

Ukraine-A Foreshadowing of The End Time?

Part 3 (Mother's Day)

A Grieving Mother's Recipe for Joy

Luke 1:46-55, Luke 2:25-35

A Ukrainian mother fell to her knees, clawing the earth behind a razed petrol station. She had just peered inside a manhole and found the corpse of her adult son, sharing the pit with another man. "My little son," she wailed into the gaping chamber.

His body was warped by water, shrouded in sediment and eclipsed by an army sleeping mat. But she recognized him by his distinctive footwear and, devastated by grief, refused to quit the crumbling lip of the shaft. "Let me see him for a while," she begged to a woman who was trying to pull her away.

"I won't leave," she wept, hugging the ground where her son's remains had been dumped out of sight. Nearby, at the roadside, sat the remains of two tanks, mangled by combat. One was scorched to black and orange, the other was painted with a white "V", the insignia of Russian invading forces, who withdrew from this region last week.

The distraught mother was named Lyudmyla, her son Yevhenii, was only 23 years old. "My heart is just heavy," said 60 year-old Zakabluk. "This is a horror. How is it possible to do such things?"

I struggled with, and spent much time in prayer concerning the approach to this morning's message, whether or not to focus once again on the tragedy of Ukraine. Whether to suspend for this week's message, our sermon series on the war in Ukraine. Whether there was any possible way to blend the recognition of Mother's Day with what is going on in Ukraine.

And the Lord apparently heard my prayers because He answered me through His Word, which we will share together this Mother's Day Sunday morning.

You see, motherhood, while among the highest of callings is in many ways full of infinite blessings, it can, and most often is, fraught with heartache and sorrows.

Now, I could certainly preach a canned message this morning on the flowery bed of ease of being a mother is, but the sense of urgency God has laid upon my heart forbids me to squander this available time on such prose.

Motherhood throughout the Scriptures has been decidedly a difficult task. This pain was imposed on Eve after her disobedience in the Garden of Eden when in pronouncing sentence on her sin,

(and therefore all subsequent mothers) God said, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children..." (Genesis 3:16)

A few centuries later, the prophet Jeremiah, in describing the

Jeremiah wrote in his prophecy of the event of Herod's slaughter, "Thus says the Lord:

***"A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more." (Jeremiah 31:15).***

How we could easily substitute the war in Ukraine for Ramah in this verse.

And this morning, as much as I have wrestled with the idea of "moving on" and providing us with a Mother's Day message devoid of any reference to this tragedy, I am compelled to share with you yet another amazing parallel from Scripture.

Take your Bibles and turn to the 24th chapter of the gospel according to Matthew.

***Matthew 24:19 Holman Christian Standard Bible
Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days!***

Now if we were to look no further for a microcosm relationship between Christ's description of End-Time events and the war in Ukraine, this verse surely provides the connection.

The news carried, not too many days ago, the picture and story of a pregnant woman being carried from a Ukrainian maternity hospital after it was badly shelled by Russian forces. She died along with her unborn baby.

The FASCINATING thing about this verse however is the specific inclusion of motherhood in Jesus' description of End Time prophecy in His answer to the disciples. He could have mentioned shepherds, He did not. He could have mentioned stonemasons, He did not. Jesus could have mentioned the priests serving in the now desecrated temple who would then be serving at ground zero of the antichrist's wrath, He did not. Jesus specifically mentions the horror that mothers-to-be and new mothers who are nursing will face.

Brenda did a masterful job covering this in Sunday School a couple of weeks ago. BTW, have those of you who are in her class noticed the parallels between what the SS material is covering and the series is teaching? It's important to note that I had this series of messages laid on my heart WEEKS before we even received the new material from Lifeway!

What do you suppose was the reason for Jesus specifically mentioning mother to be and mothers in His prophetic description of the horrors of the end time?

As Brenda shared in her class, “Could there be any more vulnerable victim than a young pregnant mother or one carrying a newborn in her arms? Her escape would be greatly hindered by her maternal situation. A pregnant woman would find it difficult to travel. A woman with an infant would be inexorably burdened by the child’s need for care and nourishment. The fate of such a woman and her offspring, if captured, is almost too horrible to imagine. Yet, Jesus knew they must find some way of escape. Remember He Himself had escaped being murdered as a small child.

Note too, that (unlike the help and protection of Joseph that Mary and the unborn Jesus had in their escape to Egypt) husbands/fathers are not mentioned as helping the mothers. Do you see the foreshadowing taking place in Ukraine? Ukrainian dads by the multiplied thousands are having to say goodbye to their wives and children because they have to stay and fight the unprovoked genocide brought down upon them by Vladimir Putin.

What a world to be born into: Heartbreaking images reveal how across Ukraine desperate refugee mothers are giving birth as they shelter from Russia's bombs while orphans huddle in an basement just to stay alive.

For all of the mothers of all time, no mother could have been left more grief-stricken and perplexed than Mary, the mother of Jesus. But lest we get ahead of ourselves, let’s look together at the words of Mary, who has just been told by the angel Gabriel that she is, “highly favored of the Lord...” and that she has been chosen by no less than God Himself to bear the incarnate Son of the living God, none less than the second person of the Godhead.

Let us first hear the Word of the Lord from Luke’s Gospel the first chapter beginning at the 46th verse:

Luke 1:46-55 The Song of Mary

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. ⁵⁰ And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Now, just flip over to the second chapter of the same Gospel and let’s hear the Word of the Lord from verses 25-35:

Luke 2:34-35 King James Version (KJV)

³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

³⁵ (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

“The days were very dark for Israel; no John the Baptist had sounded his trumpet not; everything seemed hopeless for the Jews, and some of the noblest of them had taken refuge in despair.”¹

“The times were degenerate. The official clergy [were] mere officials.”²

However, there was a faithful Jewish remnant that eagerly looked for their Messiah. These were known as the Hasidim or Chasidim (pious ones) referred to in Malachi 3:16-17, which says, “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, / And the LORD listened and heard them; / So a book of remembrance was written before Him / For those who fear the LORD / And who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, / “On the day that I make them My jewels. / And I will spare them / As a man spares his own son who serves him.”

SUPPOSE, and here’s the amazing contemplation that God gave me for your consideration this morning, SUPPOSE those mothers who have lost their babies in Ukraine would have known in advance that their precious offspring would be killed at the hands of evil madness. A madness that was totally devoid of any appreciation of the magnitude of the terrible act it was committing. An evil that was perpetrated upon innocent life that was so devoid of guilt, or malice or provocation that the only crime that could be attributed to them was the very reality of their innocence. SUPPOSE their mother’s had known. What do you think they would have done? What would you have done? What did Mary do? You see, Mary was told IN ADVANCE that the sword of sorrow concerning the baby she held that morning at the temple, would one day pierce through her very soul. Mary knew, and yet Mary maintained a Joy that we to this day find incomprehensible if you think about it. Mary had a recipe for joy that I want to share with you this morning.

What is the recipe for the perfect chocolate chip cookie?

What is the recipe for a mother’s joy? Don’t we have some responsibility to understand what brings a mother joy?

There are many recipes – many believe that if you combine a large number of family and friends with the right gifts and the right meal – if you mix those things together, you will get Mother’s Day joy. But what if you aren’t surrounded by large numbers of family and friends? What if the economy has been hard on you, and you aren’t able to give mom all that you would like to? Does that mean that you (or mom) are unable to experience Mother’s Day joy?

Today, the virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, shares with you her recipe for a grieving mother’s joy. Mary wasn’t surrounded by a large number of family and friends that first Christmas. She

didn't receive an MP3 player, and give Joseph a DVD player. She didn't have large piles of food sitting around her nicely decorated house. And yet, Mary was filled with joy – it came from something deeper – something that goes beyond all the physical trappings of our materialistic society.

Today we're going to look at Mary's recipe for a grieving mother's joy. It is my prayer that you will make use of this recipe in the days ahead, and throughout your entire life, as you seek to be a mother who has joy in your life.

We find Mary's recipe for joy in a song she sang, a song many people today call the "Magnificat." Here's the setting – Mary had just received word from the angel Gabriel that she, an unmarried girl, probably in her teens, would become pregnant and be the mother of the Messiah. She also learned that one of her older relatives, a woman named Elizabeth, was already six months pregnant. These were pretty amazing things for her to hear – so immediately she went to visit her relative Elizabeth.

Sure enough, she was six months pregnant. And the moment Mary greeted Elizabeth, we are told in verse 41 of our text that the unborn infant "leaped in her womb." We are told that the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth with words, as we see in verse 42: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" The Holy Spirit had revealed to Elizabeth that Mary would be the mother of the Messiah. Elizabeth told Mary that her unborn child had leapt for joy, and that Mary was blessed for believing that she would be the mother of the Christ.

At this point, the Holy Spirit fills Mary with a song. It is called the "Magnificat" because of verse 46, where Mary says, "My soul glorifies the Lord." The Latin translation actually says, "My soul magnifies the Lord," and there you get the word "magnificat." Verse 47: "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Her spirit was filled with joy. Let's find her recipe.

I. One Part HUMILITY:

A key idea is found in verse 48: "For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." HUMILITY is a major theme in Mary's song. Mary saw herself as a humble servant of God. HUMILITY. Perhaps humility is best summed up with three words: "I'm not worthy." That's humility – to have an "I'm not worthy" – attitude. What Mary was saying here is, "I'm not worthy to be the mother of the Christ. I'm a humble Jewish peasant girl from a small town. I'm not worthy." Notice how Mary calls God her "Savior" in verse 47. She called God her "Savior" because she knew that she was a sinner – she needed God's saving grace. And not only was she going to receive God's grace – she had even been given the privilege of being the mother of the Christ. "I'm not worthy" – that's humility.

Later in the song, Mary talks about humility when she says in verse 51: God “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.” God humbles those who are proud. Look at the last half of verse 52: “But has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things.” God blesses those who are humble. But look at the last half of verse 53: “But has sent the rich away empty.”

HUMILITY – that is the first ingredient in Mary’s recipe for Mother’s Day joy – an “I’m not worthy” attitude toward the blessings God had given her. Is humility a part of your life? Do you have an “I’m not worthy” attitude toward the good things in your life? Or are you someone who is proud, someone who thinks, “I deserve the best!” After all, that’s what the commercials say, isn’t it – you deserve the best car, the best clothes, the best electronic gadgets. You deserve the best food, the best job, the best house, the best everything. That’s pride: “Look at me – Look at the good things I have – I deserve these things.

We all struggle with the sin of pride. It’s really an unrealistic view of life. The reality is this - we don’t deserve anything from God. In his eyes, we are sinful creatures. We have done things in our lives that are deserving of his punishment. Even our sinful thoughts are offensive to God. We have all kinds of weaknesses, all kinds of shortcomings. Time and again, we fail to what God would like us to be. If you were perfect, you would deserve the best from God. But because of your sin, what you really deserve is the worst.

It is impossible to experience the joy that Mary felt if you are trapped in the sin of pride. The only way to escape that trap is to look into the Word of God, and let God humble you. He humbles you by reminding you here that you are only a weak, sinful being with all kinds of faults and shortcomings.

II. Two Parts MERCY and GRACE:

- A. But then, God also does something else through his Word – he fills you with joy, as he reveals to you his MERCY – his amazing love and forgiveness that he shows to you, and to all people.

That’s the other main ingredient to Mother’s Day joy. Do you see it in Mary’s song? Look at the last half of verse 48: “From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.” God had done great things for Mary. Mary puts it well in verse 50: “His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.” God’s mercy. That God would bless an ordinary peasant girl in such a wonderful way, that God would love this world so much, that he would send his Son as the Savior of all mankind – that is the mercy of God.

At the end of her song, Mary says in verse 54: “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful, to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” God’s MERCY is that second, and most important ingredient you need, to having Christmas joy in your life.

- B. Ponder, then, the ingredient that accompanies MERCY... God’s amazing GRACE – that mysterious love that God shows to undeserving people – that’s how you find Christmas joy.

That’s Mary’s recipe for Christmas joy. First, HUMILITY, humility that comes from God’s law, from an awareness of your sins and shortcomings and weaknesses. An “I’m not worthy” attitude. Mix that with an awareness of God’s MERCY, his undeserved favor (called GRACE) that he shows you in Jesus Christ.

Just ponder that for a second – that the almighty God would humble himself, lower himself to the level of being an infant, born in a manger. That God would humble himself all his life on this earth, allowing people to reject him and ridicule him. That God would humble himself even to the point of dying on a cross, to take all your sins away. That is the mercy of God!

And that’s why Mary could say, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Mary’s joy came from HUMILITY, combined with an awareness of God’s saving MERCY and GRACE.

May that be your recipe for joy as we head into the festival of Christmas. A good recipe can be hard to find, but here’s one that has proven to be a good one for thousands of years. Combine one part HUMILITY, with two parts God’s MERCY and GRACE. And the result - your spirit will rejoice in God your Savior.

III. Cover with FAITH and LOVE Forever:

Mary knew. The Bible says in Luke 2:19 that, “... Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” For thirty-three years Mary kept the realization that her soul would be pierced through. And that day on Golgotha’s hill, instead of wood cradling her baby in comfort and safety it now provided the material upon which He would die for her sins and the sins of the whole world. ***Because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever would believeth on Him would not perish but have everlasting life.***” (John 3:16)

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three;

Faith, Hope, Love, And all are risky...but God risked it all!

but the greatest of these is love.

Why? Because Love ties it all together. I can't have faith in something I don't love. I can't have hope in that which I don't know whether or not love is shared.

God made Himself vulnerable that night in a manger. He risked coming into this world to show His love in the most precious way possible. The form of a baby. It's why we can't understand Sandy Hook. I keep hearing it over and over and over. How could somebody do THAT to babies?! And then I asked as I look at the cross, how could somebody do that to God?

We give ourselves, mind, body and soul to the One who laid His life down for you and for me, first by coming to a cradle, then by dying on the cross. Will you receive the gift of His love for you this Christmas? Will you open it, read the instruction manual, follow His teachings, learn His will, and treasure the most precious gift you could ever receive, eternal life? If you are ready to really live, then this is the gift you need to receive this year, this very day. Jesus is here, and He's waiting for you, all because He loves you. He really does.

Let's Pray...