

For Nothing will be Impossible with God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, very good morning, everyone. It's great to see you. I must admit, I really loved that last song. It was on in our house this morning. Alex was practicing. It's just fantastic. Great, powerful lyrics. I hope we will see come out so gloriously as we turn to God's words now. So can I encourage you to grab a Bible and turn to Luke chapter 1, verses 26 to 38. But just before we get into this, why don't we just still ourselves and let's ask that God would come and be with us now as we turn to his word. Let's pray before we begin this morning. Father, we ask that you would thrill us from your words this morning as we turn to consider this Christmas story, perhaps such a familiar story to many of us.

Father, would you come and help us see it afresh this morning? Help us to see your greatness goodness and your goodness. Oh, Father, would you help us to grasp something more of the enormity of what you have accomplished for us and done for us in your son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Okay, are we feeling Christmas through this morning?

A little bit. I saw a few Christmas jumpers. Put your hand up. You've got a Christmas jumper on. There's more than one. There's two. Does this kind of count? I picked it this morning and I thought it kind of counts. I don't know if it does. Why don't you turn to your neighbour if we're not in the Christmas mood already. Here's a pop quiz question for you to kick us off. Ten seconds, okay. What do seven out of the last ten UK Christmas number ones have in common? And if that's too easy for you, why don't you see if you can have a go at naming the seven artists? Thirty seconds, turn to your neighbour, on you go. Okay, that'll do.

Okay, with one accord, what does seven out of the last ten have in common? X-Factor. Hands up if you don't have a clue what X-Factor is. Are we all right? Good, we're there. Okay, X-Factor, here we go. X-Factor, hands up if your perfect Saturday night is a takeaway and the X-Factor on the telly. Okay? Hands up if last night was X-Factor on the telly and a takeaway. We love this show, don't we? We love this show. No? Our nation loves this show. I was thinking on it this week, why does our nation love this show? Why do we go bonkers for it every Christmas? Now, I'm not hopeful for this. Does somebody want to tell me who won last year? Okay? A guy called Ben Haynow. Okay? He was, before he was famous, he was a van driver from Croydon in London, and 9.1 million people tuned in to watch that final last year. And 214,000 of us proceeded to buy this single. I was not one of them.

But that really is child's play when you compare it with the 17.2 million who in 2010 saw Matt Cardle win the X-Factor. And his Christmas number one, When We Collide, wasn't even his song, it was a cover, sold 419,000 copies to make it Christmas number one. Why do we go bananas for this show at Christmas time? I was thinking on it this week. I was thinking on it last night as I was watching it. Do you not think it's because it taps into something that we all love about Christmas?

[3 : 4 5] Do we not love as a nation, do we not love a Christmas miracle? Do we not love a rags to riches story? Someone from the bottom goes right to the top. Do we not love it when someone defies all the odds, overcomes all the barriers and obstacles, and accomplishes what is seemingly impossible?

Do we not love it when the impossible becomes possible? Well, here's what we're going to see this morning as we look at these verses in Luke. This is what Luke is telling us, that the birth of Jesus is the against all odds story. That the Christmas story, the birth of this king, is the Christmas miracle. Here's the big idea for us this morning. Christmas, God makes the impossible possible. He makes the impossible possible. And the wonder of it, unlike X-Factor, is that it wasn't accomplished by rags going to riches? It was accomplished by riches taking on rags. And this moment right here in Luke's gospel, this moment in history, changes everything. Changes everything.

And I must admit, I came to these verses this week to study them, and I thought I knew them. And they're so familiar to us, aren't they? We read them every year. You maybe read them ever since you've been a child. So familiar. But can I encourage us to come at them fresh this morning?

And maybe like me this week, to see something more of the enormity of what God has done for us here. So with that in mind, why don't we turn to the verses? This is Luke chapter 1, 26 to 38.

And let's read them together. This is what Luke writes. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, greetings, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you.

[6 : 02] Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called 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'm a virgin. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So 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. And she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her. So I guess I just want us to walk through this passage this morning.

And in classic Sesame Street style, this message this morning is brought to you by the word be as it crops up in this passage. So we pick up the story with the angel Gabriel sent on his second mission, having already delivered a message to Elizabeth that she was going to have a baby boy.

The second mission this time, he is sent to go to a girl who is pledged to be. Now notice where Mary is geographically here. She's in this little town of Nazareth. Now what can we say about Nazareth?

Well, it's a little town of no great renown. It's not a kind of place that you go for a glitz and glam. If you're looking to book your summer holiday, you're not looking at Nazareth. Nazareth, as far as Galilee is concerned, is right on the bottom rung. And you see that crop up in a few places in the Gospels, where people make snidey comments about the kind of people that come from Nazareth. How could anything good come from Nazareth? Well, it's to this place, this town that God sends the angel Gabriel to announce the greatest news that the world will ever know. Not to a palace and a princess, but to a young girl in a backwater town who is engaged to the village carpenter. Now let's be honest, if we were writing this fairy tale, if we were writing this, this isn't how I would have scripted it. If I were giving Gabriel the orders here, if I knew the cosmic proportions of the message that I had to deliver, Nazareth wouldn't be number one on my list. And if Nazareth isn't number one, then Mary certainly wouldn't be number one in terms of the person I would go to. Now why don't we aim for someone at the top of society? Why don't we aim for a place of influence? Certainly that's the best way to get this news out. But God chose Nazareth and God chose Mary. And even with that, I hope you're beginning to see what kind of gods we're dealing with here. The God not of pomp and pride, but the God who considers the unimportant and goes towards the seemingly insignificant. He goes towards the outsider.

Now maybe that's a word for some of us here this morning. Maybe you're here and you feel as if you could never be good enough for God, that you feel like God, he should just pass over me because I'm too insignificant. Well, I hope even now at the outset in these verses, you see that that is not God's heart, that God is for you, that God moves towards you. And this is what we're going to see here, that we're dealing with a different kind of king. So here's Mary, she's pledged to be. Now that word pledged, it means something more than our concept of engagement. Mary has committed herself to Joseph and Joseph has committed himself to Mary. The two of them are joined in a union that can only be separated by divorce. Serious stuff. Well, it's into this backdrop that Gabriel delivers his greeting to Mary at verse 28. What does he say? Look at it there. He says, the Lord is with you.

[10:31] You are greatly favored. And how does Mary react to that news? How does Mary react to that greeting? She is greatly troubled. That's what the text tells us. In other words, she's petrified.

She's petrified. What does this mean? Why are you here? What's going on? Have I done something wrong? Has Joseph done something wrong? Why are you here? It's interesting, isn't it? In our culture, when we talk about seeing angels, it's all cuddles and wings, isn't it? It's all cute. Well, you never see anything like that in the Bible. Mary's reaction is quite normal. She's afraid.

And what does the angel say to her? Well, it's Christmas time. There's no need to be afraid. See, it wasn't Bob Geldof and Band-Aid that came up with that line, was it? It was the angel Gabriel.

What does he say? He says, do not be afraid. There's our next bee. Do not bee. And why? Well, because she is favored. God has looked upon her in his grace, not because of who she is, not because of what she has done, not because she got the most votes on the Galilean X factor, but he's looked on her. The text tells us for no other reason than he is God and he is good and he looks with grace on people. He goes towards the undeserving. This is our God.

Looking on the lowly, reaching down to the humble. Mary is favored. She is a recipient of God's grace and his love. Why? Because God is gracious. Now, what does Gabriel say? Well, he says, you will be.

[12 : 12] You will be with child. You're going to be a mom, Mary. You're not going to have to wait for that 20 week scan to learn the gender of your child. It's going to be a boy. And you're not going to have to go through that process of picking a name, trying to decide a boy's name and a girl's name. He's going to be called Jesus. Now, instantly here, do we not see that this is no normal child? That there's a plan and there's a purpose of cosmic proportions with the birth of this child? There's a plan. There's a purpose. Really, the clue is in the name. What's his name? Jesus. The Lord is salvation. That's what Jesus means. This boy, not named in hopeful expectation of what he might become, but named precisely in keeping with what he has come to do and to accomplish.

What does the angel Gabriel say? Well, here's our next beat, verse 32. He will be. He will be what? Well, he will be great. Follow it with me. He will be great. This boy will define greatness.

He will be the ultimate one. He will be the glorious one. He will be the one who all the earth looks to for what it means to be great. And he will be the son of the most high. Now, you read that as a Jew and you read king. You will have a throne, the throne of his father, David. You see that Christ, it is not his surname. Christ is his job description. This child, God's chosen and promised king, he is the one who's going to come and he's going to win the victory for his people. This child, Jesus is the fulfillment of all that has been unfolding in the Old Testament, like we were seeing on that video. So helpful.

This is all pointing to him. He is the king, the long expected king that they've been waiting for. And God will establish this king's kingdom. Do you notice that? It will be eternal. It will have no end.

Do you see what he's saying? That the Babylonians had their kingdom. It ended. The Persians had their kingdom. It ended. The Egyptians had their kingdom. It ended. But this king, his kingdom, it will have no end. And why will it have no end? Because this child is God in the flesh. It's God's son.

[14 : 40] You see what Gabriel is saying? That the event in which the whole of redemption history has been moving forward to is kicking off and is kicking off right here in this young girl's womb.

That's what the angel Gabriel is saying. This is massive news. I have a good friend who lives in Canada. I grew up with him here in Scotland. And I noticed this week on his Facebook page. I know we're not massively into Facebook, as John told us this morning.

But on his Facebook page, I noticed this week he put up a link to a wild Scotland video by a guy called John Duncan. Maybe some of you have watched it. You can Google it when you go home. But it was this four minute video, basically. It was almost like a Visit Scotland video. You know, when you see Scotland at its best. You know, that kind of video. So I was watching this thing and panoramic views of mountains and sunsets, probably up in the west coast. There was children playing on beautiful sandy beaches. There's horses galloping in green lush fields. There's seals swimming in crystal blue sea. All of this set to atmospheric music, so romantic. And I found myself sitting there thinking, goodness, I'd love to live in that country. I'd love to live there. And then it suddenly dawned on me. It was Thursday. Do you remember Thursday? It's not a pretty day, was it? Do you remember Thursday? Blowing a gale outside, tipping it down with rain, freezing cold. I wonder if you've ever been in that situation, had one of those moments where what you're being told and what you see at ground level seem to be two very different things. Have you had one of those moments? Because I think Mary is having one of those moments right here. Gabriel has been telling her some incredible news, massive news. And I bet you there's that moment where Mary thinks back to the birds and the bees that her mom told her when she was growing up. She thinks to her betrothal to Joseph. She thinks of the marriage bed that hasn't been touched yet. And she thinks to herself, understandably, how will this be? How will this be? That all sounds lovely, Gabriel. It sounds incredible, but you're overlooking the obvious. Are you not familiar with how the reproduction thing works down here? That's not going to happen. Well, what does Gabriel tell her? Look at it there. It's fantastic.

What does he say? That she will conceive by the Holy Spirit. That this conception is not going to be man's doing. It's going to be God's doing. What Gabriel is saying here to Mary is that we're not dealing with a God who works on the basis of human limitations. We're working and we're dealing here with the God who defines what is possible. Remember who sent me, Mary? It's the God who makes the impossible possible. This is the God who parted the Red Sea for his people. This is the God who flung stars into space and who created the world out of nothing. This is the God that we're dealing with here. For him, nothing is impossible. You know, I wonder whether some of us need to recapture something of that this morning. That wonderful and incredible truth about our God, that nothing is too hard for him, that nothing is impossible for him. Do you see what's going on here? Friends, let me ask you, how big is your God? God doesn't work according to our agenda. God isn't limited to working within our capacity to fathom. We're dealing here with the God who makes the impossible possible.

Mary will conceive. The virgin will give birth to a son. And the thing to see here is that that news hasn't come from left field. This is something that was promised long ago. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of a time when God would personally come to deliver his people, like we saw in the video earlier, so, so helpful. And what is going to be the sign of that happening, that great deliverance?

[18:57] Well, there it is in Isaiah 7, 14. Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Now, what's that sign? Well, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

That's massive. The unfolding of this rescue mission, the plan that's been hatched in eternity past, is beginning to unfold right here. Right here. God's coming to rescue his people.

The virgin will give birth to a son. Now, we don't have encyclopedias have been written on the doctrine of the virgin birth. I had an exam on Tuesday and I wrote a massive essay on it. It's an incredibly brilliant doctrine. But let me just tell you two things about what this virgin birth is telling us.

It's telling us two things, I think. Firstly, it's telling us that we are lost. We are lost. This is one almighty custard pie in the face of humanity's thinking that we can be the solution to our problem. Now, we've, our little girl is nine months old and she's going through this phase just now where she just knocks things down. I don't know if there's any other parents in the room that go through that process. She just seems to, you put food on her high chair, she'll take it and she'll throw it off. You'll build some bricks for her. She'll crawl from the other side of the room to come over to knock them down. Well, when I'm bathing her at night, I'll line the ducks up in the side of the bath. And again, she'll crawl over and she'll knock the ducks off the bath. I don't know what it is. I don't know what the ducks have done to her, but she's not having any of it. But she's going through this phase where she just knocks things down. I haven't taught her how to do that.

She just does it. And that's what the Bible is saying about our heart attitude towards God. By our very nature, we just shoved them away. We wanted nothing to do with him.

[20 : 51] We preferred the darkness. That's what John's gospel tells us. We preferred the darkness and we were lost in the darkness and we have got no hope of putting ourselves right with God.

Now, John prayed it earlier. Is it not heartbreaking to see the darkness in our world? Just looking on our news screens at what's going on across the world just now. But the thing is, the darkness is not just out there. The darkness is in here. Do you not know that to be true in your own life? Do you not know the darkness inside you? I remember thinking about these things when I was thinking about Christianity. And I took M People's advice, I searched for the hero inside myself, and let me tell you, he was nowhere to be found. We preferred the darkness. Do you not know, friends, your own brokenness? Do you not know your own frailty inside? Do you not experience the frustration and the pain of living in a world that is dark? There's not something inside of us that says that there must be something more than this. There must be. There must be something more.

But the virgin birth tells us that the answer to mankind's problems are not to be found within our species. No mere man is going to be able to change the course of humanity. The human gene pool is redundant when it comes to producing a savior. The virgin birth tells us that we are lost. Secondly, it tells us that we are loved. God could have quite justifiably left us to our own devices. He could have quite justifiably passed right by, but he didn't. The glorious news, friends, here is that the light is about to burst into the darkness. The hope of all the world is coming.

That God is acting for his people. God is getting involved. God is getting his hands dirty. God is about to take on flesh. God is going to move into our neighborhood. God is about to take a heartbeat.

And if you're struggling to get to sleep tonight, have a goal at getting your head around that paradox. The creator of all things in a cradle. It's not incredible. Absolutely incredible. Jesus, the one through whom all things were created. Jesus, the one who was in the beginning. Jesus, the heir of all things, is about to humble himself. And humble himself in the most incredible way possible. To take our form. And what do we see in his life? We see that he has not come to have his feet washed. He has come to wash the feet of his people. That he has come not to be served, but to serve. This is the kind of king that we're dealing with here. Jesus, fully God and fully man.

[23 : 50] Fully God, i.e. he's born out with the sinful line of Adam. He's not tainted with our sin. Meaning that he's able to live the perfect life in obedience and worship to God. And he's fully man and that he is truly one with us. He is Emmanuel. God with us. And he can represent us before God because he has taken our skin. God came looking for us. Now let me just say, maybe you're here this morning and I see you think that God doesn't care. He doesn't care about me. He doesn't care about my brokenness. He doesn't care about my world. Well, do you see how this is telling us that God doesn't and didn't remain distant and unmoved, residing above. But God moves alongside. God cared enough that he would send his only son. You see, we're not dealing with the God of the possible, but we're dealing with the God of the impossible. I've got that right, haven't I? Yes, that's it. God makes the impossible possible.

Oh, we'll edit that from the recording. I can't remember what it said. And it's interesting because Luke only uses that phrase one other time in his gospel. And if you fast forward to Luke chapter 18, we'll just put something on the screen. He uses it when he's dealing with and talking to the rich young ruler. And the young ruler's question to Jesus is, teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

What must I do to inherit eternal life? What does Jesus say? Keep the commandments. To which the young ruler responds, well, I've done that. And Jesus says, well, there's one thing that you're lacking. Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor. To which the young man is very unhappy and he walks away. Why? Because he didn't want to do it. And so the disciples and those in the crowd, they look at each other and they say, well, if he can't be saved, if he's not going to get there, then what chance do we have? And Jesus says that, doesn't he? It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But what does Jesus mean by that? Well, he's saying that on the roads to the cross.

Jesus is about to make the impossible possible. For the life that started in the crib is now going the way of the cross. A humble birth would end in a humiliating day. His death, by it, he gives his life for our sin. He opens up the way for us to come to know God. For all those who would believe in him to come and be reconciled, to come and be made one with our creator. Do you see the way to God, the way to heaven that was shut? Jesus opens it by his death. The impossible becomes possible.

And here we have it right here, the rescue mission unfolding right here in Luke chapter 1. Mary will conceive and give birth to a son. Massive, friends. Massive.

[27 : 02] Now, how does she react? Well, let's look at our last bee and cue the beetles. Here we go. Let it be. Let it be is what Mary says. She says, yep, let it be. You see, what began with fear ends with faith. And I think Mary for us here is a great example of what it means to walk by faith.

And notice two things about Mary as we close. Firstly, notice her humility. She bows the knee to God and says, I trust you, God. I trust you. And I was reading this week that apparently £84 million worth of gift vouchers will go unused this Christmas. Does anybody actually bought a gift voucher for a present? Or bought one on previous Christmases? So I think I have. There's that stat.

£84 million worth of vouchers go unused at Christmas time. Apparently, people just put it in the top drawer, just forget about it, move on. Friends, can I encourage you? Can I plead with you? Do not do that with this gift.

It's far too glorious and far too important and beautiful to pass over. God has come and he's given you his only son so that you and I could come to know him. It's incredible. But you see how Mary, Mary takes God at his word and she walks in faith. That's what it means to have faith, to know something of God, to hear from him, to trust his word and to act in it. And if we commend Mary for her humility, we'll see lastly her bravery. This is a brave girl we're dealing with here. Now put yourself in her shoes at this point. For Mary to walk in faith, for Mary to believe God, to take him at his word and to act upon it. It's a costly thing. Just think about what she's got to do. She's got to tell Joseph that she's pregnant and he's not the father. It's not a conversation that's going to be pretty, is it?

That's a difficult conversation. She may well lose her marriage because of this. And if her marriage goes, her support goes, her social standing goes, probably her income goes, all of these expectations that you bring towards a marriage, the children, the family home, the grandkids, all of that may disappear in a second because she's listened and she's trusted what God is saying here.

[29 : 26] Now, if you read Matthew's gospel, you know that it almost did cause her her marriage, that Joseph almost did walk away, that he wanted to divorce her quietly. He wanted to do it under the radar. It's a costly thing. And if it wasn't just with Joseph that it was a costly thing, think about her reputation and her social standing in the community that she's living in. Nazareth, not a big place, and people being people being people. You know if one person finds out about this, that Mary's pregnant, Joseph isn't the father, you know that spreading like wildfire. It brings shame on her family, brings shame on her. You see how trusting God here is a costly, costly thing for Mary.

This is a big deal. But despite it all, she surrendered her reputation to God's will. And here's the big thing for us to see, and I think this is a massive challenge here. I found it a massive challenge. Mary does here, she puts God's revelation above her reputation. That God's word is more important to her than what people think about her. What a lesson for us. Are we willing, especially if you think about what goes on at Christmas time, you think about the office parties, you think about university, you think about family, friends who do not believe this message. Is this not a costly thing to stand for? And will we be willing to pay the price that may well come our way for standing, for speaking for this message? Are we willing to be brave in our association with this child? Are we willing to sacrifice our reputations for the sake of following and being obedient to God's words? Mary says, let it be. And I pray that that would be our response this morning, that we would say, let it be. So whether you're a Christian here, a non-Christian, let me that,

I pray that that would be your response, that we would welcome this child with open arms, that we would grasp something of the enormity of what's gone on here. Mary says, let it be.

So there it is, Luke chapter one, the Christmas miracle that God has made the impossible possible. The rags didn't become riches, but riches took on rags. And let me finish with these words of the apostle Paul. He would write this, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that through his poverty, you might become rich. What a glorious message, friends. Why don't we pray as we close.

Father God, we thank you. Thank you, thank you for this wonderful truth that we've been looking at this morning, that you are the God who makes all things possible. Father, thank you that this message tells us that when we weren't looking for you, you came looking for us, that you are the great pursuer, and we worship you and love you for that, Father. And so I pray this week, Lord, that we would think deep on these things, that we would see something more, our prayer at the start, something more of the enormity of what you have done for us by sending your son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

[32 : 48] Amen.