

Christmas 2018 – Nothing Will Be Impossible With God

Luke 1:26-38 | Sunday, December 16, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

CHRISTMAS 2018

NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And 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."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

If you would skip to verse 46, I want to call attention to what is known as the very famous song of Mary, called the Magnificat. I would like to share that as well. We will really look at the encounter of Mary and Elizabeth next week and a little bit at this song, but it will help us today. Verse 46:

And Mary said,

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.*

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*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*

Nothing is impossible with God. In this passage we are told about a second miraculous birth that takes place as we continue in the Christmas story. This birth is even more miraculous than the one we looked at last week, where we heard about Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age. Elizabeth was barren all her life, and now past child-bearing years is to give birth to a son, whose name will be John, who will go and prepare the way. He is the forerunner as he prepares the way for the Messiah. We looked at that last week and all that we learned from that amazing encounter between Zechariah and the angel Gabriel.

Now Gabriel appears to Mary. Quite a contrast. Older man, priest, leader in Israel, to this young teenage girl, maybe 13 or 14 years of age, very humble, engaged to be married to Joseph. She is described to us as a virgin. Gabriel comes in and announces: “You will give birth to the Son of God, the Messiah.” Now, this miracle is a model miracle. It teaches us a lot about how God works in our lives and a lot about the purposes of God.

Here is this young lady who experiences this dramatic encounter. Then this amazing miracle where a child is conceived, apart from her being with a man, and she gives birth to the Son of God. So I just want to talk to you today from this passage about the supernatural, about the miraculous, and ask you: **Are you ready for a supernatural Christmas? Are you ready for a miraculous 2019? Are you living a supernatural life?** A few less Amens that time, right?

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Just what are we to expect when we talk about the power of God being in us and moving through us? Eugene Peterson pointed out the parallels. When he began to pastor, he looked at the birth of Jesus and then the beginning of the Church that's recorded in the book of Acts. He talked about Jesus being formed in Mary and Jesus being formed in the early Church, in the body of Christ, the early Church. He saw these parallels and he used that as a model for himself as he pastored his church.

I think that's what we want to get at in this model. **When God works in you supernaturally, he has this greater purpose of forming, of shaping Jesus Christ in you. This is the real glory of Christmas. God has come to be with us. God has come to dwell in you.**

So we are going to look at the supernatural today. And in it, we are going to prepare for a new year. I just want to say this. As we finished Zechariah last week, we looked briefly at his song. He had this prophetic song where he celebrated all that God has done. Toward the end of that, in verse 78 we read: "...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high..." He talks about God coming in the person of his Son and he talks about a visitation of the sunrise of God. I thought, "You know, that describes how I feel right now about Riverside Church."

Here's a little interesting fact of history. In the 1500's, the reformation was sweeping Europe and the gospel was being rediscovered, the true message of Jesus Christ and the power of the good news in Jesus Christ. The scriptures were being opened up in a new way. As that was happening, churches who were impacted by the reformation and embracing the reformation had a symbol they would put on the top of the steeple. Do you know what it was? It was a rooster.

This seems crazy to me, but they would actually take crosses off the steeple and put a rooster on the steeple. It symbolized that the new dawn of the reformation had come to that church. And I don't how to say this, Riverside, but this is the year of the rooster – a new dawn. But there needs to be a level of expectation, a preparation of our hearts for God to move in our hearts, for God to do the supernatural.

I would say normally we look at two ingredients when we talk about God doing miracles in our lives, doing supernatural things: the word of God and the Spirit of God. If you want to reduce down to just the real minimum, it's the word of God and the Spirit of God. But I want to give you some bonus points today, so we are going to look at this passage in five parts. The first is:

I. **God's Will.**

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Verses 26-31. **One of the things that we need to know when we start talking about miracles is that they happen not according to your will or my will, but according to God's will.** Gabriel comes to visit Mary and make this announcement. He is telling her: "This is what God has decided to do. This is the will of God. You are favored of the Lord."

She was troubled by this. She didn't understand. We can certainly see why this would be confusing to her. Yet this is God's will and what the Lord is going to do in her life. In many ways, this first point and the second point – they are presuppositions. They are preparation for the miraculous. We have to understand that God works in our lives ultimately according to his will and not our will.

So if we talk about God doing wonderful, outstanding, miraculous things, then it's just, "Well, okay. I've got some things I want." That's okay, but they are going to get filtered through God's will. **I often think that many of the things that are on our hearts the most – they are the will of God, and we fail to understand just how much God really wants to do in our lives.**

Now, the will of God is a tricky thing. C.S. Lewis has helpful little illustration. He says it's like a mom who wants her child's bedroom to be clean. Can any of you relate to this? But she wants the child to clean it. So when the bedroom is a mess, she doesn't go in and make the bed and clean the room. She leaves it. If you ask this Mom, "Is it your will that this room is a mess?" she would say no. But then in a different way, in a more ultimate way, the answer right now is "Yes, because I want to see how long he can live with a mess before he cleans it, and I want him to learn how to take care of it."

There are many things that are happening in your life that are not God's will, but they are God's will, because God has a higher purpose. So we pray, but we always pray with this underpinning of "not my will but thine be done." We are ultimately resting in the will of God. We may be praying: "We need this job. We need this promotion. We need this." We are praying for God to heal, for God to move, for God to answer, for God to restore. But at the same time, we really do want the will of God.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones has a helpful idea here. He says it like this.

If you are putting yourself in the hand of God, let him lead you, and it is he who decides where he leads you. Whatever it may be, let him lead you. Go on. Do not be foolish, and because you are disappointed, turn back and say, "This is unpleasant and uncomfortable." Wherever he leads you, follow him. Go on. It is obviously ridiculous to ask God at one and the same time to bless you and then to resist what he is doing in your life. God is blessing you. He is working in your life in marvelous ways. Trust his will.

I've illustrated this over the years in many ways. I've talked about how when we adopted Joshua and Caleb we went from three boys and a girl to five boys and a girl. My daughter thought this was apocalyptic. This was the end of the world.

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She was very young at the time and she was so distraught, like, “I’m not sure I bargained for three brothers. I don’t want five brothers. I want a sister.” And we tried to adopt a little girl from a neighboring country in Africa.

I gave her a sermon over and over and over and over again from 1 Peter: “Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and in due season he will exalt you. Sweetheart, we are not adopting a seventh child. There will be no sister, and unless it’s very much like this passage, it’s not happening. Accept God’s will and in due season he will overwhelm you with joy.”

Now she celebrates being the only girl and she rules the roost. There are many ways where in subtle little ways this visits us. We just have to have something, but this is protective. Now, it’s protective in another way. I’ll make this better with the second point. Let me go on to the second point.

II. God’s Kingdom.

Verses 32 and 33. We are told about the birth of Jesus. “He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. Of his kingdom there will never be an end. There will be no end.” This is what happens in God’s kingdom. Supernatural things happen. God is beating back other kingdoms. He is defeating, overwhelming, overcoming other kingdoms. He is ruling. If you read the gospels, you see that Jesus in his earthly ministry came, announcing the kingdom, preaching the kingdom, then he went around delivering people who were in oppression and helping people, doing miracles.

There is this preparation for us to understand that God is concerned about an advance of that which glorifies him. He is concerned, not about the promotion of our kingdoms, but of his kingdom. In many ways I am trying in this Christmas season to prepare us for a new year. Last week we talked about kingdom prayer. We talked about how kingdom prayer leads us to kingdom advance, kingdom thinking. When I talk about kingdom prayer, what I mean there is that as the Lord taught us to pray in the Lord’s prayer, we are asking for God’s will to be done, God’s kingdom to come. We are really praying for the church in our area to advance, for people to come to Christ, for the city and the culture to be blessed in Christ, for the light of Jesus to shine. We are really praying about the coming of the kingdom of God.

As wonderful as it may be to get together in a prayer meeting and pray for Aunt Betty who lives in Minneapolis and some other distant relative – I’m not against those things. That’s great, but that’s not what we are describing here. We are talking about the kingdom of God coming powerfully to bring the will of God. Christian, something happens when you get a vision for an advance of the kingdom of God.

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Let me just say this. We are starting a prayer meeting. It's a men's prayer meeting. It starts January 9. It's in the new year. We actually had a couple of people ready this week who showed up. We are going to stream the prayer meeting, so if you need to log in from our website and visit us from work, you can participate. Gather a few Christians with you if you are able, at the workplace or wherever you might be. You are eager. We had people ready this week. It hasn't started yet -- January 9.

Let me tell you a little story about Travis Tritt. Anyone know the singer Travis Tritt? Any country music fans here? Yeah, right. Three. Well, a few more than that. He does Southern Rock and Bluegrass and regular country music. He tells the story of how when he started out, he would go wherever he could play. So he would find himself in various "establishments." "Establishment" is Christianese for "bar," and fights would break out.

On one occasion, a fight breaks out. It's really getting bad, so he just starts playing Silent Night. Everyone stops fighting and starts listening to him sing this Christmas carol. He said as he was starting his career, this was his practice. It could be the middle of July and these bikers and cowboys are going to fight. They've got pool sticks and who knows what else. He starts singing Silent Night and everyone stops fighting. He said bikers were standing there with tears running down their faces. He's up there sweating and singing Christmas carols. That's a great story, right?

That's the picture we have of Christmas: Silent Night. It's wonderful, and it's one aspect of Christmas. Amazing peace. The supernatural peace of God brought to my heart. Peace that can't be described. Peace that overwhelms chaos. That is a very real part of Christmas, but it's not the only part.

When you read Mary's song, when you read the Magnificat, it is revolutionary. She is like, "God has invaded this world and he is taking it back! He is bringing his kingdom. He is turning everything upside down." Just to prove it, he started with a 13-year-old virgin. You may have this picture of an impoverished girl. She was a very poor, illiterate girl. In her song she quotes the Old Testament 15 times. Mary was an exceptional young lady, but a nobody, unknown to the world. She understood, "Listen, God is about to disrupt this universe."

That, Christian, is how we pray. We care about the brokenness of our city. We care about the pain and the loss of our region. And we believe that God cares. We believe that God wants to bring his mercy and his power and his salvation and his healing to a broken world. We can sit around if we want to and complain about it, or we can pray, "Bring your kingdom. Lord, move through your church powerfully." So we pray for kingdom advance.

III. God's Spirit.

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I told you this was a key ingredient whenever God works miraculously. It's the Spirit of God. It's the Holy Spirit who works. Mary asks Gabriel, this mighty angel, a pretty simple question: "How will this be since I am a virgin?" Now, I love this passage because it reminds me of Zechariah saying, "I'd like a sign." Right? If you're there with Mary, you want to say, "Mary, be careful! Be careful how you ask. This is a good question, like how is this going to happen?" It's interesting that Gabriel basically gives her a sign. He tells her what God is going to do. He tells her this will be the work of the Holy Spirit and that Elizabeth, who is old and barren, is already in her sixth month and is going to give birth. This confirming sign, if you will, is given to Mary.

I want to talk for a minute about this. In fact, my plan in the new year is to do a couple of power sermons on the Holy Spirit and on the word of God and how the Spirit of God and the word of God work together for God to work powerfully in our lives. But allow me just to say that everything that God does in your life is experienced in this moment by the Holy Spirit. **If your pneumatology, that is your understanding of the Holy Spirit, is off or severely limited, it will impact your experience of Christ in the Christian life.**

I don't have a need to persuade you into a certain doctrinal camp in this moment. I don't want to dig down and parse all of the options. I just want to invite you to this perspective: John the Baptist came preparing the way for Jesus. He said, "I baptize you with water, but there is one coming who will baptize you, he will immerse you in the Spirit of God." Jesus said, "I will baptize you in the Spirit of God." Then Jesus was crucified and raised, and as he ascended he said to his followers: "You will be my witnesses, ultimately to the end of the earth, but don't start until you receive power from on high. You will receive the Spirit of God. You will be empowered (Acts 1:8) to be my witnesses." Then as the Spirit of God is poured out on the church, there is a power. Jesus tells his followers: "Do not try to fulfill my will, bring my kingdom in your power. You cannot accomplish the advance of my kingdom apart from my Holy Spirit at work powerfully in your life."

This is why we really want to be sensitive to these biblical admonishments that say, "Don't quench the Spirit. Don't grieve the Spirit." There are certain things that according to scripture clearly grieve, but anything against the will of God, anything that's just direct disobedience and a denial of God's reign grieves the Spirit of God. Certain things are clearly identified: dishonesty, lying. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. This is why a Christian who may have had a lifetime of embellishing and practicing deceit immediately feels this grief in their heart, knowing, "This is just not right – to deceive."

If you're like me, I was (I want to use the past tense here) very clever at legally telling the truth and yet deceiving. Some of you look like, "Oh, that's horrible." You've done it. I know you have. The Spirit of God says, "No, no." Another way we deeply grieve the Spirit of God is by unforgiveness and a vindictive spirit and bitterness and hatred. That may be a longtime battle to deal with deep offenses, but we can't just settle down and be at peace with hatred toward others and

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all the ways, the defenses that we raise up that give us permission to treat people in that way. God hates bigotry. It grieves the Spirit of God. You just go on. There are certain things, but we care about these things. God tells us that a wandering eye, a lustful spirit grieves the Spirit of God.

So then we quench the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God prompts us and the Spirit of God is leading us. We have a relationship with God. As the Spirit of God indwells us, when we are sensitive to the Spirit of God, miracles happen. Supernatural things happen in our lives. God brings his kingdom, and he wants us to be sensitive.

I want to just stop here for a second. I don't want to give you the idea that we earn this. Everything we do is by God's grace. We receive forgiveness. When we fail we confess our sin. We say, "God, you've paid for this. I receive forgiveness. There is an ongoing, lifetime learning process. I'm just going to camp here for a moment more. I want to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

If you are married, you are one with your mate. When you violate the oneness of that marriage, it grieves the Spirit of God. When you say, "Okay, Lord, I hope you're listening to her. I'm right here." When you lock into: "I am right, and you know what? I am determined to be right and prove I'm right. Even if I don't feel this strong tomorrow, I'm promising myself I will not relent. I will hold onto this." You are locking down against the Spirit of God in your life.

Now, God says, "I will give grace to the humble. I will give my strength and power to the one who humbles himself or herself." It got really quiet in here all of a sudden. It's a supernatural work of grace to have a Christian marriage, friend. It is saying it is no longer me and you. It is us. We are one and we are going to fight in the Spirit of God for that, because that is the will of God. This is a part of how God works and brings the supernatural by grace.

IV. God's Word.

It's very interesting that Mary says, "Be it unto me according to your word," verse 38. In the next part of chapter 1, when she visits with Elizabeth, Elizabeth celebrates in verse 45. She says, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the word." So the word of God and the Spirit of God go together. In fact, nothing God ever prompts us to do is on the level of scripture. We yield to God's word. It informs us. It directs us. But more than that, there is power in the word of God. It goes forth. It creates. It makes things new. We receive the promises of God. The Spirit of God brings those home to our hearts. Faith rises and God brings his kingdom.

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This is why we talk about spending time in God's word and prayer. It is so important for us as Christians. It's not to be legalistic. You know, "You've got to have a certain amount of quiet time with God." No. We need the Lord. We receive his promises as we open his word and God meets us powerfully.

I was listening to a preacher this week, a good preacher. God is using him. But he was reading the book of Acts and said, "You know, this supernatural work happened and it happened because the word of God had not come yet." What he meant by that was that we didn't have the scripture. He believed that when scripture came in its final form that miracles ceased.

I have many dear Christian brothers who believe that, some in this church, and you are welcome here. We love you. I just want to tell you why I disagree with you. The miraculous has always happened through the Spirit of God and the word of God. The miraculous was not just a confirmation of the word of God that was happening. It was a part of the word of God going forth.

I have no interest in debates about whether miracles happen or don't happen. I'm more concerned about unity in the Lord. But for me, I need to tell you, maybe I just need more help than everyone else. I need miracles! I need the supernatural work of God in my life all the time. That doubled when I had my first child. It doubled when I had another one. It doubled again. If you want to be a successful parent, you need the Spirit of God to work powerfully. It's the greatest thing to ever help us as parents, right? Are you with me?

Okay, listen. This is not about winning a theological debate. It's about calling you to a place of faith for God to work in the person of his Spirit and the power of his word. When I was spending time with God in the word of God, I realized that I wasn't receiving from the Lord. So I had trouble seeing the good news. But I read two writers or preachers that really helped me: Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Charles Spurgeon. What they did constantly, just constantly through their preaching and writing, was help me to see the promises of God. I want to say this to you: **When you open God's word, if all you see is commands or instructions but you are not seeing promises, it's going to deplete you. The word of God is full of the promises of God and what he will do so that you can keep the commands and grow in wisdom.**

Okay, last point. Are you ready for the last point? Very important.

V. God's Son.

All of the verses. God's will, God's kingdom, God's Spirit, God's word, God's Son. **It's all about Jesus.** The Spirit of God exalts Jesus. He helps you to understand the teaching of Jesus. He reveals God's truth in your heart. He convicts you of

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sin. He's always pointing you to Jesus. The kingdom is the kingdom of Christ. It is Christ ruling and Christ bringing the fulfillment of all of God's will. So what God really is desiring to do every time he works in your life, he is wanting to form Christ in you. He is wanting you to grow in Christ-likeness, in relationship with Jesus. He is shaping Jesus in you.

The songs in Luke 1 -- Mary's song and Zechariah's song -- sometimes we read those and we are like, "Hmmm, not sure I know how to respond to those." But let me maybe whet your appetite in this way. **As you and I are filled with the Spirit of God and we begin to desire God's kingdom in a greater way, our capacity for God enlarges, and our love for other people increases.**

Hear this for a moment. As you begin to pray, not just for your own needs -- you should pray for that, but you are praying for God to bring his kingdom through you to others, and God enlarges your capacity. Why is that significant?

Well, you've seen it in the physical. Some individuals have had surgery to reduce their capacity for intake, to reduce their capacity for food. You can try to help yourself physically cosmetically, right? That's not a bad idea. I try to get myself a little help when I can. But, we know medically that reducing capacity will reduce intake.

So, spiritually, increasing your capacity will increase your intake and increase your experience of God. Many of us long for that, but we don't understand that the very thing that's blocking us from that is a me-kingdom mindset rather than stepping out in faith into the things that make us feel a little uncomfortable, which is being others-oriented, God-oriented, Christ being exalted.

That's what gets me excited, okay? I really am not excited about the theological debate over here, although these issues matter and we have to work them out. I want to tell you, I have friends who say miracles don't happen today, but they have more faith than people who say that miracles do happen, and they are living supernatural lives. So I want to say, "Okay, that's what I'm going to go for." I want Riverside to be a supernatural, kingdom-come church, even greater than it is.

Are you excited? Silent Night is great. We are going to light candles on Christmas Eve. Hopefully you are going to be here at 5:30. But the next day we are going to turn the world upside down. We are going to say, "God's kingdom is breaking in. Lookout!" Put your...well...I was going to say, "Put your pool cue down." But I guess the way I was going is: "Pick it up. Come on, let's go." Let's bow our heads for a moment.