

Luke 1:49-66

Sermon: **The veil was pulled back**

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GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS PHENOMENAL

1. (Luke 1:49) Let's talk for a moment about holiness and where that idea comes from. When we see something great, grand, powerful, breathtaking—something that makes us feel “small” compared to what we are looking at—that moment brings us into a state of humility, awe, and deep respect toward someone or something. For example: a mountain, the sea, or an important person of political, spiritual, or royal status. I don't mean to say that these things are holy in themselves—for they are not—but I want to explain that we humans sometimes relate to someone or something with reverence and awe. This is exactly how Mary looks at God when she makes this statement. God is Holy in many ways: His wisdom is holy—phenomenal, His creativity is phenomenal, His power is phenomenal. In Mary's eyes, He is an incredible God, He is the Holy God.

1.1. Mary here is saying that God's faithfulness is phenomenal. Why? Mary recognizes God's faithfulness stretching far back in history, thousands and thousands of years before her birth. She sees that God has been tirelessly and patiently, with grace, fulfilling part by part of the promises He gave to Abraham, Moses, and David. And to Mary, this is unimaginable—that anyone could be like this. Let's imagine ourselves—how many promises have we made throughout our lives to people, only not to keep them? *“Ah, it's been three years already, who even remembers that!”* To my shame, I know how easy it is to break a promise to someone, and I have sadly done so many times. But God is not like that—He is faithful and fulfills His promises no matter how much time has passed. Mary now knows that through the child she will bear, God is tirelessly moving forward toward the fulfillment of those promises. Yahweh is phenomenal.

1.2. Mary must be saying to herself: *“Now, God, now after a thousand years You decide to continue moving forward with the process of fulfilling those promises. Wow, this is incredible. What being would decide to fulfill its promises after so much time? None!”*

She praises God with her hymn: *“That is why You, God, are Holy—phenomenal above all.*

1.3. What Mary says here is incredibly deep—but for whom? When we look at the world around us, we see that most of humanity does not care about God’s promises or what He is doing. *“Let God do whatever He wants, I only care about my life, my happiness, and my life here and now.”*

1.4. When we read the statements of people like Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth... we clearly see how their understanding and attitudes collide with what lies in the hearts of the rest of humanity. The attitude of today’s culture is: *“I am the center—the center of my existence, and God is my servant. The only question is: how good of a servant is He?”* Sadly, that is the mindset of most people in this world.

1.5. To explain more clearly how Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah think: “Wow, amazing, this is really happening, this is not just a nice story, this is the reality we live in.”

— In other words, for them personally, that realization is more important than their own lives. Unlike other people, whose purpose of existence is to satisfy themselves and their selfish desires here and now, Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah are examples we should—and must—follow. —

WHOSE OPINION MATTERS TO YOU?

2. (Luke 1:50) **“Those who fear Him.”** Either we fear God or we fear people. Who do we want to impress—God or man? Whose opinion matters more to us—His or theirs? In short, to fear God means that we love Him, that we want to serve Him, that we want to impress Him, that His opinion matters more to us than man’s.

2.1. A central message of the Bible is this: if man’s opinion matters more to you than God’s, then you are a foolish person. Another creature can do very little for you, or against you, for it is just as created as you are. God, on the other hand, has complete authority over you and over that other being whose opinion you value more than His.

2.2. Jesus said in (Matthew 10:28): **“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** That is why it is utterly foolish to fear man more than God.

2.3. (Luke 1:51–52) **“With His arm.”** Mary wants to highlight how powerful God is. Throughout history He has shown His strength in defending His people.

2.4. **“Those who are proud in their hearts.”** I believe Mary is speaking here directly about the Roman Empire, Caesar, and King Herod. All of them considered themselves to be incredibly important and significant people, and their arrogance reached to the heavens. To this was added the fact that they ruled over God’s people, and so they exalted themselves even more. But they were blind to the reality that they were nothing but pawns in the story that God Himself is telling. And because of that ignorance, their arrogance was limitless.

2.5. They did not understand—and could not understand—that they had no lawful right to rule over Israel. The only true and legitimate ruler over Israel is God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Precisely because they exalted themselves into that position and thought they had the right to rule over God's people, they placed themselves in direct and hostile opposition to God Himself. Later we will read, in Zechariah's prophetic statement, that they "hated" God's people—and that fully exposes their arrogance and blindness.

2.6. **"He brings down the mighty from their thrones."** Mary is prophesying here and declaring: *"All of this is coming to an end! You will fall, Caesar! You too will fall, King Herod! For now the rightful ruler of Israel is being born—the One who will defeat you all."* The birth of this child marks the beginning of the end for the Roman Empire. What Mary is declaring here is not without precedent, because Israel's deliverance has already happened throughout history. The Persians tried—and they fell. The Babylonians tried—and they fell. Alexander the Great tried—and he fell. I believe Mary knows all of this, and so she concludes: *"And you Romans will now fall, just as those before you have fallen!"*

2.7. **"He lifts up the lowly."** Who does Mary have in mind? I believe she is speaking of her own people—Israel. Why does she call them lowly? Because at that time the Roman Empire cruelly oppressed the Jewish people. The Jews could do nothing without Roman approval. The Romans intruded into every aspect of their lives: economy, culture, politics. Heavy taxation kept them in constant poverty. History testifies that centurions—Roman soldiers—were among the most ruthless men known to history. We can only imagine how they treated the Jews, whom they also deeply despised.

2.8. That is why Mary, in faith, declares: *"The One is coming who will finally change all this. He will lift us, the lowly, and bring down all those who hate and oppress the people of Israel."*

2.9. **(Luke 1:53) "He fills the hungry with good things."** This is not about physical hunger, but about those who hunger for righteousness, who hunger to live out Moses' Law and to live in harmony with God's will. And now, at last, those who are righteous in God's eyes will be satisfied. Everything promised in the Old Testament is now beginning to be fulfilled. Israel will become a great nation—spiritually, economically, and politically—and will be an example and model to the nations of the world.

2.9.1. And further: **"He sends the rich away empty."** Mary clearly understands who this refers to—the rich Romans, who revel in their power and wealth, but who will one day be brought down. And it will be by the very child she carries.

NON-JEWISH CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

3. **(Luke 1:54–55)** If we read this text through our non-Jewish eyes—through the lenses of Christian tradition and church teachings—it is very easy to miss its true meaning. What exactly do I mean by that? I speak from my own experience.

Because of my ignorance of the Old Testament—which, I admit, is still modest—I long thought this was about me, the Christian, and not about the people of Israel.

3.1. Now, from this perspective, I believe the church throughout history made a great mistake. As a human tradition¹, it separated itself from the Old Testament and over time began to say: *“The Old Testament is for the Jews, and the New Testament is for the Christians.”* But here lies the problem. I insist: we cannot understand the New Testament without the Old. The Old Testament is the framework, the foundation, without which there is no full picture.

3.1.2. Yes, the Old Testament is long, sometimes even boring—I admit—but it contains incredibly rich and inspiring stories that reveal God’s character: His holiness, greatness, power, patience, wisdom... Also, the key events in Scripture are interconnected even though they are separated by hundreds of years. That means a person must be deeply motivated and dedicated in order to grasp the whole and understand what is actually going on.

3.2. Unfortunately, most Bible teachers do not have that motivation. They rely on human tradition, on interpretations that have existed for centuries, and believe that those interpretations know what they are talking about. And so they interpret Scripture according to the convictions of that tradition. But the Bible—all of its books—is and must be connected into one whole, into the great idea that God wants to convey. And that idea is: the redemption of the elect. If we, who study Scripture, separate the Old Testament from the New, we will be left without a clear and complete picture of what God wants to show us.

3.3. The question is: did Jesus and the apostles have this perspective? I believe they did. We see in their debates with the Pharisees and chief priests that they always used the authority of the Old Testament to confirm the truth of their arguments. They never relied on their own human authority, but solely on the authority of Scripture.

3.4. So, to summarize—this is about the promise God gave to Abraham, Moses, and David. Mary connected all of this and makes a powerful statement: with the birth of this child, that promise will finally be fulfilled. The Jews will serve their Yahweh, they will serve Him as their King, and He will protect them from their enemies. He will give them economic, political, and social prosperity in every sense of the word. And He will do it all through His Son, Jesus Christ—who will be their God in visible human form.

3.5. Mary was absolutely right when she said this would happen. But today we know her timing was not correct. Everything she declared—it will indeed happen, but not in her time. (The Book of Revelation) reveals to us that it will be fulfilled when Jesus returns a second time.

¹ Human tradition already existed in the time of Jesus and the apostles. When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about the “tradition of the elders,” He was referring precisely to their oral tradition by which they added to the original meaning of the Law of Moses. In other words: they distorted the Law and used it to justify their own beliefs. The church, throughout history, has done the very same thing—distorting the New Testament in order to justify its own theological interpretations.

JOHN THE BAPTIST IS HERE

4. (Luke 1:57–66) The scene shifts. Here we have a very direct event about which there isn't too much to say.

4.1. (Luke 1:58) **"When the neighbors heard."** We know from the previous passage that Elizabeth had hidden her pregnancy for a while, but now she decides to share that joy with everyone.

4.2. (Luke 1:59) This was the custom and tradition: at the same time when they circumcised the child, they would also give him his name.

4.3. (Luke 1:60–61) We see their surprise at Elizabeth's response: *"But no one in your family has ever been called John, why that name?"* Here I'd like to pause and highlight something—we clearly see in this event just how powerful tradition and culture can be in the life of a person. We, as Christians, must be willing to rise above the culture and tradition we grew up in. Why? Because they carry many traps that can easily lead us astray, often into self-righteousness. I'm not saying the people here did anything wrong, but I want to show how strong tradition can be, and how sometimes we must be open to change instead of clinging tightly to beliefs that were simply handed down to us.

4.4. (Luke 1:62–64) They seek confirmation from Zechariah. He himself affirms what Elizabeth said—and a miracle happens.

THE VEIL WAS PULLED BACK

5. (Luke 1:65–66) **"And fear came upon all."** Growing up, through films and through our church tradition, we were often taught to believe that the Bible is full of miracles, that supernatural things were happening all the time. Just look at tradition—it's filled with stories of miracles across the world. But is that really the case? I believe it is not! If we open the Bible, we actually see that it describes only a few key moments in human history when God chose to act in a special, supernatural way.

5.1. One of those moments was the Exodus through Moses. Another was in the time of the prophet Elijah. The third, and most important, was the coming of Jesus and the ministry of the apostles. And that's really it. Of course, God still works miracles—healings, forgiveness, transformation of hearts—but these miracles He often does quietly, out of His grace. Most of the time God stands "behind the veil," ruling sovereignly from His throne.

5.2. But in those key moments He clearly declares: *"I am God. I do whatever I will, whenever I will. I am the Lord."* When He chooses to act, the whole world knows and bears witness. The echo of those miracles is still felt today—we have the records in Scripture, archaeological evidence, historical writings. If our hearts sincerely seek, if they are "hungry," as Mary says in her song, we will come to a firm conviction that the Biblical God is the only true God, and we are His creatures with a role to play in His plan.

5.3. In the time of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary, the veil was briefly pulled back. God chose to act supernaturally to show His people that He had not abandoned them, and that He would fulfill the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

5.4. Look at the text in **(Luke 1:64–66)**. The people who witnessed these events had never before in their lives seen a miracle. It was not common then, and it isn't common today. They had never seen an angel. I believe what echoed in their minds was: *"An angel told you this, Zechariah? That's hard to believe."* But when his tongue was loosed exactly at the moment he wrote the name "John," that was a moment of awe and fear. For those who doubted, it was proof—a sign that it was all true.

5.5. Just imagining that scene gives me chills. They were at once thrilled and terrified. This is really happening, and the child before them is the sign that God's promises will be fulfilled.

5.6. To conclude: when God wants to emphasize something important—as we will read next time in Zechariah's prophetic declaration—He shakes our world, our views, and our convictions. And He does this with supernatural miracles so that we are ready to hear what He has to say. That is exactly what is happening here, I believe.