

Luke 1:46-55

Listening to the radio the other day I heard mention of Burt Bacharach the legendary songwriter. One man talking about him recalled going into a cafe where there was a young woman who was sitting alone with a cup of coffee and repeatedly playing Bacharach's "I just don't know what to do with myself" while tears streamed down her face. "Bacharach's songs were often simple but connect with where people are at" the man said.

Songs do that don't they? They connect with us at different times and sometimes express how we feel. I'm not so sure though about this song of Mary, even though it has been used in the church down the centuries. But perhaps it should connect more with us because this is a great song of praise to God as Saviour as we see in the opening words, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour".

The angel had come to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus but it seems as if it was the words of her cousin Elizabeth in v 45 which prompted this song of praise. What is interesting before we look more closely at the song is that the song is not about Jesus. It is about God the Father and his plan of salvation into which the birth of Jesus fits as a decisive act. It is a song for this time of the year as we reflect on the coming of Jesus into the world and see that it was no random act but part of God's salvation plan.

Within the song we see the nature of our God who is our Saviour. This song, the Magnificat reveals God's saving nature in three M's.

Salvation comes because God is firstly

Mindful

V48, "for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant" but also v54, "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful". God is mindful of Mary as an individual and his people as a whole. He knows their situation their nature and above all he knows their need of a Saviour. Mary spoke of the "humble state" or lowliness she was in, which may well represent the situation of God's people under foreign rule. The need for God's salvation is there. Mary could not lift herself from her lowly state, God's people could not throw off foreign rule, the need of a Saviour is there and God was aware, he was mindful of that. God sees and knows, he is ever mindful of the needs of his people. The other evening I was lying in bed awake listening for the sounds of my son returning home. I'd like to say I was concerned that he got back safe but it was more that fact that he was out in my car. But through the evening I was "mindful" of him and God is "mindful" of us. He knows where we are at, the things that concern and bother us as individuals and the concerns we have as his people and as a church. But more he is mindful of our need of salvation. He remembers that we humans are sinful and needing saving. He is mindful of this because our sin separates us from him

and that causes him pain. While many people are content to live their lives without reference to God as if it doesn't matter, God is not content. A couple of years ago there was a story in the press of a dog which had woken up a woman whose husband had suffered a stroke and fallen out of bed. She was unaware of her husband's need of help and many people today are unaware of their need for help, their need of salvation. Christmas is a time which reminds us Jesus came as saviour because God the Father was aware of, was mindful of, our lowly state and our need of a saviour.

He still is mindful of the need that people have for salvation but I wonder if we are? I was wandering through Festival Place the other day. I could say I was Christmas shopping but actually I was wandering and not achieving a lot but I did have Christmas on my mind and as I looked at people I wondered if they knew that God had come to save them. I saw loads of people and I was mindful of their need of a Saviour and with that in mind I am glad that this Christmas the churches of Basingstoke will be trying in different ways to share the message of salvation. God was mindful of the need of salvation I hope we are as well. As you look at your friends and relatives who are not yet Christians and listen to what they say about their lives are you mindful of their need of a Saviour? If you are they I hope you are praying for them and through your prayers looking for opportunities to share your faith with them. Are you mindful and remembering as God was and is?

God was and is mindful.

Then secondly Salvation comes because God is

Mighty

Again in Mary's song there is the juxtaposition of Mary herself and the people of God. So in v49, "for the Mighty One has done great things for me" but then also as we follow through the rest of the song we see v51, "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm", v52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones" and v54, "He has helped his servant Israel".

What we see in these verses is that the God who is mindful of his people's need of salvation is mighty to save. He is able to bring salvation and indeed as we see through this story of Mary and the child she bore is mighty to plan and bring to effect the plan of salvation. The statements in vs 51,52 and 54 show how through the history of God's people God had shown his power to act on behalf of his people. He had done mighty deeds and brought down rulers and helped Israel. Those of us who did the Bible Overview course looked at this and saw how God's people came out of Egypt under Moses and entered the promised land under Joshua not because they were strong or had a great military capability but because God acted to defeat their enemies. With his mighty arm God defeated Pharaoh and brought the people out of Egypt across the Red Sea, he was mighty to save. With his mighty arm he brought down the walls of Jericho. With his mighty arm he created a child in Mary's womb and with his mighty arm he would raise that child from death and so defeat the

powers of sin and death for all time, opening the way of salvation for all who will come through Jesus.

Our God is mighty to save. The author C S Lewis was a staunch atheist. But slowly God humbled him and brought him to his senses. He wrote:

'You must picture me alone in that room, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Winter Term of 1929 I gave in; I admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.'

But he did come to salvation and he came because God is mighty to save, saving even, as we see in v51, those who are proud in their inmost thoughts, those who feel they have no need of God. God is able to break down their pride and arrogance, to undermine their self-confidence and to show them their need of salvation and more to bring them to salvation in Jesus. God is mighty to save and is still mighty to save today.

This is why our prayer for our friends and family who don't yet know Jesus is time well spent because the God we pray to is mighty to save.

Vijay Menon came to faith from Hinduism in just one hour. The key to it was prayer but Vijay didn't know who "Then one day it came out. Vijay had written an article for a Xn magazine entitled "why I am no longer a Hindu," Two praying people opened that magazine and had the shock of their lives. They had never met Vijay but had heard his name years earlier. An elderly lady had confided in them "I'm not very good at witnessing for my faith," she told them "and I'm hopeless at arguing with non-believers. But I've been praying for a young lodger of mine from India. He's a Hindu, his name is Vijay Menon. Would you join me in praying that he will come to know Christ?" They agreed and a prayer triplet was formed. Prayer continued steadily until the landlady became ill and died. That left two of the triplet. Although they had never seen Vijay they agreed to keep up the praying. In all their prayers continued for 7 years. Then came the day they opened up the magazine. Prayer did the work, then when the gospel was presented it was only a matter of minutes and a life was changed forever.

Then as we tentatively speak to people about Jesus, God is mighty to take our poor weak words and use them to bring about the revolution in people's lives where he tips us off the throne of our lives and puts Jesus there instead.

God is mindful of people's need of salvation and he is mighty and able to save. However if he did not have the third characteristic he would not save, but he has and so he does because thirdly he is

Merciful

God saves because he is merciful. In v50, "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation". In his mercy God lifts up the humble, v52 and fills the hungry v52 and then v54 he remembers to be merciful. God brings salvation to people because he is merciful. Indeed God only deals with us humans because he is merciful for we have no right to expect God to have anything to do with us given our sinfulness and rebellion. But he does. In mercy he lifts us up out of the mire of sin and restores us as his children. In mercy as his children when we drift away from him he draws us back and in mercy he fills us with good things, not just food but his Holy Spirit. In every generation it is that same as God carves out a people who are his, those who are the true descendents of Abraham living by faith in Christ alone. This fact alone deserves a song of praise to God and over the centuries many have added to Mary's song in praising God for his mercy towards us. As we draw close to the end of another year and as we reflect back over the last 12 months in what ways has God in mercy blessed you? What has he done for you? How has his mercy impacted your life? But also how has his mercy impacted those around you and how has his mercy brought salvation to you and those you know?

Salvation comes because God is merciful.

Mary was drawn by God's mercy into his plan for salvation history. As such she was given a unique role but salvation remained God's plan and God's work as it does today. God brings salvation because he is mindful of people's need because he is mighty to save people and turn their lives around and because he is merciful and gives us a salvation we don't deserve.

We praise God for his salvation, we praise God for our salvation and we pray that he will bring salvation to others perhaps even this Christmas.