

SERMON PRACTICES

Christmas: Promises Fulfilled Week Three - Promises of Justice

Welcome, we're delighted you've chosen to dig more deeply into the Scriptures and consider what God has for you through this sermon. These sermon practices are ideally intended to be discussed with others, so find a friend, family member, or roommate to join you. If you haven't yet joined a life group yet, check out our website at vchurch.org/groups or stop at the Welcome Center for more info.

Introduction: A Personal Practice

This week our Sermon Practice looks a little different. We've provided some prompts for personal reflection throughout the week based on Luke 1:46-55. **We invite you to work through it on your own, then bring your thoughts to your life group or a partner.**

** Group Leaders: as you go through this week's practice, be thinking and praying about which part of this practice would be most meaningful for your group to discuss. It may come from the questions within this practice, discussing the process itself, or the Lord may lead you in a unique direction. Don't be afraid to take divinely-guided risks! **

Getting Started

Below are five days worth of prompts reflections. Plan to set aside 5 - 10 minutes each day to work through them. **It is important to note that the questions and commentary provided in this practice are tools to stir up some thoughts, so don't worry about answering every question exactly.** Instead, allow God to lead you and talk to Him about anything that may come up during your time.

Begin each day in prayer, asking God to help you stay present and focused. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your heart and mind towards any messages God may have for you today. You may even want to spend a couple of minutes in silent contemplation before you dive in.

Finally, **be sure to write your reflections down**, as God often uses the insights we gain from our times of reflections long after we've done them.

[DAY ONE]

Luke 1:46-48a

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant."

Mary is exploding with gratitude that God is lovingly paying attention to her difficult life. She's almost certainly thinking of both present and past pain when she refers to her "humble state." List out some of the biggest struggles of your own lifetime. Then looking at that list consider the following; What does it mean to you that God has taken notice of your pain? How does it feel to know that the humble state of your life matters to Him? Take a moment and write out a short prayer of gratitude that flows from your reflections

Note: if you're having a hard time believing God cares about your circumstances, don't feel pressured to pretend you think differently. Instead, write out a prayer that tells Him what you're honestly thinking and feeling right now as you read this. Don't be afraid to ask tough questions either. Scripture shows us time and time again that God desires genuine connection with us; He will always invite honest frustration and sincere doubt over religious performance.

[DAY TWO]

Luke 1:48b-49

From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name.

Mary knows that countless people will see the great privilege that was hers: to give birth to the Messiah! What can the people around you say about God's blessings upon your life? List several of the great things God has done for you. As you reflect on each blessing, consider how that kindness speaks of the greatness of God's character and deeds (aka the "holiness" of His name.)

[DAY THREE]

Luke 1:50

His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.

God wants to extend grace and mercy to all people, yet apparently He will not force it upon them. The God of the universe waits for us to accept Him. "Those who fear Him" are the ones who accept Him as the Good King, not just a good teacher or role model, but a Good *King*. When we revere Him as the one who can work such miraculous mercy into any life, we begin to experience those mercies. "Fearing" God is less about terror and more about deep respect; a fear of life without Him. It is a choice to respect Him so intensely that you do not take His guidance lightly, and examine your own distrust of His word. How have you shown intense reverence to His word this Christmas season? Is there anything that you fear more than distrusting God? In other words, what creates more anxiety for you than disobeying Jesus? Bullet point those worries on the left. Then review each worry and identify a promise of God that speaks to that concern.

[DAY FOUR]

Luke 1:51-53

He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

Mary longed for justice to reign in this world. During her lifetime, governments were brutally oppressive and corrupt, including the Roman Empire who ruled over her and her people. She was longing to see the bullies lose their power and to see wealth shared freely so that no one was without abundance. She clearly understood the promise of God spoken more than 700 years earlier, *“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on Him, and He will bring justice to the nations... In faithfulness He will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth...[and] open eyes that are blind... free captives from prison and...release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:1-7)*

What is a specific injustice you long to see made right in the world? And what specific injustice has never been made right in your personal world? Write those out and then write what it will look like when God brings justice to that wrongdoing. Furthermore, write out your answer to this question, *“How does the promise of future justice impact you today?”*

[DAY FIVE]

Luke 1:54-55

He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and His descendants forever, just as He promised our ancestors.”

The greatest promise to Israel was the coming Messiah who would be the Savior not only for Israel but also for the whole world. And He would be called Immanuel, which means “God with Us”. God spoke this promise to Abraham, *“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3)* Jesus’ death on the cross was that promise fulfilled. He saved Israel and the entire world from our own sin. Sin has harmful consequences, and justice demands those consequences be paid for. But instead of forcing us to spend our whole lives trying to repay a debt we cannot afford or ignoring the injustices caused by sin, Jesus lived a holy and perfect life then died on the cross as payment for all of us. The scriptures declare that Jesus took on the penalty of our sin, and in exchange, He offered us His righteousness as if it were our very own. Paul explains, *“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT)* List some of your own injustices that have required the sacrifice of Christ to pay off for you. How has the mercy of God’s forgiveness changed your life? Do you need to receive that forgiveness in a way you haven’t yet? How does it impact your approach to seeing justice in this dark world?