

“Mary: The Way of Obedience & Prayer” September 2, 2018

Pastor Dave Sattler Series: The Jesus Way Texts: Luke 1:26-56; cf. Luke 22:39-43

Sources: NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: Leon Morris & N.T. Wright. Book: “The Jesus Way” by Eugene Peterson. Online: cmalliance.org, Forbes “Responses to Unexpected” & Global’s “Fake News.” Wikipedia: “Hypostatic Union.” Trips: Israel, October 2013: notes & photos from teachings by John A Beck & Maritimes, July/August 2018. Sermon: Sattler, Aug 19/2018, NSAC.

I. Review & Introduction:

- **<Slide>** Good morning, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC, today finishing off our Summer Series, “The Jesus Way.”
- In Acts, when Luke refers to members of the early church as followers of “the Way,” what’s he getting at? The “Jesus-Way” is, most certainly the way to heaven, but, is it also more than that? When Jesus declares, “I AM the Way, the Truth, & the Life” (John 14:6), what’s He really mean?
- When I think about the Jesus-Way, Cf. Hebrews 11:8 stands out for me:
 - This verse was crucial in the Lord’s ‘call’ to move our family from Surrey to North Shore Alliance Church ... 21 years ago today.
 - Q: “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.**”
- Following Jesus is absolutely a unique way of living; for it flips the norms and values of our culture completely upside down.
- **<Slide>** Eugene Peterson puts it this way,
 - Q: “Following Jesus has everything to do with this world but almost nothing in common with this world.” – Peterson, p.240/270.
- The Jesus-Way ‘ticks few of the boxes’ on our world’s ‘To-Do’ list.
- It gets us little or nothing of what we commonly think we need, or want, or even hope for. When Jesus says, “Follow Me,” and we truly follow, we actually don’t know ... where we are going or, what we will do next.
- Honestly, for me this is a titanic battle ... because the Jesus-Way often feels like a blind walk of faith. I want to lead. Or at least, know – or better yet, dictate, the way. And I struggle to put my trust in Jesus, the only One who truly knows where we’re going and what’s next. Yet, as I submit more and more, there is a measure of joy and freedom in following the Jesus-Way.
- Please turn now to the Gospel of Luke 1:26-56, p.830-31 in the blue Bibles in the seat rack in front of you. Or, fire it up on your electronic device.
- Let’s jump in with a Straw-Poll to whet your appetite for today’s story...
- **<Slide>** Question #1, Which of the following headlines is not “Fake News?”
 1. Research shows women are especially attracted to pudgy men.
 2. Child playing on phone at gas station causes fatal explosion.

- 3. Teenage girl impregnated by the Holy Spirit claims to carry Messiah.
- [Crushed me when I found out #1 was fake news.]
- <Slide> Question #2, How do you respond to unexpected, hard situations?
 1. Isolate, feel sorry for yourself, self-medicate [with ice cream, Netflix, intense workouts, a shopping spree?]
 2. Remain calm, assess the risk, consult an expert [write a song].
 3. Get busy trying to manage the situation.
- Not sure any of these is the right answer on this one. But, take a moment now to discuss your answer, or defend it, with someone sitting near you.
- <Slide> Question #3, What does the Bible mean when it calls Mary “blessed?” We should ...
 1. Worship her. 2. Appreciate her. 3. Learn from her.
- So, what do we do with Mary?
- For the most part, Protestants have ‘missed’ her. But, there’s something about Mary. To appreciate. To learn from. The beautiful story of a teenage girl with a humble, unassuming response to God whose perpetual, dynamic impact on the world one can, to this day, hardly begin to measure.
- <Slide> “Mary: The Way of Obedience & Prayer.” Let’s read her story. Luke 1:26-56 (NIV). Christmas right here in September!
- 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, **God sent the angel Gabriel** to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. **The virgin’s name was Mary.** 28 The angel went to her and said, **“Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.”**
- 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. 31 **You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.** 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”
- 34 **“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”** 35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.” [Or, another translation, **“Nothing is impossible with God.”**] 38 **“I am the Lord’s servant,”** Mary answered. **“May your word to me be fulfilled.”** Then the angel left her.

- 39 At that time **Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea**, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”
- 46 And Mary said [or sang]: “My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”
- 56 **Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months** and then returned home.
- <PRAY> ‘Lord, move me out of the way. Come speak to us by Your Spirit. Help us to embrace, live the Jesus-Way. We’re hungry to hear from You.’

II. Text & Message Outline:

1. <Slide> **A Messenger from God (1:26)**

- God sends one of His angels, Gabriel, to Nazareth — a tiny, conservative, staunchly-Jewish village in Galilee — with an important message.
- APP — Reality is: God communicates with humans in many different ways.
 - Most, less sensational than this, but God still speaks: through His Word, through prayer, through music, through nature, through the Holy Spirit to our spirit, through other people; sometimes, God even sends His messages to us via the miraculous.
 - There are more ways too. But here’s the point: we never control how God delivers His messages. The greater concern is: are we listening? And I wonder, how open are you to messages from God?
 - Do you put yourself in good positions to hear from Him?
 - Perhaps you’re somewhat impulsive; like me, a ‘shoot-first-ask-questions-later’ kind of character and the need to hear from God (or, anyone else, for that matter) rarely crosses your radar?

- o A good question to ask is this, GQ: If God had something to say to me, would I be ready to receive it? Or, even notice it was Him?
- o Part of walking the Jesus-Way is ... to anticipate, to ask for, to even expect to hear from God.

2. <Slide> An Unlikely Recipient (1:27-29)

- The recipient of Gabriel’s message is a “virgin” (27) named Mary, probably just 12-14 years old. A fact difficult to wrap one’s head around. God chose this Mary for one of the most important tasks He has ever asked of anyone.
- APP — And, isn’t that just like God? He loves to choose unlikely people.
 - o I think, actually, God doesn’t just sometimes choose to do this, this is the Jesus-Way: God prefers to use people the world deems ‘useless’ or ‘powerless’ — those on the margins of popular society.
 - o Maybe you find yourself in church today ... feeling like an ‘outsider.’
 - o You say, ‘Sattler, if you only knew my story! I got a rap sheet a mile long!’ I know, church is sometimes the hardest place to feel like you belong. I’ve had people say, ‘I walked into your building and it’s the like the Red Sea parted ... seemed people took one look and wanted nothing to do with me!’ This is wrong. And I am sorry.
- Young, poor, and female would have been a ‘resume’ unfit for any job in the ancient world. Still, the angel of God comes to Mary and says, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you” (28).
- Little Mary fits God’s way to a T! Truth is: God never writes anyone out of His script. May this serve as a great encouragement to those who feel ‘under-qualified’ or ‘on the fringes’ of God’s plans today.
- Though obviously “troubled by his words,” (29), Mary appears unfazed by the presence of God’s messenger. And, willing to listen and engage.

3. <Slide> Rather Unexpected Difficult News (1:30-37)

- Gabriel delivers some rather unexpected news, “[Mary], you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus” (31).
- We mustn’t underestimate the risk here.
- Becoming pregnant as a young unmarried girl in the 1st Century left few options. Her father would most likely disown her, and, if Joseph didn’t marry her immediately (and that would require divine intervention), she would be forced into a life of begging, or, worse yet, prostitution.
- Cognizant of this scandalous proposition, Mary calmly asks, “How will this be ... since I am a virgin?”
- (34) Then, when the angel answers, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and ... the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (35), indicating some

sort of divine conception that would impregnate Mary with the Messiah, this only complicates matters!

- Can you imagine the ‘scuttle-butt’ over morning coffee in the village of Nazareth when people got hold of that story?!!
- **<Slide>** APP — Unexpected and difficult, Mary’s story is a stark reminder ...
 - That, sometimes, life is not as straightforward as we’d like it to be.
 - Perhaps there’s something you’ve been praying for, for what seems like forever — healing, provision, reconciliation, pregnancy — and it’s just not happening. And you are tired ... and feel like giving up.
 - Or, maybe you’re struggling mentally or emotionally deep inside with something you feel you just can’t tell anyone about. And, downtrodden, trapped, forgotten ... you’ve even felt like ending it.
 - Some of you have received hard, earth-shattering news recently and you’re having trouble figuring out how you’ll ever make it through.
 - ILL — June 2018 was a very hard time for me.
 - Unexpected news crashed, wave after wave, into the church office ... a pedestrian killed, a suicide, deaths in the Lynn Valley fire, a tragic car accident, a drug overdose ... all within a few days.
 - Surviving the unexpected is truly difficult.
 - In times like these it’s hard to see God, find one’s way, or even put one foot in front of the other.
 - ILL — When I was 20, my close friend was killed in a car crash.
 - This rocked me. During that time, a sign hung in our college dormitory. It read, Q: “Hope is not a way out, but a way through.”
 - **<Slide>** God’s promise? Q: “[He] is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” — Cf. Psalm 34:18
 - When something hard hits, unexpectedly, I have learned not to ‘get busy and try to manage it’ or, try to ‘bury it.’ Instead, I need to take time to process. With God. And others. Find a way through.
 - And, with Jesus in the picture, there is always reason for hope. No matter the circumstance. I know this to be true.
 - “For nothing is impossible with God” (37). May we hold onto this truth as we face the impossible situations of our lives this week.

4. **<Slide> Simple Obedience (1:38a)**

- I’ve met a few 12, 13, 14-year-old girls in my time ... and they are not necessarily known for their willing obedience!
- Immaculate Conception, Virgin Birth, Incarnation, Hypostatic Union ... to name a few, all high theological concepts, but what is most staggering in the narrative is the power of young Mary’s simple obedience.

- One commentator says, Q: “The more important we become in the Kingdom of God, the more subservient we become.” – Peterson, p.219.
- In the Jesus-Way, the way up is ... the way down.
- APP – Too often I find my prayers self-serving, ‘O God, give me ... O God, make me/don’t make me.’ Not acknowledgments of submission.
 - The prayer that defines Mary’s life and legacy? “I am the Lord’s servant. [Lord], may it be as You have said” (38a). Great posture.
 - Mary’s just received the most honoured vocation in history and she stays grounded – remembers her true identity, as a servant of God.
 - And notice, she’s not broadcasting it ...
 - Snap-chatting to friends to boost her popularity.
 - Or, asking Gabriel to stick around for a quick selfie to post on her Instagram feed, #doingthelordswork. Or, shamelessly self-promoting her ‘Jesus-mission-adventure’ on Facebook.
- APP – On dark days, I often wonder, ‘Has my work had any impact?’
 - I’ve seen so many walk away from Jesus and the Church.
 - Sometimes I feel we “oversell” the benefits of following Jesus.
 - That discipleship gets us everything we want and need, with little pain or suffering. Then, when something bad happens, we dump and run! Q: “This isn’t what we signed up for!”
 - When reality is, Jesus says, Q: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily (that’s painful!) and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.” – Cf. Luke 9:23-24
- <Slide> History tells of Mary quietly going about her business obeying God.
- This is the real reason she’s called, “blessed.”
- Mary was given a monumental task. And, knowing there was no way she could do it herself, she allowed the Lord to accomplish His plan through her.
- And in so doing, Mary, with her simple obedience, becomes a “blessing” to us.
- And a solid example for how to live the Jesus-Way. Step-by-step, scene-by-scene, Mary trusted in God’s plan. At the birth of her son, Jesus. And, there too, to watch His crushing death. The only human to witness both.
- In the joy, and in the suffering. This is how genuine faith grows.
- Which begs the question: Am I, like Mary in her obedience, simply willing to make myself ... available to God ... with my life?

5. <Slide> Reflection & Retreat (1:38b-56)

- What was Mary to do, after “the angel left?” (38b) Disappear into isolation? Get busy? Run for the hills? Mary went to be with family, Zechariah &

Elizabeth, her trusted older cousin. “Mary got ready,” Luke says, “and hurried to ... the hill country of Judea” (39-40).

- Visiting there a few years back, our teacher said, Q: “Galilee (where Mary lived) is on the road to everywhere, and the hill country of Judea is on the road to nowhere.” — John A Beck, Oct 26, 2013
- ILL — To get away, to retreat with family in the Judean hills, young Mary ...
 - Had to embark on a perilous 4-day, 110km journey. By foot.
 - And travelling in the ancient world wasn't easy. Weather was hot, little shade from the sun; the hills, steep and dusty. Food and drinking water, scarce. Thugs and robbers, always looking for someone to jump. I'll bet Mary did a lot of praying on her way.
 - (Seems she even composed her prayers into a song.)
 - Combating her fear, calling out her needs to God, recalling His promise through the angel Gabriel, “The Lord is with you” (28).
 - That's what prayer is: reminding ourselves of Who God is, the “merciful” (54b) and “Mighty One” (49a), and, what God's done: “He has performed mighty deeds” (51a).
- **<Slide>** APP — “Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months” (56).
 - She's become known as a person of reflection and retreat ever since.
 - Do you know that Mary's eyewitness accounts for much of the content of the gospels? Later Luke comments, “[Mary] treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” — cf. Luke 2:19.
 - Seems she passed this spiritual practice on to her son. At least 5 times, Luke says, Jesus “retreats,” usually after times of intense ministry, and often to the mountains, for reflection and prayer.
 - This was His rhythm. And one I'm embracing more and more.
 - In our fast-paced world, times away are vital. To connect with loved ones. To take it all in. To pray. To commune with God.
 - Regular reflection and retreat is meant ... to rejuvenate us, to ground us in Jesus Who carries us through life's ups and downs.

III. Conclusion:

- Never static, living the Jesus-Way requires movement and often, taking risks, counterintuitive to the accepted norms and values of our culture.
- ILL — On this summer's family trip to the Maritimes, we visited ...
 - Many iconic Canadian sites: Fortress of Louisbourg, the Halifax Citadel, Port Royal, Peggy's Cove, the Bay of Fundy, & more.
 - **<Slide>** However, at least for me, one of the most meaningful, was this tiny memorial gazebo, far out-shadowed by the vast array of Anne of Green Gables' tourist destinations all around Cavendish.

- Albert Benjamin Simpson, the founder of our movement, was born in nearby Bayview, Prince Edward Island on December 15, 1843.
 - From an early age he felt the call of God to ministry.
 - Simpson left Canada, at age 30, to pastor what would become a large and successful denominational church in Louisville, Kentucky.
 - Years later, Simpson would leave that church due, in part, to the fact he could not support church leadership's plans for expensive building expansion and adding services to accommodate the masses who flocked to hear his passionate preaching.
 - So he took a job in New York City, where his desire to minister to the flood of immigrants pouring into NYC was met with great opposition from the leadership of his church.
 - Largely criticized by family and friends as a 'terrible career-move,' Simpson eventually resigned from that prestigious pastorate, left the denomination, gave up a regular salary, and set out to establish an independent mission in the heart of the city, where all — the poor, homeless, sick, and displaced — would be welcome.
 - It was during this time of ministry to New York's immigrants, in the 1880's, that God gave Simpson an insatiable burden and vision for the worldwide evangelization of lost people for Jesus.
 - And The Christian & Missionary Alliance was born.
- **<Slide>** On the eve of His crucifixion, our Lord comes to the Garden of Gethsemane. For my money, it's the 'TSN Turning Point of history.'
 - With His disciples in tow, and unthinkable suffering ahead, Jesus again retreats, to pray this prayer of submission, Q: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; **yet not my will, but yours be done.**" — cf. Luke 22:42.
 - And we wonder, where did Jesus learn that prayer? In utero, perhaps?
 - We forget that, in His humanness Jesus still needed to be shaped ... as a Son, as a Servant of His Heavenly Father, as our Saviour.
 - I think when young Mary clasped her pregnant tummy, and prayed, "Lord, may it be as You have said" ... over and over again, Jesus heard.
 - And, 33 years later, with the burden of the world on His shoulders, Jesus prays virtually the same words, "not my will, but Yours be done."
 - "Lord, may it be as You have said." And, this too, is our prayer.
 - Luke concludes, "An angel from heaven appeared to [Jesus] and strengthened him." — cf. Luke 22:43 Like mother, like Son.
 - Obedience to God. For Mary. For Jesus. For us. This is the Jesus-Way.
 - A hard way, for sure. But, also the best way. The only way. The path of suffering, but of transformation and freedom too.
 - May the Lord strengthen me and you for the journey. Amen.