

No Word from God will ever fail

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 October 2022

Preacher: Paul Ling

[0 : 00] But let's begin today with the question, what do you do when something sounds too good to be true? What do you do when something sounds too good to be true?

Now, I don't know about you, but I've been getting phone calls at least once a week from random numbers who claim I've won something from a shop that I apparently visited. Now, I never pick those calls out because I know most of the time they end with the winner having to transfer some amount of money to pay for the shipping fee for the price that he has just won.

Now, these scams have been evolving too. In the last month, just two people close to me, I know, have had their money scammed from fake Facebook profiles who claim to sell products that they don't actually own.

All they do is get a random picture from Google, put it up, and you look, wow, three nice dresses for 200 ringgit. Now, once you make the transfer, though, it's when they block you off and your money's gone for good.

Maybe that's why people say that in general, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. See, last week in Luke, Zechariah the priest also thought the news he received was too good to be true.

[1 : 22] The angel Gabriel appeared before Zechariah with word that God has heard his prayer and will finally give his wife a child. And accordingly, this baby would be called John, and he will prepare a people for the Messiah.

Wait, so you're telling me not only would I have a son, but he will be a servant of the Lord? How can that be? You know, can you just give me a sign so I know for sure this is not a scam?

Little did Zechariah know that his request would cause him to lose his voice. Now, today in Luke 1, verse 26, we get another birth prophecy, one that also sounds too good to be true.

In the six months of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Now, notice right in the beginning, Luke uses Elizabeth's pregnancy to know the timing of events.

He also points out that it's the same angel who delivers both news. It's almost as if the author wants us to draw parallels between the two birth announcements.

[2 : 42] Except this time around, the angel reveals himself in a different setting. See, previously, Gabriel appeared before Israel's priest in the middle of a public worship service.

Here, Gabriel appears before a humble woman in a small rural village. Now, considering who the announcement is about, the environment is surprisingly simple.

The angel shows himself to Mary, a lady who has officially agreed to marry her fiancé, but is still a virgin. Mary and her partner have registered as a couple, so they legally belong to each other.

But they still have to wait one year until Joseph can take her home. I mean, it's not so different from today who finished their R.O.M., their registration of marriage, but are still waiting for the official wedding ceremony.

And her fiancé is Joseph from the line of David, the one where the Messiah will come from. So on that evening, around 9 o'clock, when all the lights in that little village had gone out, Gabriel greets Mary and says, You who are highly favored, the Lord is with you.

[4 : 05] Now, Mary was probably still in her pajamas. She was stunned by what she just saw. I mean, it's not every day that an angel shows up at your door and says these strange words.

But notice, compared to Zechariah, who was startled and gripped with fear, Mary was merely perplexed. Compared to Zechariah, who worried, Mary was just curious.

So you're telling me, God has favored me, and He is with me. What is He going to do? Well, the angel says, Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.

Notice how the word favor is repeated twice to confirm that God has graciously chosen Mary as someone through whom He will accomplish something special.

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. Again, a rather straightforward announcement.

[5 : 15] Compared to the book of Matthew, there is no clarification on how Mary will conceive. There is no explanation of the baby's name. But although the announcement is simple, what Jesus will accomplish is far from simple.

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, and He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever.

His kingdom will never end. While John is said to be great before the Lord, Jesus is simply said to be great because He is the Son of the Most High who enjoys a special relationship with the Father.

Now, likewise, John is a prophet of God who ministers on behalf of God. But Jesus is literally God incarnate.

He is who God should be, would be, should He live among us. But furthermore, Jesus is to receive the throne of David, a direct claim that Jesus is the fulfillment to all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

[6 : 28] And I'm just going to show a few on the slides. On his deathbed, Jacob prophesied that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come, and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

So here we have this idea that the king will come from Judah. But when David, a young boy from Judah, comes and does everything right, people look to him, except God said to David in 2 Samuel 7, See, forever is the key word here because a persistent theme in the Old Testament is an eternal line of kings.

Isaiah 9, verse 6, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and a government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And in Psalm 110, verse 4, The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

So all of these verses goes to predict the coming of the Messiah, and here in Luke 1, verse 32-33, Gabriel confirms Jesus is the one who will come as the Son of God, receive the throne of his David, and rule over his people forever.

[8 : 26] But just imagine for a moment the weight that is on Mary's shoulders. Imagine how it feels knowing that your friends, family, and the entire village might judge you when they see you pregnant out of wedlock.

Imagine what it must be like knowing you will be a first-time mom tasked with the heavy responsibility of raising the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Mary had every right to doubt, every right to fear, every right to think that God made a mistake. But she did not.

Mary responds with curiosity. How will this be? Since I am a virgin. See, this is just normal biology.

A woman must know a man sexually before she can conceive. The prophecy would be an issue if the child were to come after Mary's sexual union with Joseph.

[9 : 40] But Gabriel uses words in the Greek tense that suggests that it is an immediate pregnancy. Mary will bear a son way before Joseph takes her home.

How? Verse 35. 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.

More parallels. Previously, Gabriel told us the Holy Spirit will fill Elizabeth's womb. But here, and John, before he is born, here he says the Holy Spirit will come on Mary.

And throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is an active agent that gives lives. Way back in Genesis 1, God created life out of nothing through the Spirit.

Then in Genesis 2, God breathed life into Adam's nostrils. Now God creates human life in Mary's womb.

[10 : 49] So if you look at the Genesis, it's actually not so surprising. It's wholly fitting with who God is to create out of nothing, to impart life onto Mary's womb.

And God further promises to watch over Mary and give her a son. Yet unlike Elizabeth's sons, who will be the prophet of the Most High, Jesus, verse 35, is the Son of the Most High, the Son of God.

He isn't here to just fulfill the Jewish hope of a powerful military leader that crushes their enemies. Jesus is the Son of God whom God will, through His creative power, bring to earth.

Next, in an incredibly ironic twist, the angel gives Mary a sign. The one who asked for a sign became mute, while the one who did not ask for a sign received one instead.

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.

[12 : 09] St. Gabriel mentions Elizabeth to affirm and show Mary that nothing is impossible with God. If God can impart life onto a barren womb, He too can create life out of nothing.

All for a planned and simple reason. No word from God will ever fail. No word from God will ever fail.

He will bring about the birth of Jesus.

And so seeing herself as God's chosen servant, Mary submits in humility, may your word to me be fulfilled. Despite risk to her reputation, risk to her relationship with Joseph, Mary gives herself up for the Lord.

Now, almost immediately, Mary takes a three-day journey to her city south of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judea and goes over to Elizabeth's home.

[13 : 34] Hello? Is there anybody home? Upon hearing Mary's voice, Elizabeth feels the baby in her womb leaping. She runs to the door to greet her cousin, her face beaming with joy.

Although Mary, I'm sure at that point, looks just like a normal lady, Elizabeth senses that her baby, John, which if you remember, Gabriel said is filled with the Holy Spirit before he is born.

This baby filled with the Holy Spirit seemed to recognize that there's something inside Mary. Suddenly, the dots begin to connect.

Elizabeth shouts with praise and utters a blessing over the mother and the child. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? See, on one hand, Elizabeth feels inadequate and humbled by the fact that the Messiah would come and visit her.

[14 : 46] But on the other hand, she is filled with joy for salvation has come to this family. John, who again is said to be a joy and delight to Zechariah.

Now joyfully worships the Messiah. In a great reversal, in a great foreshadowing, the one who was first conceived submits to the one who would come after.

Elizabeth then says, blessed is she who has believed that the Lord will fulfill his promises to her. Unlike her husband who doubted what sounded too good to be true, her cousin Mary simply believed.

Because Mary trusted God who would act faithfully according to his word, she becomes the example of faith that many would follow. The God who fulfills his promises to Mary will surely provide and care for his children.

for no word from God will ever fail. Now notice up to this point, Mary had been, at least we don't know what she said, so immediately, overwhelmed with joy, she now lets out a song of praise.

[16 : 10] And this final section is known as the Magnificat or the Song of Mary. And it contains many phrases that alludes to the Old Testament. with the most obvious one being none other than the one we read as we prepared for service, Hannah's Song in 1 Samuel 2.

Now, Magnificat in Latin literally means to magnify. So the hymn's name is taken from verse 47. Although the NIV doesn't translate it this way, the ESV and NKJV translate as my soul magnifies the Lord.

So that's where the name of the song comes from. Now, Mary's praise can be broken down into three parts. Praise for God's grace on Mary, praise for God's grace on all people, and praise for God's grace on Israel.

First, Mary praises the Lord for what He has done for her. God, who is the Lord and the sovereign Master of the universe, look upon her humble status and chose her.

But notice how Mary also calls God her Savior. She sees in God's giving of Jesus a story that is just beginning.

[17 : 35] Even as she praises the Lord now, Mary starts to find eternal joy in her Savior. Verse 48, she worships God as He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.

See, just a few days ago, Mary was your regular young lady in Nazareth with no social status. But now she has received special attention from God who in love has allowed her to bear the Messiah.

What's more, the virgin birth proves that God is not some distant deity who created a world for fun and left His people on its own. He is instead the mighty one, verse 49, who fights on behalf of all His people.

The Lord is on our side. Yahweh deeply cares for His children, yet He is also the Holy One who does not abuse His power.

God, in His purity, uses His authority to uphold justice. From verse 50, Mary moves to praise God for His grace on all people.

[18 : 51] She praises God for He expresses His holiness not in judgment, but in mercy of those who close Him. His mercy, Elias in Greek or Chesed in Hebrew, ties Yahweh to a loyal, faithful love that God is in covenant with Israel.

The same God who commands Israel to worship Him in reverence, blesses those who fear Him. So Mary testifies God's faithfulness from one generation to another, and counts on God to continue to show mercy in the future to those who fear Him.

Those who face injustice in the present will be vindicated by God the Almighty. For God has performed mighty deeds of His arm, He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thought.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted out the humble. The arrogant who see no need for God nor for treating fellow humans with compassion will be judged, while the humble, as in those who are oppressed by the rulers, will be honored.

Now perhaps Mary has in mind the Romans, who demand total allegiance and use their power to suppress those who serve Yahweh.

[20 : 23] These kings will be brought down while the Messiah will rise to the throne. And finally, verse 53 then records God's grace on society.

The hungry will be filled, while the rich will go away empty. Both themes have strong ties again to the Old Testament. All in all, the second part of the Magnificat looks to the reversal God will bring in the end times, starting with the Messiah.

He will first judge the prideful, the scoffers, and the wealthy, and then bless the humble, the God-fearing, and the poor.

He will first judge the prideful, the scoffers, and the wealthy, and then bless the humble, the God-fearing, and the poor. God vindicates those who fear Him because He made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12.

The final part of Mary's song turns towards God's grace on Israel. Verse 54, He has helped His servant Israel remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as His promise our ancestors.

[21 : 37] So Mary looks forward to a time where through the baby in her womb, God will support Israel. And along with Israel, all who are in Christ will experience God's protection.

Like Israel, Mary awaits a political deliverance from their enemies. But unlike Israel, Mary also expects a spiritual deliverance.

So whether it's the God-fearers among Israel or the God-worshippers apart from Israel, Jesus is the one who unites both outsiders and insiders.

God will act based on His promise to Abraham, but He will extend His invitation by grace through Jesus to bring all people into a covenant relationship with Himself.

So the Magnificat provides us a wonderful picture of God's grace and redemption to an individual, to the world, and to His chosen people.

[22 : 45] And so finally, on the third month of her pregnancy, Mary returns home. friends, Luke 1.26-55 gives us a contrast to 1.5-25.

The birth announcement to Zechariah is the 1A, while the birth announcement to Mary is the 1B. And throughout today's message, we have seen some great differences between how these two individuals respond to Revelation.

Zechariah thought the news he heard was too good to be true. Could the God of the universe truly be so deeply involved with the details of His people's lives?

Could God be messing around and getting Zechariah's hopes up only to overturn His word last minute? See, there is an incredible sense of irony here too.

As the priest of God, Zechariah is supposedly among the group of people who are most in tune with God's word. In fact, their very role as priest affirms the way God has preserved Aaron and his line through the generations.

[24 : 12] From Egypt to the wilderness, the wilderness to the promised land, the promised land to exile, and the exile back to Jerusalem.

Yet Zechariah doubted the truth of God's word. In contrast, Mary, a lowly young lady without a husband or property to her name, responded with full submission to the Lord's will.

Although she does not fully understand how God will bring about the conception, God's covenant faithfulness and believed that through her, God will bring about the Messiah who will rule his people, deliver this world from injustice, and establish a kingdom characterized by righteousness.

Jesus. But as the text lays before us these two characters, is the scripture lesson this morning to just be like Mary and don't be like Zechariah?

God, we could end there, and you would go away telling me it's a good sermon because I woke something in you, and you can go home and pray, sorry Lord for the times when I have been faithless like Zechariah, please help me to try harder so I can be faithful like Mary.

[25 : 39] End of the sermon? See, the way you repent says a lot about how you look at your relationship with the Lord.

But maybe the better approach is to ask, should the same thing happen? Should the Lord wow you and appear before you?

What is it that stops us from trusting in the promises of God's word? What is it about our hearts?

that turn into skeptics when we are presented with something that sounds too good to be true? I think it is because at our core, you and I are stubborn creatures who crave sovereignty.

We would rather place our faith in science, statistics, and the sufficiency of our plans over an all-powerful God. And whether they acknowledge it or not, many people in our city hold this view, that spirituality is really only something you have space for once you are secure in life.

[26 : 58] Who has the time to be concerned about suffering, injustice, and the afterlife, when none of these will pay the bills? What saves you is your education, your competency, not some God who is far away.

God who is your God who is your God who is your God who is your God who is your God who is your God. But friends, the gospel restores both structured and loosened lives.

Maybe you've been trying your best to maintain this image before others that your life is in control. Or maybe you've been struggling to find a sense of peace among all the chaos that is happening around you.

And it's not wrong to desire to know the details of each situation before deciding. And I am by no means advocating for the cliché let go and let God.

Nor am I saying you must turn off your responsibility so God can turn on his sovereignty. See, the bad news is that the gospel of Jesus Christ comes straight at our desire to know, to control, to dominate our circumstances.

[28 : 21] It calls for us to plan diligently, to love our plans a little amount, but trust the Lord above all. But the good news is that the cross replaces the need for us to be the sailors of our own ship.

God demonstrates his master plan in sending his son through the womb of a young virgin such that in Jesus there is both the fullness of deity and the fullness of humanity.

Jesus is 100% God and the 100% man who through his death became the perfect sacrifice that satisfied God's holiness and fulfilled God's mercy.

will be the yes, it defies all human logic. Yes, it sounds absurd. Yes, it sounds too good to be true.

At the same time, it is absolutely genius. Who in this world would come out with a better plan than this? but as the sisters do plan and do continue to live your life responsibly with God has put in front of you but also got your heart from loving and relying on your unknowing to open your palms and let the word of God wow you trust in the covenant faithfulness of God who appeared before Mary to proclaim his great redemptive plan who sent his son to dwell on earth and die in your place who raised Jesus from the dead to reverse the curse of sin and finally who promises to one day establish his kingdom here where all the curses of sin will be reversed and will be fully reunited with him submit under the rule of the Messiah let's pray

[30 : 36] Father God we are creatures who are stubborn who crave sovereignty who like Zechariah want to know what is wrong with just giving me a sign and Lord we confess our tendencies to often fall back on the genius of our plans to fall back on the sufficiency of our wisdom and wealth and power but Lord as your text so reveals to us this morning help us to allow the word of God to wow us to submit our lives to the Lord who masterfully planned our salvation through the virgin birth relinquish our help us to let go and help us to plan diligently but to trust willfully that even when things sound too good to be true they never are because you Lord who is our father in heaven desires the best and will wonderfully provide and care for us just as Mary sang in the magnificent so I pray for all of us to lean on you and to faithfully live out our lives in full reliance of your word for no word from God will ever fail in Jesus name

Amen Amen