITH HIS WORD. (II.) When Mary said yes to the will of God and His choice, she did so in a song of joy known as the Magnificat. In her words that Pastor Larry read to us this morning, in Luke 1:46-55, Mary was not quoting, but she was referencing the words from Eliphaz the Temanite, in Job 5:11, in his first speech to Job. Eliphaz said, "He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety." That is the theme of the Magnificat. Mary knew the Word of God as a teenage young lady. Mary showed clear knowledge of three Psalms. God often chooses those who know and love His Word. Mary made reference first to David's Psalm 103:17 which says, "But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children." Notice Luke 1:50. "And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation/to children's children." Secondly, Mary referenced Psalm 107: 9, which says, "For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things." Notice Luke 1:53, which declares, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich, He has sent away empty." Then Mary also made reference, thirdly, to Psalm 138: 6 that declares, "For though the Lord is high, He regards the lowly; but the haughty He knows from afar." This reference of Mary is in our text, verse 48, "For He has looked on or had regard for the humble state of His servant."

To be filled with the Word of God is not only being able to quote verses on command. To be filled with the Word of God is to be able to know it so well, that as Mary did, we can paraphrase its essence. Mary knew the Word of God in her heart and life. She knew God's value system from the Word because she knew the Word. Mary knew God's place was high and exalted, but she also knew that when God comes near, He always comes down to be close to the humble and the lowly. Elisha A. Hoffman wrote a beautiful hymn about it called about being right with God. The first verse and chorus are: "Have your affections been nailed to the cross? Is your heart right with God? Do You count all things for Jesus but loss? Is your heart right with God? Is your heart right with God? Washed in the crimson flood, cleansed, and made holy, humble, and lowly, right in the sight of God?"

The Hebrew word David used in Psalm 138:6 about coming down to be close to the lowly and humble is **shephel** means those brought low before God, those who sink down, actually those who are low, abased, on their knees, and flat on their face before the Lord. When Luke translated the Hebrew word **shephel** into the Greek language, the Greek word he used and spoke of Mary speaking was **tapeinosis**. This Greek word means depression in rank, feeling unworthy and vile in the sight of God. Mary understood that God's value system was to desire those to be close to Him who feel unworthy before Him. Isaiah 57:15 declares. "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose Name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit; to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

God stays away from the proud—He resists us if we are boastful and arrogant. If we could express it in Wyoming vernacular, God wants no closer to us when we are proud than He wants to get to a ten-foot pole. God would scarcely desire to touch a proud person, as we might choose to use tongs to take half-burned pieces of wood out of a burned-out fire. God knows how vile the proud are from a distance. That's why the proud who never humble themselves are bound for hell.

Think of it! Mary was a teenager, but she knew God's word and His value system. She knew it early in her formative years. Mary wasn't poisoned as our generation is getting today with "the sinful disease of "meism." She wasn't locked into a passion for high self-esteem. Jesus said, in Luke 14:11, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." God is still looking for humble bondslaves, who as Paul said, in Philippians 2:3, "In humility count others more significant than themselves." Think of it at home, in marriage, in your family, in your church family, at school, or at work. What do you think of other's opinions, of their hopes, their dreams, and their needs? Must we be numero uno? Like Mary, does the Word of God fill our heart and control our responses? Are we willing bondslaves, filled with God's Word not only on our lips but in our life? Do we count God's choosing above every other choice? Thirdly, and lastly,

GOD IS LOOKING FOR BONDSLAVES WHO SEE BEYOND TODAY

WITH DIVINE VISION. Rather than saying to her cousin Elizabeth, "Joseph will probably divorce me. I may be stoned to death," Mary said, verse 48, "For behold, from this time on, all generations will count me blessed." In her heart, as her spirit may have tried to debate, Mary's own inner conclusion could have been, "I may soon be dumped by Joseph; divorced, and rumored to be, a prostitute with a son to be born out of wedlock. But I choose to leave my present predicament with God. I know God will take care of me and my future." Beloved, so much more is at stake than what people think about us today. More is at stake than our image, our fitting into our culture, and our worrying about what others think of us. Let me share with you two examples of people we know about who have taken God's view rather than their own view to be their own.

Oswald Chambers wrote about Galatians 2: 20 in his life, which states, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." He wrote, "These words mean the breaking of my independence with my own hand and surrendering to the supremacy of the Lord Jesus. No one can do this for me, I must do it myself. God may bring me up to the point three hundred and sixty-five times a year, but He cannot put me through it. It means breaking the husk of my individual independence toward God, and the emancipation of my personality into oneness with Himself, not for my own ideas, but for absolute loyalty to Jesus. There is no possibility of dispute, when once I am there. Has that break come? All the rest is pious fraud. The one point to decide is — Will I give up, will I surrender to Jesus Christ, and make no conditions whatever as to how the break comes? I must be broken from my self-realization, and immediately when that point is reached, the reality of the supernatural

identification takes place at once, and the witness of the Holy Spirit of God is unmistakable — “I have been crucified with Christ.” The passion of Christianity is that I deliberately sign away my own rights and become a bondsman of Jesus Christ. Until I do that, or you do that, we do not begin to be a **doulos** of God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon told of the day he surrendered his life to Christ. He said, "I surrendered myself to the Savior; I gave Him my body, my soul, my spirit...for eternity! I gave him my talents, my powers, my eyes, my ears...my whole manhood! So far from regretting what I did then, I choose rather to renew my vows and make them over and over again. I pray God, that if I have a drop of blood in my body that is not His, let it bleed away." We too often think of a slave or a bondsman of Christ in terms of bondage; but truly, one who is a slave to Christ could not be any more free. I ask you, “Can you honestly, wholeheartedly say with Paul, “I am a **doulos**, a bondsman, bound to my Master?” Can you say with Mary who bore Jesus, “God has looked on the humble estate of His servant, for behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed.”

Mary rejected the short view, the impending disasters ahead view. She took the long view. How many of us take the long view—God’s view? How many of us see with eternal eyes opened by the Lord, so we can see beyond today? Norman J. Clayton in 1943 wrote about this view in his hymn, “If We Could See Beyond Today?” The lyrics to his three verses go, (1) “If we could see beyond today as God can see, If all the clouds should roll away, the shadows flee; O'er present griefs we would not fret, Each sorrow we would soon forget, For many joys are waiting yet for you and me. (2) If we could know beyond today As God doth know, why dearest treasures pass away, and tears must flow; And why the darkness leads to light, why dreary days will soon grow bright, Someday, life's wrong will be made right, Faith tells us so. If we could see, if we could know We often say, But God in love a veil doth throw across our way. We cannot see what lies before, and so we cling to Him the more, He leads us till this life is o'er, Trust and obey. To fit Mary’s Magnificat, with her humility to be a **doulos**, a pitcher poured out for God, I wrote verse 4. “If we could see beyond today, as Mary could, if all our choices served God’s choice, as servants should, If we were filled up with God’s Word, and saw our future with the Lord, We’d be filled up, His pitchers poured, that’s our reward.”

Are we willing to choose God’s choice over all our choices? Are we willing to fill our hearts and spirits like Mary with His Word? Will we take the long view as Mary did, saying not, “Joseph will have me stoned or divorce me,” but rather to say, “Behold from now on, all generations will call me blessed.” Would you bow your heads with me?