

*Nothing Will Be Impossible with God: Luke 1:26-38*

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Nothing will be impossible with God. That's what Gabriel told Mary when he was announcing to her the miraculous way in which the Messiah was going to arrive. This is what I want us to meditate on this Christmas Eve.

On Sunday mornings we've been studying Romans 9 and the teaching of unconditional election. We are seeing that our salvation is possible only because of what God has done. From our standpoint, to have our sins forgiven and to enter God's presence is absolutely impossible. But by God's grace, by His sovereign choice and calling, the impossible becomes reality. He chooses unconditionally and He calls effectually. So we praise our great God, for whom nothing is impossible.

What seems impossible in your life right now? Is it the salvation of a loved one? The salvation of a friend or co-worker or neighbor? Is it your own struggle with sin that seems impossible? Is it your marriage or another family relationship that seems to be strained almost to a breaking point? Does parenting seem like an impossible task? Or maybe the desire for children seems like an impossible dream. It might be your job situation that seems impossible. Or you might have a vision for a ministry venture that is so exciting to you, but it always seems to be just out of reach. You just can't figure out how it could actually become a reality.

This Christmas, I encourage you to believe in our God who turns the impossible into reality. He delights to do this. He is pleased to do things out of the ordinary. He loves to surprise us sometimes by turning a brick wall into an open door. This doesn't mean He's going to make every one of our dreams come true. But He is powerful to do the impossible, and He is worthy of our deepest trust.

Let's look together at Luke 1:26-38 and see that nothing will be impossible with God.

Just before this is the account of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy. The miracle of John the Baptist's birth was that his parents were old. And Elizabeth was barren (Luke 1:7). It's a miracle that they conceived. But the miracle of Mary conceiving is a miracle that takes things to a

whole new level of miraculous. Even though Elizabeth was barren, and they were both old, they still conceived in the usual way. But for Mary, it's a unique miracle—the miracle of the *virgin* birth. God wants to show in a completely unique way that nothing is impossible for Him.

Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament had experienced a miracle similar to Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were old. Sarah was barren. But the Lord told them that Sarah would bear a child. They laughed at this, but it came true. *“The LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.’”* (Genesis 18:13–14, ESV)

What Gabriel said to Mary is very similar to what the Lord said to Abraham there. Gabriel said, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” The Scriptures are making a connection here for us. There are these miraculous births, culminating in the most astounding miraculous birth of all—the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners like us.

Another emphasis we find is that Jesus is a descendent of David. In chapter 2 Luke emphasizes the fact that Joseph was from the house and lineage of David, and therefore had to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, for the census. And the angel told the shepherds in 2:11, “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” And then in the genealogy at the end of Luke 3, Luke traces Jesus’ family tree back to David, and then all the way back to Adam.

Matthew also emphasizes Jesus’ descent from David, beginning his Gospel with the words, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

And in Luke 1:32-33 Gabriel tells Mary that “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Going back to 1-2 Samuel we see the surprising things God did in David’s life. Before David there was a king named Saul. And Saul had been anointed king. Anointing was the custom to signify that a particular person was to be king. God instructed Samuel that Saul was to be the king, and so Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head. That was his anointing. But later

the Lord rejected Saul, and the Lord instructed Samuel to anoint David as the next king.

This was quite a surprise. David wasn't the kind of guy anyone would have expected. Samuel went to see Jesse, who was from Bethlehem, because the Lord told Samuel that one of Jesse's sons would be the next king. And Jesse brought out his son Eliab, thinking he must be the one. But God said, "Do not look on his appearance, or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). So then Jesse brought Abinadab, but he wasn't the one either. And he brought Shammah. Seven sons came before Samuel, but none were chosen. And Samuel said, "Are all your sons here?" And so finally they brought David in from the fields, because he was keeping the sheep. And the Lord told Samuel to anoint him.

David was the unlikely candidate. He was not the obvious choice, humanly-speaking, like Saul was. Saul was a head taller than everyone else, he came from a wealthy family, and he was very handsome, the Bible says. He was the obvious choice to be king, humanly-speaking. But David was the youngest brother, a shepherd. There wasn't anything about him that made others think he would be the great ruler of the nation.

In a similar way, our Lord "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him," as Isaiah 53 says. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and Mary wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals! These are not accommodations fit for a king! This is backwards. It's not the way it should be, at least according to our earthly expectations. But God has a different way of going about things. He chooses Isaac, the younger brother, rather than Ishmael. He chooses Jacob rather than Esau. He chooses to bless Joseph, the young brother. He chooses David to be king. And He sends His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world as a baby born in very humble circumstances to live a life of humble means and to die a humiliating and agonizing death.

So God was showing His sovereign choice in the lives of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and also David. And He shows it again very clearly in choosing Mary to be the mother of Jesus.

Look at verse 28 where Gabriel greets Mary, calling her "O favored one." What does it mean that Mary was "favored"? We might wrongly assume that God favored her because of something about her. We might think that God favored her because she was extra holy and pure and humble. But that's not at all what this

word is communicating. The Greek word translated favored is the verbal form of the word for grace – *charis*. This is a perfect passive participle, so we might translate it like this, “one who has been given grace.” That’s what Gabriel is saying to Mary, “you are one who has received grace.” This is how she is favored. She has not earned grace. That would be a contradiction. You can’t earn grace. You can’t earn God’s favor. She was a recipient of God’s undeserved grace.

This is the case for all of us who are in Christ by faith. Ephesians 1:6 uses the same word. “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us (favored us) in the Beloved.”

We do immediately see evidences of God’s grace in Mary’s life, even as Gabriel is speaking to her. Look in verse 38 at Mary’s humble response to all of this. “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” The word for servant is *doulē* (the feminine form of *doulos*), which is better translated as slave. And she uses the same word again in verse 48. Mary gives praise to God because “he has looked on the humble estate of his slave.” Mary recognizes that she belongs to the Lord. He is her master, the Good Master, and she joyfully submits to Him and obeys Him.

In these ways Mary provides us with a wonderful example of faith. She believes the angel. She asks an honest question. She also acts on her faith, going to see Elizabeth in response to what Gabriel had told her. And Mary sings a song of praise to God for what He is doing (the magnificat, in verses 46-55).

An important clarification needs to be made at this point, because of the way in which many people think of Mary. We need to recognize that Mary is an *example* of faith, but she is not an *object* of our faith. Don’t pray to Mary. Pray *like* Mary, but don’t pray *to* Mary. When we see individuals in Scripture who were greatly blessed by God, it’s appropriate to learn from their lives and seek to emulate them. But to pray to them or worship them or hold them up almost on the same level as Jesus, that’s idolatry.

It is interesting to note that Luke doesn’t give us many details about Mary, which is striking when we compare this with other people who are highlighted in Luke 1-2. Luke writes of Zechariah and Elizabeth that “they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (v. 6). It is said of Simeon in chapter 2 that “this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and

the Holy Spirit was upon him” (2:26). And of Anna, that “she did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day” (2:37). Those are some pretty impressive statements. But nothing like that is said of Mary. She is blessed by God in a unique and wonderful way, but it’s as though Luke avoids saying anything about Mary’s moral virtue or purity lest we think God chose her based on that. Luke wants to make sure we understand that it’s not due to anything Mary has done.

Just like God elects individuals unto salvation unconditionally, He also chose Mary for this marvelous role unconditionally. It was not because of her righteousness that God chose her for this. It was not because of her impressive prayer life or her many good deeds. It was God’s sovereign choice, and therefore God gets the credit and the attention and the worship for it all.

In closing, we should be in awe of how God does things in a way that is so contrary to our world’s ways of doing things. We prop up certain individuals in society and say, “They’re important. They have status. They’re really something.” And those in positions of power and wealth and prestige and popularity, so quickly become proud in thinking that their earthly status means something. But God’s economy deals in a different currency. And He delights in humbling the proud and exalting the humble. He finds joy in doing surprising things.

So we see a young woman here who is not a person of privilege, standing in awe of the fact that God has graciously chosen her for such a miraculous role—to be the mother of the One who would be the Savior of the world. His crib was a feeding trough. He had animals gathered around him. And his first visitors were a ragtag group of shepherds.

God loves to do the impossible. He loves to act in unexpected ways. He shows His freedom in bestowing mercy on whomever He wills. He shows His power and creativity in bringing about marvelous things in surprising ways.

Whatever impossibilities you are facing today, look to the gracious and sovereign God who brings about the impossible. For nothing is impossible with Him.