

## The Meeting of the Mothers

A Lay Commentary on Luke 1:39-56

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### Introduction

This story continues to weave the lives of Mary and Elizabeth and John the Baptist and Jesus together into one story. Here is how they are interwoven: In the Temple in Jerusalem, Gabriel tells Zechariah that he and Elizabeth will miraculously have a son and they are to name him John. Zechariah goes home to Elizabeth, and she gets pregnant with John. They live in the hill country outside of Jerusalem. Gabriel then appears to Mary in her hometown of Nazareth 60 miles to the north to tell her that she will miraculously conceive Jesus. Mary walks 60 to 100 miles south to Zechariah and Elizabeth's house, which is where this "meeting of the moms" takes place. After John the Baptist is born, she returns home. Next week, we will study the events surrounding John's birth. Jesus is born six months later. We'll study that two weeks from now. For the next two weeks, we are going to decorate the Eagle's Nest with Birth Announcement decorations. This story about Mary and Elizabeth in verses 39-56 is the center point of these narratives. The two predictions about John and Jesus' births come before this meeting of the mothers, and their two births come afterward.

The two predictions that come before anticipate the coming of Israel's Messiah. John will be the messenger that will tell the people of Israel their Messiah is coming soon. Gabriel alludes to the ancient prophecies that described how to recognize both the messenger and the Messiah. The two pregnancies followed by the two births fulfill Gabriel's prophecies to Zechariah and Mary. This kind of symmetry, or balance, characterizes great literature. It helps the audience understand and remember the significance of people and events. Luke and the people he worked with wrote some great literature.

These are exciting times. God is on the move in a fresh new way. He is coming to offer salvation to His people and to the world, restore their relationship with Him and bless them. His perfectly wise plan is suddenly unfolding as He providentially works through people and events to accomplish His will. The coming of God is surprising and unstoppable.

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**At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah,**

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**where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.**

The story picks up where Gabriel's birth prediction left off. She found out about Elizabeth's pregnancy from Gabriel. Elizabeth is now in her sixth month of pregnancy. Again, Mary has walked 60 to 100 miles in sandals south to visit Elizabeth. Luke relates that she hurried, which seems to indicate her excitement to experience Gabriel's revelation about Elizabeth. It also indicates her youthful energy! Luke does not tell us how long it took, but at fifteen to twenty

miles a day, it would take her four to seven days. Even though Luke does not tell us, we may safely assume she did not go alone. A twelve-year old girl would not be safe or shrewd out on the highway by herself. At least one adult probably accompanied her.

It is impressive that Mary makes this journey for more reasons than just the physical difficulty. It is also impressive how she and probably her family overcame the social difficulties. A father normally confined his betrothed twelve-year old girl to her house until the wedding. He has already received the “mohar”, or dowry from Joseph. It is now his responsibility to protect and provide for her until the twelve-month betrothal period is over. It was also his responsibility to keep her a virgin until the wedding night. If she knew at the time that she was pregnant with Jesus, she violated the customs. If she did not know yet, then she still violated customs. Even so, she apparently had her father’s blessing to go visit Zechariah and Elizabeth. We might speculate that he did not believe her story about Gabriel and sent her away in a fit of rage or that she ran away. However, it would make more sense to assume that he sent her to confirm the story. They did not have telephones and email in those days. Her father couldn’t call Elizabeth and ask her, “Is it true that you are pregnant?” Elizabeth then replies in shock, “How did you know?” Mary’s father then answers, “The angel Gabriel told Mary!” No. Normally, for relatives in a distant village to find out that Elizabeth was pregnant she would have to send a messenger or someone from her household. However, Gabriel seems to have let the cat out of the bag first by telling Mary of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. While Gabriel did not instruct Mary to go (as far as we know) the ball is certainly in her court. God is taking the initiative to come to earth. He is graciously providing the promised messenger, John. He sent Gabriel to Mary. He is on the offensive, not the defensive. Why should God and Mary wait around for Elizabeth to send word of her pregnancy to confirm Gabriel’s word?

Mary’s father needs the confirmation. If she goes and Elizabeth is not pregnant, then it will prove that Mary lied and had illicit sex with Joseph or another man. If Elizabeth is pregnant then it will preserve the father’s dignity and make him the recipient of God’s blessing by being the grandfather of the Messiah. We also learn from Matthew that an angel (possibly Gabriel) appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him that the child is from the Holy Spirit and to marry Mary. Perhaps he told Mary’s father about this dream, which then prompted her father to send her to Elizabeth to confirm it all.

We also sense that Mary would want to visit Elizabeth because they share a special fate. Perhaps her father sensed this as well.

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**When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting,  
the baby leaped in her womb,  
and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.**

In Jewish history, some other unborn children reacted to someone or something outside of the womb too. The most famous is found in Gen. 25:21-23. God allowed Isaac’s barren wife Rebekah to become pregnant with twin boys, Esau and Jacob.

The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her,

Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you will be separated;  
one people will be stronger than the other, (Jacob and the Israelites)  
and the older will serve the younger.” (Esau and the Edomites)

These two sons fought for supremacy in their mother’s womb. By contrast, John the Baptist leaped for joy when meeting Jesus, which indicated his recognition of Jesus’ superiority.

What we know about the customs of the time shed some light on what follows. Elizabeth is Mary’s superior in both age and social status. Mary is a poor peasant girl from an insignificant little town. Elizabeth is old enough to be her great-great-grandmother and is married to a priest of high social status. She and her husband were both descendants of the first high priest, Aaron. In addition, God bestowed on her a very special grace by miraculously helping her conceive a child past her childbearing years. In other words, Elizabeth has every reason to look down on Mary.

We don’t know what words her greeting contained, but she followed the customary protocol. As the one of inferior social status, custom dictated that Mary speak first. When Mary greeted her, the baby John did a back flip with a half twist in his mother’s belly. Then the Holy Spirit filled her and revealed a startling truth about Mary’s true status, inspiring her to utter the words we will study in a moment. What is significant is that suddenly Elizabeth realizes and yields to the reversal of status between the two women. She realizes that God placed her in the lower, servant role. She must now honor Mary, not the other way around. Her high social status is nothing compared to Mary’s high spiritual status.

This reminds me of how when Mother Theresa was alive, people of high social status recognized her higher spiritual status. This also reminds me to not seek higher social status but rather to bask in the high spiritual status God bestows on us as His adopted sons and daughters. At the same time, God’s Word reminds me that we could never work for or inherit this privileged position. We can only enjoy it through God’s love, grace and mercy.

Next, let’s remember that Gabriel told Zechariah that John will be filled with the Spirit from the time he is conceived and John’s sole purpose in life is to be the messenger to point people to the Messiah. This was his first action in fulfilling this role. The Holy Spirit prompts him to recognize and signal that the baby in the other womb is none other than the one he is sent to tell others about. The Holy Spirit is using him to confirm Gabriel’s prophecies to Elizabeth and Mary even before Mary tells Elizabeth about Gabriel’s announcement to her. The Holy Spirit also gives Elizabeth the discernment to know that her son is beginning already to fulfill both the ancient and the recent prophecies about him.

Now at this point Luke could have just continued to describe what happened, but this is a third example of Luke’s letting women express their own thoughts, feelings and experiences for themselves instead of dismissing them and just explaining things in his own words.

**In a loud voice she exclaimed:**

This expression suggests to us that she is under the strong influence of the Holy Spirit. This is prophecy. It has been around 500 years since the last prophecies, especially concerning the Messiah. Then in the past six months, there are the prophecies of Gabriel to Zechariah and Mary and now these prophecies by Mary and Elizabeth. More prophecy will come through Zechariah next. We'll study that next week. This is an exciting time. The Spirit of God is moving and revealing divine knowledge. The next four lines are what the introductory narrative has been building up to.

**“Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the child you will bear!”**

The Holy Spirit has revealed to Elizabeth the nature of Mary's child as the Messiah. The phrase “Blessed are you among women” is an idiom that means that she is the most blessed of all women. God has blessed her with the privilege of giving birth to and raising God's Messiah. What is more, Jesus will be a blessed child.

**But why am I so favored,  
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**

This seems to be a declaration in the form of a rhetorical question. Remember I talked about their social customs dictating that the person with the lower social status must take the initiative to greet and speak first to the person with the higher social status? Elizabeth through the revelation from the Holy Spirit realizes that the table of status is suddenly turned around. She is the one who should be traveling to Mary and initiating a greeting with her. She even calls the baby Jesus in Mary's womb Lord. Now, not only is Jesus superior to her but the mother of Jesus is superior as well. This is only the beginning of an overturning of social and spiritual conventions where the greater will serve the lesser.

Elizabeth is experiencing God's unconditioned, unprompted, surprising grace for the second time. First, He allowed her to get pregnant after her childbearing years, and now He is coming to her in person in Mary's womb. Exciting things are happening!

**As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears,  
the baby in my womb leaped for joy.**

That John leaped for joy shows that by the influence of the Holy Spirit he is completely in tune with God's purpose for his life. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22 that joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. This must have been joy in its purest form.

**Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”**

There are two changes to explore here. The first change involves the reason for God’s blessing Mary. God blessed Mary by choosing her to bear the Messiah. Now, in addition to that, God is blessing Mary for her faith. This ties into the second change.

The second change is from the second person, “Blessed are you” to the third person “Blessed is she.” In this way, she implies that both of them are blessed because they have both believed that what the Lord has said to them will be accomplished. We can generalize this out still further and extend the principle to ourselves as well. Indeed, God blesses us when we believe that what the Lord has said will be accomplished no matter how impossible it seems. This may also imply that Elizabeth had continued to believe all through her childbearing and post-childbearing years that God would eventually give her a son.

We also can’t help but notice the contrast between Zechariah and Mary’s responses to what Gabriel told them. Zechariah did not believe what the Lord had said to him through Gabriel, but Mary did. Zechariah went home to Elizabeth in faith only because of the sign of speechlessness Gabriel gave him. Mary believed Gabriel’s words from the beginning and her pregnancy confirmed the truth of those words.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit and some prompting by John, Elizabeth has done a 180 degree turn from the initial social convention and put herself in an inferior position to Mary and Jesus. Let’s read Elizabeth’s song again to bring all these lines together.

**In a loud voice she exclaimed:**

**“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?**

**As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears,  
the baby in my womb leaped for joy.**

**Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”**

Keep in mind that all of this is inspired by the Holy Spirit who suddenly revealed to Elizabeth the surprising fact that Mary is pregnant and bearing the Messiah in her womb. In addition, Zechariah must have somehow related to Elizabeth the details of what Gabriel told him in the Temple. He probably wrote it out for her, which may be how it came to be preserved in writing for Luke to incorporate into this Gospel. Gabriel made it clear that Elizabeth’s baby is the messenger for the Messiah. When Mary greeted her and the messenger leaped for joy in her womb, it could only mean one thing—the baby in Mary’s womb is the Messiah. That is why she called him her Lord.

Now it is Mary's turn to speak. Her speech is in the form of a praise psalm and is very similar to Hannah's praise psalm in 2 Samuel 2:1-10. This psalm would have been very familiar to Elizabeth and other women because she was past her childbearing years when God enabled her to conceive the prophet Samuel.

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**And Mary said:**

**“My soul praises the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.**

Soul and spirit refer to the total depth and breadth of Mary's whole being. Many psalms have language like these lines. It is a very Hebrew way of saying “I praise the Lord and I rejoice in God my Savior.

I am normally not a fan of the King James Version, but in this case, it does a better job of preserving the meaning of the Greek. It says, “My soul *magnifies* the Lord.” For this reason, this poem has been traditionally called the Magnificat. When you magnify something, you make it bigger in order to emphasize its importance or in order to see things that you normally would not see.

A very literal, but wordy translation is “I, with my total being, am causing the Lord to be held in greater esteem by myself and others through my praises.” As I praise God, I focus on aspects of God's nature and character and in so doing, my own esteem for Him rises, and when others hear me praise the Lord, their esteem for God rises as well. The detail that Mary is magnifying and drawing attention to is God's grace—He chose her by His grace even though she did not deserve it. This theme of God's graciously using and blessing people who don't deserve to be used and blessed begins with the first story of Zechariah and runs throughout the Gospel of Luke.

What right or privilege did Mary have to be the mother of a king, the mother of God's Messiah? What about all the wives of priests and aristocrats and government officials and military generals who seemed more worthy of the honor than Mary? Why didn't God choose any of them? God wanted someone of lowly status, someone who is a servant not a master. But why? Jesus will not come to establish an earthly kingdom, sit in fancy garments on a fancy throne, in a fancy palace, with fancy people of high social status. Instead, He will come as a Servant, as a Shepherd and as a Sacrifice. He will take His place with the poor. He will never have wealth. He will die poor and without any status on a criminal's cross. It will be because He has no status that many will reject Him. It will be because He does not act like a king is supposed to act that many will reject Him.

There is also a parallel here with Israel. In OT times, when foreign powers oppressed the people of God they were humiliated and lowly in status among the nations. A pagan empire now oppresses Israel. Mary's lowly social status represents Israel's lowly political status. However, God is coming to deliver them from their humble and oppressed state. However, to everyone's surprise He does not establish an earthly kingdom of high international status but rather a spiritual kingdom with spiritual status high above all that.

Mary rejoices in God her savior. Joy and rejoicing are characteristic responses to God finally taking action to save His people. Gabriel told Zechariah that John would bring joy and delight and people would rejoice because of his birth. John leaped for joy in Elizabeth's womb when he came near Jesus. Now Mary rejoices over God using her to bear the Messiah despite her lowly status. Year round and especially this Christmas season I want to continually rejoice over what God has done for me.

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

Mary echoes Elizabeth's earlier declaration: "Blessed are you among women." Eve had the distinction of being the mother of all living humans after her; Mary now has the distinction of being the mother of the Savior who will save people in all future generations from their sins. However, the reason is not how great she is but because God has done great things for and through her. In the previous verse, she referred to God as savior, now she refers to Him as Mighty One. In OT times, God was the Divine Warrior who fights battles for His people.

Psalm 24:8

Who is this King of glory?  
The Lord strong and mighty,  
the Lord mighty in battle.

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is with you,  
he is mighty to save.

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**His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.**

The camera lens has been zoomed in and focused on Mary. It now zooms out to take in all of Israel and all of humanity. People in every generation since the beginning have rebelled against God, but God keeps extending His mercy to those in every generation who fear him, that is who trust and obey Him. In Jesus' day, the Jews called Gentiles who worshipped Yahweh with them "God-fearers." Since many of Luke's original audience were probably "God-fearers," this line would have had special meaning to them.

In the next four stanzas, Mary will recount three ways that God has shown and will continue to show His mercy to those who fear Him despite other people's constant opposition to Him. I want to make a quick comment about the tenses of the actions in these statements. They are in the English past tense. However, she is not referring to specific actual events in the past alone. How do we know? First, in the verse we just looked at, she is looking forward in time when she says, "From now on all generations will call me blessed." Second, in prophetic songs like this the

author often uses the past tense to express the kinds of actions God habitually does either from time to time or on an ongoing basis. An author can also mean that the fulfillment of the promises is so certain that one can consider them already done. A final note about these promises is that they are promises to those who fear God. They are not promises to everyone.

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**He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.**

One way people in every generation have opposed God and those who fear Him is through their pride. Even though prideful people often try to look like they are humble and caring people, God knows what we really think. When those prideful people are oppressing God's people, He mercifully scatters them away. He continues to do that and will one day do it permanently for those who fear Him.

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**He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.**

Another way people in every generation have opposed God is through political and economic oppression of the poor. From time to time God removes those rulers and frees His people from their oppressed state. He continues to do that and will one day do it permanently for those who fear Him.

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**He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.**

A third way people in every generation have opposed God is when selfish rich people do not share with the starving poor. This verse does not mean it is evil to be wealthy. It is only evil to be so selfish that we're not willing to help the poor among us. When God's people are hungry because of the selfishness of rich people, God turns the tables on them. He continues to do that and will one day do it permanently for those who fear Him.

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**He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
even as he said to our fathers."**

This is the main point of this mini-story within the larger story of the Gospel of Luke. After hundreds of years of silence, God is finally on the move again. He has not forgotten His people. He has not forgotten His promise to Abraham. The reason that God chooses to help the oppressed victims of pride, power and selfishness is first that God is a merciful God. Because God is merciful, He chose to provide a way of salvation from our fallen state. As part of his plan, He made a covenant with Abraham to bless him and his descendants forever. God chose to do this out of His perfect mercy. He chose to mercifully provide a savior for sinful people through

Abraham's descendants. God is mercifully working through Mary now to provide that savior. He has not forgotten, and He will not fail. The good news for everyone who is not a descendant of Abraham, like most of us in this room, is that God will bless all of humanity through Abraham. One of those descendants will be the Savior for all people. Again, God will not fail, because He remembers to be merciful. We may forget to be merciful to those who need our mercy, but God never forgets.

This is also the point of conflict and crisis, not for Mary and Elizabeth but for us, the readers. Mary presents two sides in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. There is the side of evil with its pride, power and greed. At this moment, the evil side seems to be winning, because the side of good is only characterized by humility, poverty and hunger. Like a prophet of old, Mary is foretelling a time when those prideful, those oppressive rulers and those greedy selfish rich will be brought down and humble pious people will be raised up and satisfied. She is telling us that here in her body is the evidence that God will do this. This unborn child is the evidence that God has not forgotten His mercy and His promise. She believes it. Elizabeth believes it, but will we the readers believe it? Will we doubt and like Zechariah and others demand more and more signs to prove it? Or will we, like Elizabeth and Mary, accept the truth and trust in our merciful, mindful God? We can either trust in human abilities to provide for us and His people or we can trust in God's abilities to make things right.

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**Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.**

Application

There is an important theme in these verses to apply to our lives. It is the difference between God's values concerning status. Luke anchors this theme in these first few stories and it runs all through the Gospel of Luke. Zechariah and Elizabeth, on the one hand, enjoy the highest of social status because he is a priest and both of them are descendants of Aaron, the first high priest. However, since they do not have a child, especially a son, Elizabeth suffers social disgrace. God finally blessed them with a son and her social disgrace was lifted. However, this son would not be like other great people. He would live an ascetic lifestyle. Thirty years later, he will emerge from the wilderness wearing rough clothing and eating insects for food. He subjected himself to the lowest social status so he could call attention to the Messiah who also lived a life of the lowest social status.

Mary, in contrast to Elizabeth, is a peasant girl with no social status, but God chooses her to bear and raise the kingly Messiah. This had the potential of giving her very high social status. However, the way God chose to do it eliminated that possibility. Since Joseph was not the father and they could only say that an angel told them that the child is from the Holy Spirit, she must have suffered horrible ridicule and social disgrace. Yet, despite this future prospect, Mary rejoices and basks in the highest of spiritual status. She realizes that God does not care about social status. He only cares about the status of our spiritual humility before Him.

Therefore, there is this theme or principle that God's kingdom, His blessings and His plans to use us don't require that we begin with high social status. What He requires is spiritual humility.

This means that we humbly admit we are nothing and have nothing of any real, eternal value without Him. We cannot buy His blessings or buy the right to be used by Him. Neither can we inherit it from our parents. The person of low social status can often accept this more easily than the person of high social status, although there are many people of high social status who are more humble before God than many poor people. Whether rich or poor, God will only come to us and work through us in the poorness of our spirit.

Another theme that comes loudly and clearly through Mary's prophecy is that God is in the business of rescuing the poor who fear God from their arrogant and powerful oppressors. He will turn the tables and lift up those who fear Him. These kinds of arrogant and powerful oppressors constantly opposed Jesus because He was on the side of those they oppressed. He made them very nervous when he said in Luke 6:20-26,

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.

...

But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry, etc.

Who is Jesus talking about here? Who are the poor that He is promising food to? Who are the rich that He is promising hunger to? Is He talking about all poor people just because they are poor? Is He talking about all rich people just because they are rich? To answer that question we could look at a number of OT verses that make it clear that these promises are not for those poor people who are evil and the warnings are not for those rich people who are godly. The most specific application of these promises is for the poor person who is godly, the poor person who fears God and trusts and obeys Him. That is the kind of person God promises to provide for. We also know it from Mary's earlier statement "His mercy extends to those who fear him,..." God will not feed all the poor of the world. He never promised to do that. He also never told the Church that our main objective is to feed all the poor of the world or to redistribute all the wealth to make the poor rich. Our main objective is to share the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith with everyone no matter how rich or poor they are.

Does this mean that God is not interested in the poor person who has not yet received Christ?

Does this mean that we shouldn't feed and help the poor person who has not yet received Christ?

No, it does not mean that. I'll come back to what kind of attitude we should have toward the poor in a minute.

The reason I am making a big deal about this is that some people have looked at these verses and others and justified political revolutions to overthrow governments and redistribute all the wealth to the poor. These communist and socialistic revolutions always fail because the new leaders who were once poor then become the wealthy oppressors they despised earlier. Nothing really changed for the poor and oppressed. They were still poor and oppressed. Many of the liberal social programs of the past half a century have failed the poor as well. You cannot use these

verses to rally the poor to overthrow the government. Nor can you use these verses to justify social and economic programs that steal from the rich and give to the poor.

In our sinful nature, there is a desire or need to oppress other people when we get the chance. You have heard the saying, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Many Christians in America want to take over the government, media and educational institutions so they can reorient our country to God and remove immorality. They would begin with good intentions, but having absolute power would eventually corrupt them to the point that they would be just as oppressive and immoral as those they kicked out of power. It would be a repeat of what we have seen throughout history when so-called Christians have wielded absolute power in the name of God. I would rather see the ungodly do ungodly things and be punished by God for it than see supposedly godly Christians stain the name of Christ again.

If Jesus were like any other revolutionary, he would have overthrown the powers-that-be using very predictable methods involving raising up an army and defeating the Roman oppressors. Jesus, however, is a very unpredictable Messiah. Allowing Himself to be crucified is the ultimate, unpredictable plot twist. Through His death, He can now lift people out of their spiritual poverty and give them the highest status possible, which is the privilege of being sons and daughters of the King of Kings. Social status is so BC.

Now with all that said, how should we think about helping the poor? It is good to help someone in need. The Bible gives plenty of admonitions to extend the grace and resources we have received to others in need. But is this all a poor person needs? If you gave a poor person a house to live in, food, clothes and education would they then have all they need? Sadly, many Christians stop at merely giving material and economic help and think they have done enough. If they are not told that those gifts come from God and they can have a rich relationship with Him through Christ they will continue in their spiritual poverty. You could give them the world but they would still lose their soul. It bothers me when some churches and Christian organizations go down the street or to another country and build a house or hospital but don't tell the people how they can be saved spiritually. We must not only care for them physically we must care for them spiritually as well.

Often when we care for the poor who are lost without Christ they wind up receiving Christ if told how to. The Early Church did this very effectively. In the second, third and fourth centuries epidemics swept through the Roman Empire. There was a stark contrast in how the Christians responded and how the non-Christians responded. When people were dying in an epidemic and a non-Christian got sick, their families would just up and leave town, leaving the sick person behind to die. The Christians, not being afraid to die, would stay. Some would die but those who didn't get sick cared for the non-Christians who were sick and nursed many of them back to health. These people became Christians because of experiencing God's grace and mercy through the Christians. Christianity grew and spread because of this kind of gracious charity. Christianity has always grown through this kind of gracious charity.