



MOTHERS OF THE MASTERS

WEEK 2
06.12.16

FOCUS VERSE

Luke 1:41

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

LESSON TEXT

Luke 1:35, 42–45, 57

35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

.....

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

.....

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

Luke 2:7

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 3:15–16

15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Great things can be accomplished for the kingdom of God when people are willing to submit themselves to His will.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Our Purpose in Life

In his commentary article titled “Link Your Life to God’s Purposes,” the late J. Hampton Keathley III made the following observation about performing the will of God in our lives: “Why are our lives often . . . lacking in purpose? . . . Are we caught up in the . . . pursuit of . . . prosperity derived from things, power, position, and pleasure? . . . there is a mountain to climb with a purpose that brings blessings to others and to the climber himself. It brings glory to God, and has eternal rewards; it is the purpose of serving God and others” (*www.bible.org*, accessed February 25, 2015).

Our purpose in life is to fulfill God’s purposes, and doing so is the key to abundant living—joy, contentment, peace, and

fulfillment. Those who live in frustration, anger, or bitterness have failed to discover the key to true purpose in life. They are miserable because they focus only on themselves—their hurts, their disappointments, their circumstances. Only when we learn to shift our focus from ourselves to others and dedicate ourselves to a life of serving Christ will we realize true purpose and fulfillment.

Elizabeth and Mary fulfilled God’s purposes for their lives through their obedience and submission to His plan. In doing so they experienced joy and contentment and advanced the kingdom of God. Obedience and submission to the will of God form the only pathway to true joy and peace in life.

OUTLINE

I. EMBRACING DIVINE SUBMISSION

- A. Elisabeth and Mary
- B. Submitted Relationship

II. THE RESULTS OF SUBMISSION

- A. The Prophet
- B. The Messiah

III. THE MISSION OF SUBMISSION

- A. The Prophet’s Decrease
- B. The Messiah’s Increase

IV. THE SUBMITTED MOTHERS

- A. Elisabeth Faded from the Scene
- B. Mary Stayed Involved

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Jesus and John the Baptist proved themselves masters of this life—no matter what it had to offer. As two masters, or rabbis, they taught the people. John challenged the world to repent and be baptized. Jesus came preaching a message of eternal life. Yet both men had to submit themselves to death. Herod ordered John to be beheaded for

telling Herod his marriage was unlawful. The Master of the wind and the waves submitted Himself to death on the cross. Both John the Baptist and Jesus took their cues for submission from two seemingly ordinary women.

A study of the mothers of the masters Jesus and John the Baptist offers a contrast of two submissive women. Jesus’ mother, Mary, was young and looking forward to a fruitful life with her betrothed, Joseph. John’s mother, Elisabeth, was older and had experienced a long life with her husband, Zacharias. The couple had yet to receive the blessing of a child because Elisabeth was barren. These two women show us that we can do great things for God—whether we find ourselves in the spring or the fall of our lives.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. EMBRACING DIVINE SUBMISSION

A. Elisabeth and Mary

We can place Elisabeth around the age of fifty while Mary was about sixteen. Despite

their age difference, they had no trouble connecting. When a pregnant Elisabeth encountered an expectant Mary, Elisabeth's baby leaped for joy.

Elisabeth, who had lamented her barrenness for most of her married life, now felt the delight of the Holy Ghost. God not only granted Elisabeth a child, but He also gave her a special endowment of His Spirit before the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost.

The gift of prophecy that would be her son's birthright also manifested itself in Elisabeth. She told Mary, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42). Elisabeth considered herself blessed because of her soon-to-be-born child, but now she found someone even more favored of God. Through the spirit of prophecy, she told Mary, "And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). However, both Mary and Elisabeth knew that belief was not enough; submission was also required.

Both belief and submission played key roles in the lives of Elisabeth and Mary.

B. Submitted Relationship

Both belief and submission played key roles in the lives of Elisabeth and Mary. The angel Gabriel spoke to Elisabeth's incredulous husband, Zacharias, telling him the wonderful news he would have a son. Because Zacharias did not believe and willingly submit himself to the plan of God, the Lord took away his ability to speak. He remained silent until his son, John, was born.

Even as God removed Zacharias's power of speech, He provided Elisabeth with the strength to carry and give birth to John the Baptist. Like her ancestor Sarah, Elisabeth had received an unexpected blessing from God in a season of life that made such a gift seem

impossible. Unlike Sarah, who had responded with derisive laughter in a spirit of unbelief, Elisabeth recognized that God had granted her a miracle: "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men" (Luke 1:25).

Mary also responded with submission and belief. In fact, she and Elisabeth had better attitudes than Zacharias. Both Zacharias and Mary heard a message from the angel Gabriel, but only Mary answered in faith and humility. Both asked questions of Gabriel, wondering about the possibility of a barren older woman or a virgin giving birth. But something about the way they asked the questions was different. Zacharias spoke with a skepticism that had no room for faith, whereas Mary voiced her query as an innocent young woman ready to learn that "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Upon hearing Gabriel's message, Mary submitted herself to the word of the Lord.

II. THE RESULTS OF SUBMISSION

A. The Prophet

Although Zacharias had doubted the word of the Lord, his son, John, submitted to the call of God on his life. John was a compelling preacher, and many people obeyed his message of repentance and were baptized: "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matthew 3:5-6).

Although a fiery preacher with a growing following, John obediently accepted his role as the forerunner of the Messiah by denying he was the Christ. Instead he told the people of one coming who was mightier than he. In fact, for all his greatness, John deemed himself unworthy to unlatch the Messiah's shoes. (See Luke 3:16.) The man who spoke with such conviction in calling the Pharisees and Sadducees a "generation of vipers" (Matthew 3:7) submitted himself to the will of God.

B. The Messiah

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah. When Jesus came to him seeking to be baptized, John met the request with protest. Hesitating to perform the baptism, he said, "I have need to be baptized of thee,

and comest thou to me?" (Matthew 3:14). Although many might assume Jesus' sinless nature made His baptism unnecessary, Jesus recognized its importance. He told John, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Both Jesus and John had righteous missions to fulfill, and John submitted to Jesus' request.

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III. THE MISSION OF SUBMISSION

A. The Prophet's Decrease

Arrested for speaking against Herod's marriage to his brother's wife, John's faith dwindled to doubt. John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3). The man who had recognized Jesus as the Messiah and had seen the Spirit descend on Jesus at His baptism found himself imprisoned by uncertainty and wondering if he had failed in his calling. In other words, he was human.

Jesus sent word back to John, letting him know of the miraculous events taking place in His ministry: the blind could see, the lame could walk, the deaf could hear, the lepers were cleansed, and even the dead were raised. Also the poor had the gospel preached to them. (See Matthew 11:5.)

Jesus had one last important message for John. Some have called it the "forgotten beatitude." Jesus' final words to John were "and blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matthew 11:6). When John heard this response, he must have been reminded of a

prophet who spoke of the coming Messiah, saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John himself was that prophet, and perhaps he had thought to take on a lesser role right by Jesus' side as a best man stands by the bridegroom. (See John 3:29.) But as he faced imminent death, John must have realized the plan of God was different from what he had thought. Yet John responded with submission.

Perhaps realizing the difficulties John faced, Jesus did not respond to him with praise. Instead He lauded John before the people, calling him "more than a prophet" (Matthew 11:9). He even referred to him as the prophet Elijah (Matthew 11:14). Even when He spoke of John's greatness, He let the people know about their great potential: "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). All who submit to the plan of God and allow the Messiah to have the preeminence in their lives can be great in the kingdom of God.

B. The Messiah's Increase

As John's star faded, Jesus' star rose brightly. He gathered disciples and began to teach the people. In spite of His growing following and the miracles that were taking place, Jesus knew what ultimately awaited Him.

As He contemplated the cup of death passing from Him in Gethsemane, perhaps He remembered the words John the Baptist spoke when he saw Jesus coming to him: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus realized that for His message to truly increase throughout the world, He would have to submit Himself to death on the cross.

Although He knew what He must do, He still wrestled with the issue. Praying in Gethsemane, perhaps He remembered His mother Mary telling Him the story of the angel Gabriel. No doubt she had quoted the angel's words, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Jesus said something similar in His prayer, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me"; however, He made His request with a submissive heart, adding, "nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Like

John, Jesus had to submit Himself to death. Both of these masters could credit their mothers with being great examples of submission to the plan of God.

IV. THE SUBMITTED MOTHERS

A. Elisabeth Faded from the Scene

After the birth and circumcision of her son, John, Elisabeth did not appear again in Scripture. Her neighbors shared her joy at the miraculous birth of her child. Even before he began preaching, John was a testimony of the greatness of God: Elisabeth's "neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her" (Luke 1:58). She and Zacharias reminded the people of Abraham and Sarah. Later, when the people heard her son preach, they thought of Elijah.

After Zacharias confirmed Elisabeth's declaration that their son would be named John, God returned Zacharias's ability to speak. When Zacharias praised God, the people spread the word about this miraculous child: "And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea" (Luke 1:65). Sometime later, John's message spread exactly the same way. Many of the people who saw the boy grow up and start preaching must have remembered the reaction they had at his birth: "And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him" (Luke 1:66). Even though Scripture does not tell of Elisabeth's later years, we can imagine she smiled when she heard about her son preaching a message of repentance and baptizing people.

B. Mary Stayed Involved

Perhaps because she was younger than Elisabeth, Mary remained involved in her son's life. As she watched Jesus grow up, begin to fulfill His calling, and finally suffer crucifixion, she must have thought about the first words the angel spoke to her. When the angel Gabriel met her, he told her, "Fear not" (Luke 1:30). Although Gabriel spoke those words to Mary because she was no doubt startled by

his appearance, perhaps she held onto them from her journey to Bethlehem to give birth to her son until His journey to Golgotha.

Soon after the birth of Jesus, Mary heard about another angelic visitation. Shepherds came to visit Jesus, telling Mary, Joseph, and anyone who would hear about the heavenly choir of angels who interrupted their night in the field. The angels brought a message of salvation and peace. When Mary heard their story, she "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

Some have suggested that our knowledge of Mary's inner thoughts point to the fact that Luke interviewed her when he was writing his gospel. He also told of Mary's reaction to Jesus' staying behind at the Temple to converse with the doctors of the Law. Although Jesus submitted Himself to His mother and His earthly father, He said, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Luke said that Mary "kept all these sayings in her heart" (Luke 2:51).

Although Mary experienced the wonder of her child's birth and longed to see Him fulfill His destiny, she also may have faced rejection when she heard some seemingly cruel words from her son. When Jesus was told that His mother and His brothers were waiting to speak with Him, Jesus responded by saying, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" (Matthew 12:48). Even though Jesus was trying to expand His "family" to include anyone who wanted to be His disciple, the sting of Jesus' words may have hurt.

Like John the Baptist, Mary may have felt confusion about the plan of God if she heard her son make another unflattering comment about her. When people told Jesus how blessed His mother was, He seemed to downplay her importance in His response, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Although Jesus wanted to show people the importance of following Him, listening to Him, and obeying His commands, Mary probably still would have felt distressed because of her son's words.

Mary's greatest moment of heartbreak came at Golgotha when she saw her son crucified. Seeing the tragedy take place through tear-filled eyes, she must have questioned

the reality of the situation. She must have wondered if she misunderstood the angel's words. But Jesus offered her some measure of comfort. Even though His words may sometimes have left her dejected, she knew He loved her when He entrusted her care to John, the beloved disciple, by telling him, "Behold thy mother!" (John 19:27). From that time on, John took Mary to his own home to care for her.

On the Day of Pentecost, Mary was among the 120 tarrying in prayer for the Holy Ghost. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14). The same mother and brethren who may have felt rejected by Jesus' words felt the power of the Holy Ghost as they spoke with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Mary began her journey of submission by making room for Jesus in her womb, loving Jesus, and pondering His life and words in her heart. At Pentecost she made room for Jesus to live in her heart in a different way by submitting to the power of the Holy Ghost.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

All of us have an image in our minds of how we see the plan of God for our lives. We have had dreams, received a word from the Lord, felt a calling to a particular ministry, or have seen the hand of God moving us in a specific direction. We have responded to the plan of God with humility and submission.

But what happens when things do not quite go as planned? What happens when life shatters the images we have created in our minds? Perhaps all is not lost. Perhaps we need to remember the "forgotten beatitude" Jesus conveyed to John the Baptist: "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matthew 11:6).

In times of distress, we can become offended at the Lord. Like John the Baptist, and even Mary the mother of Jesus, we may begin to doubt the word of the Lord. Did we hear what we thought we heard, or did we totally miss it? Maybe we heard correctly, but in hearing we created the wrong image in our minds.

When John thought about decreasing to make way for Jesus, he may have envisioned himself as Jesus' right-hand man, serving as the "press secretary" for the King of kings. But when King Herod put John in prison, John's vision was shattered.

Perhaps God allows our own visions to be destroyed so we can truly see what the Lord has in store for us; we can become the people God wants us to be instead of who we think we should be. The process can be extremely humbling. For one thing, we have to admit we were wrong.

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Nevertheless we should not be afraid to ask God questions at these moments in our lives. When John doubted himself and sent his disciples to question Jesus, the Master did not berate him. Instead He told John's messengers to relate to John the wonderful miracles that were taking place and the blessing of not being offended. When our dreams are shattered and we feel justified in being offended at Jesus, we need to see these difficult situations as opportunities for God to bless us.

Furthermore, we may need to remember a statement that sounds like a beatitude even though it cannot be found anywhere in the Bible: "Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape." Walking with God requires flexibility. Even when we hear a word from the Lord or receive a calling, we do not always know how everything is going to work

out. We need to be flexible enough to let God work in our lives.

Even though this particular “beatitude” about flexibility is not in the Scriptures, perhaps the idea behind it is. We are supposed to be like clay in the hands of the potter, able to be shaped and molded so we can be “a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (II Timothy 2:21).

In today’s lesson, we have learned about the mothers of the masters, but we must allow ourselves to be the children of the Master Potter. We must show submission whether we are young and full of life like Mary or feeling old and barren like Elisabeth. We must not allow the words we have spoken with faith and conviction to be lost just because we feel imprisoned like John the Baptist. And we must not become offended at Jesus just because His plan for our lives seems to have changed.

Sometimes the real problem is we want to be the masters of our own destiny. We want to work hard to achieve our goals. Although a strong work ethic is important because “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20), we must recognize our need to put our trust in God.

Submission to God is not merely sitting back and allowing God to do the work. Sometimes we can mistake trust in God for inaction. However, words like *submit*, *trust*, and *pray* are action verbs. They require action on our part, but they also faithfully anticipate action on the part of God. When we submit to the Lord, we can accomplish wonders. We can do greater things than the masters in this study, John the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus declared that the least in the kingdom was greater than John (Matthew 11:11), and He promised we would do greater works than He did (John 14:12). We just need to follow the submissive example of the masters—and their mothers. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Today’s lesson talked about submitting to God. Think about a time when you submitted to the will of God even when you found it difficult. What do you need to do in order to be more submissive now?
- Although in different phases of life, Mary and Elisabeth both submitted themselves to the plan of God. How can we make ourselves ready to do the will of God—no matter what season of life we are experiencing?
 - What lessons do you think Jesus and John the Baptist learned from their mothers?
 - John the Baptist may have felt as if his vision of God’s plan was shattered when he was cast into prison. What are some difficulties you have faced that made you question God’s will for your life? How did you make it through these tough times?
 - Jesus told John of the blessing that comes from not being offended in Him. How can we avoid being offended at Jesus when things are not going our way?
 - What do you think it means to be “great” in the kingdom of God?