

Luke 11:27-28

Mother Mary

Main idea: We try to be happy by doing and being all sorts of things, but nothing compares to how we are truly blessed in Jesus.

Paul McCartney was raised Catholic, but did you know that his song, "Mother Mary" isn't even about Mary, the mother of Jesus? He said that it was about his own mother, Mary, who, although she had passed away when he was only 14 years old, appeared to him in a dream one night when he was stressed out, and she told him "Let it be." So Paul wrote a song about her. And even though she died when he was so young, he loved her, honored her, and recognized that she had a major impact on his life.

You know, the Mary in the Bible had a great role in the coming of Christ. She was highly favored. She held Jesus in her womb for nine months, she nursed Him, she raised Him. She taught Him how to tie His sandals, and how to say His prayers, and she told Him about the story of His birth.

Can you imagine it? "Mother, tell me again about the angel, and the shepherds, and the manger." And Mary would reply, "You know it better than I do, Jesus! You sent the angel! You provided the manger!" And Jesus would reply, "I know, mother, but I like to hear it from you." Oh, Mary had a great role in the coming of Jesus!

But we're not to worship her, or venerate her, or even really give her much of a thought. Because our relationship with God isn't at all based on Mary, but on Jesus alone.

But my sermon this morning isn't just about Mary, or even primarily about Mary, but more about all the things that we often treat as far greater than they are, and how those things cause us to take our eyes off of Jesus.

You know, we often try to be blessed, happy, by doing and being all sorts of things. We watch tv because we want to laugh or be inspired, hoping it will make us happy. We buy things because we think those things will make us happy. We spend time with family because they make us happy.

Some of us try to make our wives happy because if momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

And some of that's okay. But why do you do it? And will it really make you happy?

Luke chapter 11, verses 27 and 28.

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28)

Father, help us to keep Your word. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, not getting distracted by other things, even good things, but being blessed as we unwaveringly hold to Your Word. In Jesus's name, Amen.

It might be an oversimplification to say it this way, but the word “blessed” in the Bible can simply mean “happy.” I think it’s probably a deeper kind of happy than we usually think of happiness, probably more along the lines of a lasting joy, but it’s not a bad thing to think about being blessed as being happy.

Well, in our passage this morning, we read about two people who talked about being blessed, about being happy, and both of them are right, but one of them is even more right.

Our passage begins by saying, “As he said these things.” So first, we’re going to go back to see what Jesus was just saying. Last week, we saw how Jesus had cast out a demon from a man who was mute, and how the Pharisees accused Jesus of being able to cast out demons only because He had the power of the prince of demons, Satan. And I think the verse that really sums up the previous passage is verse 19, where Jesus responded like this:

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Luke 11:20)

Which is interesting. Because Jesus didn’t say, “If you recognize that it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Jesus didn’t say that the kingdom of God is only in our midst if we recognize Him as coming from God. Jesus seemed to say that since He has indeed come from God, and does indeed have the power of God, and since Jesus Himself is God, then whether you recognize it or not, the kingdom of God is all around you!

You see, the reality about this world is that there is ultimately only one King. God is King. And He’s all-powerful, and sovereign, and everything that happens happens ultimately because God willed for it to happen. God even orchestrates all of our seemingly free wills so that His completely free will would be done.

But that seems kind of hard to believe, doesn’t it? It almost sounds kind of manipulative of God, doesn’t it? Like He’s this big puppeteer in the sky, and we’re all robots, just being moved around like pieces on a board, wherever, whenever, and however He wants. And sometimes in order to get a checkmate, God has to sacrifice a few pawns. Is that what it means to live in the kingdom of God?

I think that’s what a lot of people think of when they hear that God is in control. We like the idea of God being in control when it comes to helping us out of the mess we’re in, making us more

happy, but we don't like the idea of God being in control when we need to be disciplined, or even punished, for the mess we've made for ourselves.

When a family member is dying, we're comforted when someone tells us that God is in control because we know that God is wise, and He knows what He's doing, and we can trust His plan. So, with God's help we can let it be, even in our hour of darkness.

But when you blow it, when you sin, when you ignore His commands and live for yourself instead, well, that's not a time that we want to be reminded that God is in control, is it? Because it means that judgment is coming.

I suspect most of us, at that point, would rather cast off God's authority. We'd rather get away with our sin, having no consequences. But even then God is in control.

Nahum 1:3 says it like this:

The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. (Nahum 1:3)

You see, everything around us testifies to God's presence, power, and sovereignty. And because of that, even God's discipline ought to make us happy, because God disciplines those that He loves, so that we might love Him more.

So why do so many people miss it? And why do we sometimes even still ignore it, ignoring God's will in order to do our own will? Well, maybe it's because rather than fixing our eyes on what's truly important, we often treat lesser important things as if they were of the greatest importance. Instead of spending time in God's word, we want to spend time in front of a tv. Instead of shouting about Jesus, we shout about sports. Instead of getting excited about the kingdom of God, we get excited about building our own kingdom, our career, our family, our dreams and goals, because we fear that at the end of our lives, we'll have nothing to show for our lives.

But the ironic thing is that when we focus exclusively on such things, things we treat with utmost importance, then we often spend less time thinking about and living for the most important: Jesus Christ. So it's ironic that in all these other things, we're trying to truly live, but true life is found in Christ.

It's like we need to die to our old selves, be buried, be baptized with Christ and His death, so that we would be raised with Him to live a new life in Him.

Now, that doesn't mean that we won't still pursue a career, or a family, or goals, but it does mean that we see all these things less in the context of building our kingdom, and more about

how in each of these we might glorify God in His kingdom, which is upon us even now. Because it's Jesus who is most important, most exciting, and as we begin to see Him more and more in all of His power and goodness, we begin to have less excitement about the pleasures of this world, and we want more and more to shout the name of Jesus with joy!

Because when we shout, whether we're angry or happy, why do we raise our voice? Why do we shout? It's because we want to be heard, right? We want others to hear the message that we have, because either we think it's a message they need to hear, or, at the very least, because we need someone to hear us. Because we need to feel loved. So we often raise our voice to say, "Love me! Bless me!"

Well, there was a woman in our story today who raised her voice, and here's what she said. Verse 27.

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" (Luke 11:27)

She was talking about Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus. She nursed Jesus. She had this amazing role in the life of Jesus. And the woman who shouted this seemed to have the right attitude. She wasn't saying Mary was sinless. She wasn't saying that we should worship Mary, or that we should pray to her. She was merely pointing out how blessed Mary must have been to be the mother of Jesus.

And this concept is true for every parent to a degree, right? When your child does well, you swell up with pride! When they graduate from high school, you're so happy for them, but you're also blessed to have raised them! And when they go out on their own, and make a real difference in the world through their career, well, that's every parent's dream, right?

I mean, tell me, right now, how are you proud of your kids?

And if that's true of us, just imagine how much more that was true of Mary. Jesus was perfect! Sinless! He healed the sick, saved the lost, and loved the poor! He must have made His mother extremely proud, so she was extremely blessed, because she alone had this privilege to be the mother of Jesus, that no one else in all of history got to experience.

And yet, look how Jesus responded to that statement. Verse 28.

But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)

Ouch. This would have been the perfect opportunity to lift up His mom. To say how blessed she truly was. To talk about her perpetual virginity, if that were true of her, and to say just how much we should worship her or even venerate her, which means to honor her. This would have been

the perfect opportunity to establish the doctrine of Mary, the Mother of God, so that we build statues of her and pray to her that she would pray to Jesus, who would pray to God. I mean, this would have been the perfect time to set us straight about Mary.

But instead, Jesus just changed the subject.

"Blessed rather" indicates something like, "Nevermind that." Nevermind that Mary gave birth to Jesus. Nevermind that she raised Jesus. Nevermind that she was highly favored.

Yet this wasn't because Jesus didn't love and honor His mother. To the contrary, Jesus deeply cared for His mother. He loved her. He made sure that she was going to be looked after. Because at the end of His life, as He was dying on the cross, Jesus, looked at His mother, and then said to the apostle John, "Behold, your mother." In other words, "Love her! Care for her! Protect her! Provide for her! She's my mom! She nursed me! She raised me! And now she has to see me this way! Oh, God, help her! John, help her! Love her like she were your own mother!"

And yet, Jesus still died. He didn't come down from the cross to remain with His mother. He didn't spare her the pain of seeing her son die on the cross. Because she wasn't the point of it all. She wasn't the focus. She was just blessed to be part of the story, as are we all.

One of my roommates from college, Chris Pearson, preaches occasionally at the church he attends, and he said this in the sermon last week:

While Mary fed baby Jesus, He was literally holding her atoms together with His hands.

You see, Mary was not the creator of Jesus. Jesus was the creator of Mary. So we shouldn't be so enamoured with Mary, but with Jesus.

And the same is true for everything else we're enamored with. It may be a really good thing that makes you happy in this life, and that's awesome! It's a gift from God, but be careful not to exalt the gift as a higher priority in your life than God Himself. Be careful not to make life all about that thing. Treating that thing as if it were the focus, the point, of all of your life, when the Bible calls you to leave it all behind, and fix your eyes on Jesus, not to steal your joy, but to give you the greatest joy you've ever experienced.

Nevermind your greatest joy in this world, if it distracts you from the greatest joy imaginable, which is God Himself.

So when the woman in this story raised her voice, excited about the blessed mother, Jesus shut her down. Jesus told her, "Nevermind that, because even though that's true, if you focus on that, you've missed the point." And if you focus on all the blessings of this life, you've missed the point.

But look again at what Jesus said. "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" And how do we keep the word of God?

Well, we could try really hard. We could make a commitment to live according to all the Old Testament practices. We could try really hard to obey all of the commandments in the Bible, over 1,600 of them, all of which we should have obeyed from the beginning, but at the end of the day, we're going to fail, because we're all sinners. So how do we keep the word of God? John 6:29.

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (John 6:29)

God sent His Son, Jesus, and our job is simply to believe in Him. You see, Jesus is the Word of God. He is the Word made flesh. And He fulfilled the word of God. He obeyed God perfectly His whole life. He kept the word of God.

So how do we keep the word of God? By trusting in the One who kept it for us, and died in our place.

You see, this woman looked to Mary, and thought Mary was blessed. But Jesus responded, "No, you're even more blessed if you simply trust in Me."

And when you trust in Jesus, He begins to transform you, so that even though we're unable to keep His word, he begins to make us into His image, so that we begin to want to keep His word. We obey not in order to earn God's blessing, but because we've already received God's blessing by grace through faith in Jesus.

So when Jesus contradicted the woman who shouted about Mary, He wasn't at all putting her down, but lifting her up. He was saying to her, "It's not just Mary who is blessed, but you, through Me. And this isn't of yourself, but is the gift of God."

So when you consider that thing that most blesses you in this life, remind yourself, "Nevermind that." As long as it doesn't distract you from Jesus, feel free to enjoy it, praise God for it, but remember also that Jesus is greater. And through Him, you already have the blessing.

Lord Jesus, thank You for blessing us with Yourself. Help us to fix our eyes on You. And help us to keep Your word, primarily by trusting in You, but also by following You all our lives, because in You, we are truly happy. In Your Name we pray, Amen.