

DATE: December 14, 2008

TEXT: Luke 1:26-38

TITLE: "Lessons from Mary II"



This morning we are continuing a sermon series I began last week. During this advent season we are looking at Mary, the mother of Jesus and the lessons she teaches us. Last week we began looking at our text and saw the primary theme of this section is obedience. We as Christians must all echo the words of Mary **"I am the lords servant. May it be to me as you have said."** Mary the mother of Jesus has been a controversial figure in history. Even today there is a debate between Catholics and Protestants about Mary. A article in a previous issue of Christianity Today features a story entitled *"The Blessed Evangelical Mary."* It begins with this quote

First, we find no biblical warrant for the kind of devotion to Mary that flourishes among many of the Catholic faithful. Mary's perpetual virginity (the belief that she had no children after Jesus and remained a virgin throughout her life), immaculate conception (that she was born without the stain of original sin), and bodily assumption (that she was taken body and soul into heaven after she died) are extrabiblical beliefs that cannot be traced to the earliest historical memory of the church.

We must be careful that we do not deify Mary. We must be careful that she does not become an intermediary to Jesus or God. She must be elevated, as some are trying to do to be a co-

redeemer. Mary was “blessed” not deified. The Christianity Today article goes on to say...

If Roman Catholics have deified Mary, evangelical (Protestant) Christians have subjected her to “cold neglect.” We have been afraid to praise and esteem Mary for her full worth.. This is the Mary Protestants can and should embrace. We do not think of Mary the mother of God, and object of devotion by herself, in isolation from her son. We need not go through Mary in order to get to Jesus, but we can join with Mary in pointing others to him.

We will look at Mary. We will honor her. We will allow her to point us to Jesus. The first way she point us to Jesus is to teach us lessons on obedience.

Last week we saw **Lesson # 1 on obedience.** We saw the preparations needed for obedience.

Mary, even before the Angel visited was a God-centered woman. She was surrendered to God. We saw the need to have surrendered lives a willing to obey the Word of God as He speaks to us. God speaks to and uses those individuals willing to be used by God. REPEAT Acceptance comes before discernment. Our **2nd** on obedience deals with the cost of obedience.

Lesson # 2 Let us look at the cost of obedience in Mary's life. Imagine what it must have been like for Mary in the next few weeks following this visit by the angel Gabriel. Mary was probably approximately 14 years old. She is betrothed to Joseph. The Pulpit Outline tells us this about betrothal....

Being betrothed was something like an engagement only more binding. It lasted one year. Two matters are important to understand. First, In the betrothal period sexual contact was adultery and could result in stoning. Second, The betrothal was so serious a matter that if it was broken a divorce had to be secured.

Upon this visit Mary was pregnant. Possibly she waited a month to confirm her pregnancy, but it was soon clear that Mary was expecting. Mary almost assuredly goes to her parents. She explains of the visit by the angel and shares that she is pregnant. They almost assuredly do not believe her and blame Joseph. Next, she goes to Joseph. We know he does not believe her. He is ready to do the honorable thing... to quietly divorce her and allow her to marry the father of the child.

Gabriel had to make another visit to Joseph assuring him to the truth of Mary's story.

Imagine with me also, the small town of Nazareth. Today if a girl at Wilmington becomes pregnant, there are some whispers and some concern but generally there is acceptance. I remember sitting in the waiting room in Jamison Hospital for the birth of Adam. A mother was in the waiting room as her daughter was waiting to give birth. She was very upset. She was angry at her daughters boyfriend. They couldn't get him out of bed. She kept saying... **“we need to get him here....my**

daughter won't deliver until he is here.... and the principal of her school said if she gives birth before 2:00 they can announce it over the P.A. system of the school... he better get here soon."

2000 years ago an unwed mother was chastised, shunned and could be stoned to death. The next incident in the gospel story is Mary hurriedly going to visit her Aunt Elizabeth. It is very likely she had to leave Nazareth. Her life was in danger and the shunning and criticism would have been overwhelming. A number of years later she and Joseph and the infant Jesus returned to Nazareth. I imagine the town, especially the "righteous" women in the town, never forgot that she conceived a child before marriage. She was probably shunned by some for her entire life.

There is a cost of obedience. Mary's obedience eventually led her to the foot of the cross to watch her son die. A great cost to obedience.

The same is true today. A number of years ago there was a movie out entitled "**Chariots of Fire.**" It was actually nominated for an academy award. It is the story of Eric Little and the 1932 Olympics. The story is about a strong Christian man representing England at the Olympics. When

he arrived at the Olympics he was aghast to discover that his race was scheduled to take place on a Sunday. He would not run on Sunday. He met with the officials who tried to twist his arm. He resisted. He was next brought into a meeting with the King of England who asked him to run "for the good of England". Tremendous pressure... he chose obedience to God and would not run. The movie ends happy as he wins a gold medal in another race not on Sunday. Eric Little's life did not end there. Little went on to be a missionary to China. In WWII Japan overran China. Little was placed in a POW camp. One day the officer in charge decided to punish the prisoners by choosing one prisoner to die. He chose a man and marched him out. Eric Little knew that this man had a wife and children. He volunteered to take his place. Little died on that day. Obedience has a cost. Obedience will cost us. Christmas is often turned into a nice children's story where the cost is ignored. Easter is turned into a nice Children's story, again ignoring the cost of the cross. Christianity is often turned into a simple belief system ignoring the cost. Obedience to Christ has a cost. It will cost you your time. It will cost you your money. It will cost you your goals in life, it may cost you your family, it may cost you your friends, and someday it may cost us our lives.

Truthfully, I believe it is getting more and more difficult to be a Christian in our society.

When was the last time you stood up and said.... “I believe all pre-marital sex is wrong and breaks your relationship with God.” The common reaction today to statement like that is shunning. People look down at you as “Intolerant.” “Old fashion” “unrealistic” “right wing Christian”.

When was the last time you stood up and said “serving Christ is far more important than saving money for retirement.” Remember the parable of the foolish man who build bigger barns only to then die and face the judgement seat. Today “building bigger barns” seems to be the goal of everyone.

When was the last time you stood up and said “Jesus is the way the truth and the light... No one comes to the Father except by Him.” You quote Jesus and you are given the brand of “intolerant” is given to you.

When was the last time you stood up and said.... “Not everyone who says Lord ,Lord will enter the Kingdom of God but only he who does the Will of God.” (Yes that is a quote from the bible) In other words... it's not cheap grace..... it's not just believing in Jesus.... it's being in a

surrendered relationship with Jesus. Jesus can not be savior without being Lord.

The cost of obedience is growing in our society. To stand on the Word of God will cause others to laugh at you... break friendships with you. Possibly even fire you. But we are to be like Mary.... we are to stand in obedience.

Lesson # 3 Notice the results of obedience. Joseph's obedience brings about the development of faith. *J.H Masterman* in his commentary on this text states.....

We need not suppose that Joseph understood the full meaning of the angel's message. Only he knew that a duty had been laid on him in which he must not fail. He is perhaps the supreme example of the way in which God has chosen to depend for the fulfillment of His purpose on the faithful obedience of simple-hearted men.

Mary's obedience results in the birth of Jesus Christ. Our obedience will bring out the same results....The growth of our faith. Truthfully, you can not grow in your faith if a life of obedience is not chosen. If we chose disobedience we will drift through life and live in the guilt of disobedience and never discover the joy of obedience. I remember when Adam was a toddler... he loved to run. But Adam had a bad habit... he loved to run down the hill in our front yard and into the road. When he did this he had his bottom swatted. He became a little bit older and would ask if he could go outside to play. We would say “No Adam, you can’t go outside.... we are afraid you will run into the

road.” After a few month of getting his bottom smacked he learned that he was not allowed to go toward the road. Finally, he no longer ran toward the road. Then he asked “may I go outside and play”. We could say “yes Adam.” His obedience allowed him the freedom and the joy of being outside. Many of us are trapped inside. Our disobedience traps us in unhappiness and guilt. Chose obedience and discover freedom and joy.

Another result of obedience is that the declaration of the love of Jesus is shared with a lost world. Indeed, some may reject you for standing up to the truth in God’s Word. But some may hear the truth for the first time. Some may discover the magnificent love of God through your words and actions. Because of your obedience some may be in the presence of Christ for eternity.

Let us chose the path of obedience. It will have a cost.... but it will also cause the growth of faith and the presence of Christ in your life and in the life of others.

AMEN