

Luke Chapter 1 v 30 - 38

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you'd turn with me just for a moment to Romans in chapter 11. Romans in chapter 11 and the last four verses of that chapter. The Apostle Paul has been writing about the gospel, about our great need of salvation and how Christ has come, and then he begins to talk about God's sovereign choice, God's purpose and plan to save and to rescue, and then he comes to this great, as it were, crescendo at the very end of chapter 11. So Romans in chapter 11 verses 33 and following. Just listen to these wonderful words. Here's, in one sense, Paul's song of praise to God.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has ever been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. Paul was amazed when he thought about God. And we should be amazed because our God is an amazing God. He's a mind-blowing God. He's a wonderful God. He's not a God that we can easily explain and put down in just a few sentences. He's a God who is indeed amazing. And most of all for us who are Christians, the most amazing thing about God is his grace. That he chose to save us. That he loves us and sent his son into the world to be our savior. And our first hymn is going to come on the screen in a moment. God of grace, amazing wonder.

Let's stand and sing this hymn of praise. Let's come to God in prayer. Let's pray once more. Oh Lord our God, we thank you that indeed we can sing of your amazing grace, your wonderful grace, your astonishing grace. There are no superlatives, as it were, to explain you or your grace. You are beyond our language, beyond our understanding.

You are to us, oh Lord, the God who is the only God. We thank you that you are so great. We thank you that you are so wonderful and amazing. We thank you that you are the God who blows our minds in the best sense of the word, with the love that you've shown to us in Jesus, your son. Oh Lord, as we draw near again to this time of year when we peacefully remember the coming of Jesus, the son of God into our world.

Lord, we immediately are humbled. Humbled because we don't understand. We don't understand how the God who fills the universe and beyond, the God who has no limits, could be contained within the size of a baby.

[3 : 16] The God who is immortal, undying. The God who has never been limited in any way. Who never hungers. Who never needs food or water or rest. The God who has been forever and will be forever. How you could take on to yourself our human nature with its hunger, with its tiredness. Lord, with its thirsting. With its pain and sorrow and grief. Lord, you are the God who has always been content. Always been satisfied. We thank you that yet though we don't understand this, we know that it's true. That the word, the eternal son of God became flesh and lived amongst us. Lived as we have lived. Thank you that means that we have a God who understands us. A God who knows what it's like to live each day to face the trials and troubles and struggles of life.

And we thank you that we have a God to whom we can come in prayer. We can bring to you every situation and circumstance. And Lord, it doesn't baffle you. It's not something you don't understand. For you understand our ways full well. In fact, we thank you that our Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest, is one who is not unsympathetic to our temptations. But one who has been tested in every way. Just as we are. Only one thing separates you from us, O Lord. You never sinned. You never broke God's law. You never acted contrary to the will of your Father in thought or word or action. We thank you for that. Because that means you're a perfect Savior for us. That means that when you went to the cross, you were able to give a sinless sacrifice for our sinful behavior. You were able to pay completely and fully our debt so that we can enjoy full forgiveness for every sin for

all our lives and for all eternity. And we come this evening, O Lord, again as forgiven people. We come again as those who have experienced your grace in our hearts to transform and to change. So that, Lord, it's not because we must that we are here. It's because we want to. It's not because we want to earn anything from you that we seek to obey your word. It's because we love you and we know that your word is right and good. Lord, everything about us in ourselves is undeserving of grace. But Lord, we thank you that you have loved us with everlasting love and that your grace has come into our lives. Oh, let us forever, every breath that we live in this world, let us always sing of your amazing grace. Let us never, Lord, take it for granted. Help us to do that. We take so many things that you give us for granted.

We take of your provision of life and health and strength and food and home and clothing, family and friends. We take these things for granted so many times. But Lord, let us never take for granted the forgiveness of sins. Let us never take for granted the gift of your Son. Let us never take for granted the cross that he bore. But let us always find ourselves agog, amazed, in wonder, awe and praise.

And be with us now in this time together and strengthen us in that faith and reveal more of your grace to us, us we pray. For we ask it all in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour. Amen.

[7 : 09] Let's turn together in our Bibles and we're going to read from Genesis and chapter 18. Genesis and chapter 18 and the first 15 verses.

Genesis and if you'd like to turn there, that's page 17, page 17 in the church Bible. Beginning at verse 1, Genesis chapter 18.

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, If I found favor in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat so you can be refreshed and then go on your way, now that you've come to your servant. Very well, they answered.

Do as you say. So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. Quick, he said, get three sayers of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread. Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice tender calf, gave it to a servant who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

Where is your wife, Sarah? they asked him. There, in the tent, he said. Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

[9 : 05] Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself, as she thought, after I'm worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?

Then the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, will I really have a child now that I'm old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? I'll return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, I didn't laugh. But he said, yes, you did laugh. Well, what's that got to do with Christmas?

Please would you turn with me to Luke and to chapter 1. Luke and chapter 1. Last week we looked very briefly at the angel and Mary, and we saw again how wonderful it was that Mary was able to trust the Lord and worship him for all that he was doing.

And I want to pick that up again and read part of that once more. Reading from verse 30, just from verse 30.

[10 : 38] The angel said to her, do not be afraid. You will find favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son. You are to call him Jesus. He will be great, and we call 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. How will this be, Mary asked?

The angel, since I am a virgin. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you. The power of the Most High will overshadow you. As the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. She who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month, for no word from God will ever fail.

And the Lord's servant, Mary answered, may your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her. It's always been a dream, hasn't it, of men to go back in time, to travel through time.

[11 : 46] Jules Verne was the writer of that, one of many wonderful science fiction books, The Time Machine. And if you were to go back in time, maybe a hundred years or so, you would find that if we were to tell the people there what is accomplished, what has been done in the hundred years since 1918, they would definitely not believe us.

Because there were things a hundred years ago that were impossible. Absolutely impossible. And yet, somehow, amazingly, they now take place.

Think about it. If we were to tell our great-grandparents that people could travel faster than the speed of sound, in fact, more than twice that speed. Impossible.

Or that you could take the heart out of one person and put it into another person so they could live. Impossible. Or their liver, or their lungs, or their kidney.

If you could tell them that people would travel to and walk on the moon, they would probably lock you away. That's just impossible.

[13 : 00] Or that you could send messages and live pictures around the world in a few seconds. And then, if you started to use the language of today and tell them that you could store a whole library's worth of books on a chip, they wouldn't believe you.

Or that you could control the most powerful computers in the world with a mouse, and that all of your banking was done with the net, they would never believe you.

Impossible. But amazing, as those once impossible things were, they're very possible now, and many other things beside.

But there will always be some things that will be impossible. In fact, time travel will always be impossible, no matter how many Doctor Who episodes we watch, or books we read.

There are things that are impossible to us as a human race, in spite of the amazing leaps in technology and science.

[14 : 09] There will always be things that we cannot do. But that's not the case with God. That's not the case with God. What is impossible for us, is possible for God.

The closing words of Gabriel to Mary are designed to relieve her concerns about the impossible challenge that God was setting before her.

Verse 37, for no word from God will ever fail. Or as most translations put it, with God, all things are possible.

Or with God, nothing is impossible. We'll come back to that verse and how we understand it in a little while. But basically, Gabriel was saying to Mary, I know that what I've told you is impossible, but it's not impossible with God.

And she believed him. His words were such a strength to her faith that she was able to believe that all that God had said and promised would be done.

[15 : 23] In fact, of course, there were two impossible things that Gabriel said would happen. First impossible thing was that a virgin would become pregnant and have a son.

Now, of course, one of the amazing advances in science and technology has been in the understanding of the human body and the reproductive system. But even with all of those advances, the test-tube baby, which is now just over 50 years old, the very first one, we are not able to make a woman pregnant without a contribution from a man.

Women can do absolutely anything that a man can do, but without a man, they can't make a baby. Yes, IVF, commonly called the test-tube baby, the implanting of embryos in the womb.

It's possible to conceive without sexual activity. There still must be that male sperm added to the egg to fertilize it and grow it into a child.

It's never been any other way. It was the same way when Mary was around. It's the same way now. It's just impossible. But Gabriel said it was going to happen.

[16 : 40] The second impossible thing that God told Mary through Gabriel was this, that God would become a human being, that God would take on a human nature.

Verse 35. So the Holy One to be born would be called the Son of God. This child would be called the Son of God. The Creator would become part of His creation.

The infinite God would become finite. The immortal God would become mortal. The eternal God would become temporal. The heavenly God would become earthly.

That's impossible. It never happened before. It's never happened since. So why should it be possible?

Gabriel was aware that both these things were impossible. And Mary knew they were impossible. And that's why I believe he adds at the end, verse 37, what most translations make of those words. [17:43] For nothing is impossible with God. And it's those two little words, isn't it? With God that makes all things possible. It changes the whole situation.

It changes the circumstances. It changes everything. Those two little words, with God. The impossible becomes possible. With God. Now those two words that Mary heard, those words of Gabriel that were spoken to her, were not only true for her situation, but they are true for all of us who, like Mary, have put our faith in God.

All of us who have bowed to the Lord's will. And again and again, throughout the Bible, these words were spoken and repeated in different ways.

We read there, back in Genesis, in chapter 18, didn't we? How when Sarah heard the word from the Lord that she would have a child in a year's time, she said, laughed.

Laughed. That's not possible. It's impossible. I'm past childbearing age and my husband is old. We know they were both well on beyond their 90s. And yet, what does God say to her?

[18:59] Is anything too hard for the Lord? In other words, nothing is too hard for the Lord. Prophet Jeremiah, when he prayed, he had heard God's promise that the exiles would return to Judah in the future.

Jeremiah 32. He prayed, nothing is too hard for you. And the Lord replied to him, I am the Lord. Is anything too hard for me?

Then even Jesus, when his disciples questioned him after he'd said how difficult it was for a rich man to become a believer in the Lord Jesus and enter the kingdom of heaven, they said, who then can be saved?

He replied, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. I want to ask you this evening, do you believe that?

Do you believe God's word through Gabriel that with God nothing is impossible? I think there's a third miracle that takes place, a third impossibility that we've missed here in Luke and chapter 1.

[20:07] The incredible miracle that we know of as Christmas was not only that a virgin could have a child, not only that God could take to himself human nature, marvelous and miraculous as they were, but surely it was a miracle, a supernatural act of God that Mary could believe that God could keep his word.

I think so. It's impossible. Her reason would say it's impossible. All of history would say it's impossible. Yet she was able to believe.

And to believe for herself that in her circumstances and situation, God could do the impossible.

See, that's the problem we have, isn't it?

Our doubts about God's ability to do the impossible are usually connected to our own circumstances. We don't doubt that God can do the impossible for somebody else.

We don't doubt that God can do the miraculous for somebody else. We can believe that God can save another person's spouse, but not our own.

[21:16] We believe that God can heal another person's cancer, but not our own. We can believe that God can bring revival to a country, but not our own.

That's where our doubts hit, don't they? Our faith, when it impacts our own personal individual lives. But the truth is that the only thing that God cannot do, the one thing that is impossible for God to do, is anything that he doesn't want to do.

Those are the only impossible things. God cannot lie because he's holy. He cannot sin because he's righteous. He cannot do anything against his own will.

He cannot break his promises. He cannot change because he's perfect. We could spend a lot of time thinking about all the things that God cannot do, but I want us to think about what Gabriel's words mean for us today in the circumstances of our lives.

Mary was full of faith. She did not doubt God, as Sarah had done all those years before. Impossible as it may have sounded to her, entirely she trusted God.

[22:37] So I want to draw just two simple conclusions from this event for us in this matter of the impossible being done by God.

Since nothing is impossible with God, then everything God has promised is possible even when everything else says otherwise. I think that's the sense of the translation for the NIV that we have, for no word from God will ever fail.

In other words, what Gabriel is saying, all that I've said may seem impossible to you, but it's not impossible with God. God will always do what he's promised he will do.

And certainly Gabriel's words there relate, don't they, to Mary primarily and firstly that God has said about her bearing a child who will be God's son shall be done.

God's words through Gabriel apply to you and I as well. Every single promise of God must and will be kept.

[23 : 54] No matter how impossible it may seem to us in the present circumstances of our situation, no matter how impossible it may seem to others around about us, no matter whether the whole of our life is crumbling, the promises of God must, that's why we sang that song before, must be kept.

J.C. Ryle was the very first bishop, Anglican Bishop of Liverpool and I'll just quote him at length here for a moment which to me is a wonderful description of this truth.

There is no sin too black or bad to be pardoned. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all our sins.

There is no heart too hard and wicked to be changed.

The heart of stone can be made the heart of flesh. There is no work too hard for a believer to do because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

There is no trial too hard to be borne. The grace of God is sufficient for us. There is no promise too great to be fulfilled. Christ's words shall never pass away, and what he has promised he is able to perform.

[25 : 07] There is no difficulty too great for a believer to overcome. When God is for us, who can be against us? God's word is his bond.

What he has written, we can be confident, is true and dependable because he is true and dependable. Isn't one of the reasons that we doubt and worry and fear in times of crisis, in times of difficulty, when we feel as if we're sinking, isn't one of the reasons that we fear because we do not know the promises of God?

Because we have not read them and studied them and meditated upon them and delighted them and made them our own, and yet God has said, all the promises in Christ.

In other words, for those who are in Christ, are yes and amen, confirming they shall be fulfilled.

Dear friends, we don't need an angel to come to us as he did to Mary or to others.

What we have is something much more substantial, something much more solid, something which endures. We have God's word to which we can turn to at any time to remind us and assure us.

[26 : 25] In Numbers 23, we're told this truth. God is not a man or human that he should lie, not a human being that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act?

Does he promise and not fulfill? Again, the answer to those questions is no. He always fulfills what he promises, always does what he says.

Do you know the promises of God? Are you relying on the promises of God? Are you standing on the promises of God day by day? I'm not one for the, I'm sure many of you had it in your home, you may even have it now and I don't mean to be rude, a promise box.

Do you ever those? I saw one many, many years ago, I don't see them there, a little box by this shape, tiny little scrolls of paper rolled up about, I don't know how many hundred there were maybe in it and each day you would get a pair of tweezers and pull out a little scroll of paper and on it would be a promise, a lucky dip.

We don't need to do that dear friends because we have all the promises of God in the scriptures and we need to read them and know them and devour them and delight in them. They're all there for every situation, every circumstance.

[27 : 39] So the first thing that we know, the first thing we're sure of is this dear friends, every promise of God, no matter how impossible it may seem to us in the circumstance, God will keep.

And how many of us dear friends here who have been Christians for some time are able to look back in our lives and see how God has kept his promise to us again and again and again and again. And yet what happens?

As soon as things get tricky and sticky and difficult, we begin to doubt the promises of God. Since nothing is impossible with God, then the second thing that must be true and that we draw from this

is this.

Everything God has planned is not only possible but must come about. Everything that God has planned must come about.

The problem is, of course, often we confuse our plans with God's plans. And we think that God's plans are the same as our plans and our plans are the same as God's plans. And so we have a plan about what we shall do in the future and how things shall work out and we pray about it and we think, therefore, because we've prayed about it and it's my plan, God's got to agree with it and he's got to go along with it.

[28 : 55] And then when God doesn't go along with it and it doesn't quite work out as we planned, we say, what's wrong with you, God? And we doubt him. Dear friends, prayer ultimately is us conforming our will to God's will.

Your life and mine, if I'm going to put it this way, is about being drawn closer to the will of God and to the plan of God and the purpose of God. We need to learn that God's ways are not our ways, that his ways are always best and we need to learn to trust him.

That's not always easy. In fact, it's usually very hard. And perhaps at Christmas time, it may be all the more difficult to trust God that his plan is the right one and it will be worked out.

Perhaps you are somebody who this Christmas is facing a very difficult Christmas. You're in a family. And in that family, it's very hard to be a Christian, to follow Christ, to live for him.

You see all the adverts on the television. All these lovely, happy families around the Christmas table with the great goose or the duck or the turkey or whatever it is. People getting on so well.

[30 : 26] And do you know that's a million miles from your Christmas? And in the midst of that situation, your prayer is, Lord, how can I be faithful to you?

In a family which is so torn apart. In a family where I feel like I'm a black sheep. Dear friends, God has promised that he will give us strength for every day.

For nothing is impossible with God. You are with him and he is with you. Some of us, Christmas will be a very difficult time because it will be at that time of the year when somebody that we've loved is no longer with us.

And Christmas brings that all together again as adverts and people are together and sharing and you have to face it with that sense of loneliness, with that sense of pain.

And your prayer is, Lord, I just can't face this Christmas without that one that I loved. The pain is too great.

[31 : 43] The heartache is too much for me to bear. The Bible tells us that our God is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our sorrows.

God is with you. You need not feel alone. God is with you. For nothing is impossible with God. It may be that this Christmas is hard financially. You wanted to buy presents for the family and the children but maybe redundancy is looming or your savings have been cut or something's happened. A huge debt has arisen. And it's so much temptation to go into debt. Put it on the card. Put it on the never-never. So I can give the family all that I want.

So I can send them that gift. So I can provide for them. In one sense there's that pressure that comes down. Almost it's impossible. Impossible for me, Lord, not to go under with all these bills coming through the door.

[32 : 47] With all this pressure. God has said that he is our provider. My God shall meet all your needs according to his riches in glory, Paul tells us.

Trust him. Trust him to keep his promises. Trust him that don't give in to that pressure. For nothing is impossible with God.

For many of us it's other things too. It's those pressures of work. Pressures at school maybe as well to be a Christian. Pressures to compromise and not live the Christian life.

Pressures to join in with sinful behavior. With our peers. To go along with those that we work with who are swearing or cursing.

Or those who are denying the reality of Christmas. Or just being sucked in to the whole Christmas experience and forgetting Christ. A sense of being a sore thumb.

[33 : 50] Sticking out. How can I not give in to temptation? How can I carry on being faithful to the Lord? When everybody's calling me names.

Laughing behind my back. Mocking me. But our Lord Jesus Christ knows what it is to be tempted to compromise. He has been tempted in every way just as we are.

Hebrews tells us. For nothing is impossible with God. And so for each of us it may be something else. It may be old age.

Decay of the mind and of the body. Infirmity. It may be fears that no one else seems to be burdened with. And doubts that seem to crush. And weight.

And guilt. And past. And so on. And so we could just add and add and add. And say all these things. It's impossible. For me to keep on. Trusting you Lord.

[34 : 53] But the word of God to you dear friend. To me. Nothing is impossible. With God. And what. Is.

The centre of Christmas. God. With. Us. Emmanuel. What is the whole of Christ coming into the world about?

It's about us not being alone. About us not facing impossible odds alone. It's about us now being with God.

And God with us. And of course we're going to fall. Of course we're going to get it wrong. Of course temptation will win. Of course it's going to be difficult.

You know some of us dear friends. Even though we're long in the tooth in the Christian faith. We still think. For some foolish reason. That with God means it's easy.

[35 : 54] Well if God's with me. Surely it can't be that hard. Surely it can't be this painful. Surely it mustn't be such a struggle. Well it is. And it always has been.

And it always will be. But with God we have the victory. With God we shall get through the other side. With God we shall overcome. Because with God.

Nothing is impossible. And though we sin and fall. And though we get it wrong and make mistakes. And though we feel as if we cannot go on any longer.

The grace of God is sufficient for us. Paul the apostle knew exactly what it meant. When he said who is sufficient for these things.

How can I be an apostle? How can I serve God? How can I live him? What is his response? Our sufficiency is of God.

[36 : 56] Not of our own strength. That's the problem isn't it? That's the difficulty. In one sense if Mary said yes. I can see all these things are impossible. But I know I can get through it. I know that somehow I can manage it.

I can bear this child as a virgin. The son of God can be born in me. Or I can cope. She's not that at all is it? She's completely humbled before God. And recognizes that God alone.

Is the one who fulfills his word. May your word be fulfilled. Sorry may your word to be. May your word to me be fulfilled. Not my strength but yours.

Not my power but yours. What's your impossible tonight? What is that one thing you've been praying for?

Longing for? Planning for? Working for? That's not happened. And to you it's an impossible. You've almost given up all hope.

[37 : 56] Please dear friends. Take the word of God. Take it and apply it to yourself and to that situation.

Ask for that same faith that the Lord gave to Mary. And echo the words of Gabriel. Nothing is impossible with God.

It's not positive thinking. It's not a mantra to keep saying until we believe it. It's the truth that we have to accept. Because it's true.

So the final question. Ultimately this evening is this. Am I with God? Am I with God? Is he my God? Is he my father? Is he my saviour? Is he my Lord? God. Then everything. Is possible. With him.

[38 : 58] Let's pray together shall we? Right at the very start of our service this evening.

Lord we acknowledged along with. Paul of old that. You are an amazing God. Oh wondrous God. A God who we cannot fully fathom and comprehend.

A God who has passed our working out. A God before whom we have to stand open mouthed and agog. And confess that you are great.

And that we are not. Lord we do want to do that again. We want to finish as we started. In that same position of amazement. But more than that.

That we want to stand in that position. Lord not only that we are amazed at you. But Lord that we trust you. We believe in you. We have faith in you.

[39 : 58] We have faith in you oh Lord. That every promise you've given us. You will fulfill. Just as the coming of your son into the world. Which we know.

We know. Happened. So we know oh Lord. That what you've promised you will fulfill for us. And Lord we want to trust you with that plan that you have as well.

For our salvation. And for our walk with you. And for our future. Lord we know again that it was your plan that brought your son into the world.

It was your purpose. It was your work. Something impossible. But possible. With you. And so Lord we commit to you again and afresh.

Those impossibilities in our lives. Maybe the impossibility of a loved one ever being saved. Maybe the impossibility of us finishing the race.

[40 : 57] Getting to the end. Faithful. Maybe the impossibility. Oh Lord of our fear. For the future.

But Lord whatever that impossibility is. We again bring it to you. As it were we lay it on the altar once more. And say oh Lord. Consume it.

Take it. And oh Lord fulfill. In us. All your promises. And all your will. We say again with Mary oh Lord. We are your servants.

May it be to us. As you have purposed. For we ask it all in Jesus name. Amen. Now to him.

Who is able to do. Exceedingly. Abundantly. Above. Anything that we ask. Or even imagine.

According to his power.

[41 : 56] That is at work within us. To him be glory in the church. And in Christ Jesus. Through every generation. Today.

Tomorrow. Forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Bible. Amen. B■n Palace. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.