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The Promise

2 Samuel 7:1-11; 16 Luke 1:26-38 Romans 16:25-27

INTRODUCTION TO 2 Samuel 7:1-11;16

Having a king for Israel was not God's idea or ideal. God wanted to be their ruler, their provider, their protector. But the people wanted a human king like the other nations. They said, "All the other nations have a king, why can't we?" Be careful what you wish for.

King Saul may have won battles, but lost his soul and wound up falling on his own sword. His reign paved the way for another king, one who was a man after God's own heart. He came into his rule not by succession from the previous king, but by God. Saul was the people's choice. David was God's choice.

David wants to build a house for God, but through the prophet Nathan God promises to build a house for David—a lineage through which one day will come the Messiah. Hear the word of the Lord from 2 Samuel 7:1-11; 16

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 1:26-38

The priest Zachariah has been mute for six months. He has not been able to speak since he came out of the holy of holies. On the one day of his life that he was to burn the incense on the altar in the holy of holies God sent an angel named Gabriel who appeared to him with the news that his wife Elizabeth would bear him a son. Zachariah couldn't believe it. He said, "My wife is too old to have a baby! It's impossible!" Because he couldn't believe it the angel struck him mute saying that he would not be able to speak until the baby was born.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy and Zachariah's "sign language" charades, Mary, also receives a visit from Gabriel. This time, the appearance is not in Jerusalem, but in Nazareth, seventy miles northeast of Jerusalem, in Galilee. Hear the story of the second time God sent Gabriel on a mission from Luke 1:26-38.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this wonderful news. May we have Mary's attitude as we attempt things that look impossible to us, but with you are possible. As we meditate on this news and what it meant to Mary, may we discover what it means to us.

As a little girl climbed up into Santa's lap, Santa asked the usual, "And what would you like for Christmas?" The little girl just stared at Santa with her mouth open and horrified look on her face for a minute, and then she gasped: "Didn't you get my E-mail?"

Her horrified look might have been the same sort of reaction Mary had when Gabriel appeared to her. We are told that when Gabriel appeared to Zachariah

in the holy of holies that he was terrified. The holy of holies in the temple in Jerusalem though is a place that one might expect to see an angel but not in the home of young girl in Nazareth miles away.

Gabriel said, "Mary, You are highly favored." What does that mean, to be highly favored? To be highly favored in a horse race means you are likely to win. To be highly favored in an election means that you are supported by friends and fellow believers in your cause. To be highly favored by God means that you have been chosen for a partnership which fulfills the will of God on earth as it is in heaven. For Mary to be highly favored is to be blessed among women. It is also to sign up to be in for a world of hurt. It was a daunting challenge to accept. I appreciated Lanie Garrett's column in this morning's Baytown Sun in that regard so much.

The time had come for the promise not just to be believed. Now the time has come for the promise to be conceived. .

Jewish readers would have been amazed at the beginning of this story, because Gabriel ignored Judea (which was the very heart of God's work through the centuries) and comes to Galilee, a region that was basically filled with people of mixed race--and what we would call today country bumpkins. Not only did the angel by-pass Judea for Galilee, but he by-passed the city of Jerusalem, the capitol, the royal city and instead went to a town of little renown called Nazareth.

God had a whole world of women to choose from and He chose a young, poor, peasant girl, named Mary. When we understand why He chose Mary, it gives all of us hope and understanding of why God could and would choose us to use for God's glory and to accomplish God's purpose. .

Mary was the only person who was present, both at the birth of Christ and at His crucifixion. Mary was the woman who saw Jesus come into the world through his birth and leave the world through his death ... and be raised from the dead. Without question, Mary is the best known woman in the history of the world. She is the most famous mother in history. Her name occurs over 51 times in the New Testament.

What is so special about Mary is that she was so un-special. God took an ordinary, young woman and used her in an unbelievably extraordinary way. The reasons God was able to use Mary are also reasons that God can use us.

A baby, a bouncing, burping baby boy is called the Son of God Most High. How odd of God. The omnipotent, almighty, everlasting, Lord of the Universe becomes an infant, needing His swaddling clothes changed.

A baby could never make it on its own. A baby is helpless, totally at the mercy of others for survival. We hold babies. But don't be fooled. Babies hold us. If you don't believe that, ask any grandparent present. Babies get on your mind and in your heart and pretty soon control your life.

Remember the objective is not to overwhelm humanity, lest you rob humanity of the freedom to choose. The object is to win the hearts and souls of human beings in order to fashion a new creation. How would God accomplish this? God would become one of us.

This is not as mysterious as it sounds. Look at it this way. Leaders in today's companies are continually looking for ways to motivate their employees. They want people to enjoy their work enough that they will stay self-motivated. The problem is, how can they get rid of the image that they are pressuring people to perform?

One way is to meet them where they are. Get rid of your own vestments of power so that your presence no longer intimidates. Here's how some have accomplished that objective: A bank manager in Norfolk removed his name from the most coveted parking spot and replaced it with a sign, "Employee of the month." Meanwhile he parked with the rest of the staff. A guidance counselor at a middle school in Jacksonville decided to walk the halls and playgrounds two hours every day, engaging students in informal conversations. The head honcho of a computer software company in Palo Alto, California, halted the practice of eating lunch with his top people in the private executive dining room. Instead, he ate in the company cafeteria--making certain he sat at a different table each time. In Cleveland, Ohio the president of a wholesale paper company turned his office into an employee lounge and created an open office space for himself in the middle of the warehouse. (1)

In his book, The Regis Touch, marketing expert Regis McKenna tells a story about Max Poll, CEO of Barnes Hospital in St. Louis. Poll, disguised as a patient, has someone wheel him around the hospital on a Gurney in order to develop a feel for what it's like to be a patient at Barnes. He says he doesn't see much except for the ceiling, but what he hears sensitizes him to the level of service the hospital provides. (2)

These executives are but copying what God did when God came into our world in the babe of Bethlehem. God came down to where we are. Evidently there was no other way to lift us up than for God to come down.

God emptied Himself. That's the significance of the babe in the manger. God, who was all powerful, made his appearance not in strength, but in absolute weakness.

It is more than my mind can comprehend. Yet that is what God did. Don't let the familiarity of the story rob you of its meaning, God taking on the form of a servant began by becoming a helpless infant.

Faith is plunging into the depths of truth. Faith is asking the question, but it is getting beyond the question and offering your life. What would happen if you moved to a deeper more meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ today? What

would happen in your life if you were to take that risk? What would happen if this Christmas every heart would prepare him room?

Faith is an obedient life. The key to the story is in that little phrase of Mary's, "May it be as you have said." When the day of opportunity meets the delight of human response, God can do great things.

It wasn't easy for Mary to say, "Yes." Many people would not believe her story. She gave up her reputation in the community basically for the rest of her life to do what God asked her to do. She was risking her parents, her friends, even her betrothed. She had no idea how Joseph would respond.

If you get serious about God's will for your life, not only are you not going to always understand what God is doing, but there are going to be people who will misunderstand, misjudge and criticize you.

Discovering and doing God's will for your life is not always going to be easy. God's plan for your life is sometimes going to be harder than your plan for your life. That is why so many people cut out on God. We want to take the easy way out. We want to slide through life. We want to take the path of least resistance.

On Friday when I was doing my physical therapy for my balance issues there was a man who was doing physical therapy for recovery from knee surgery, like I did over a year ago. I couldn't help but overhear his complaining of his pain to this his therapist. The therapist very calmly said, "You can bend your knee for a short pain now or you cannot bend it now and not be able to bend it in the future. By not bending it now you are only prolonging how much longer your pain will persist."

God often offers us hard challenges. When we accept those challenges, we give testimony of our faith in God to do the impossible. When the angel reminded Mary that God can do anything, she replied, "Consider me the Lord's servant. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

Do you know why God sometimes does it the harder way? Because God is more interested in our character than He is our comfort. God wants us to mature. God wants us to grow. God wants to teach us to trust His promise to the point that we decide to believe God's word and determine to do God's will. That is where God can bless us far beyond any other way we can bring blessing upon ourselves. God wants us to move forward and not backward. As the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8, "Forgetting what lies behind, press on to what's ahead. Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ."

Mary made one other choice that we also must make for God to use us. When we decide to believe God's word and determine to do God's will, we cannot help but worship. In verse 46 and 47, "And Mary said: 'My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.'" (Luke 1:46-47, NASB)

The rest of what you read down through verse 55 is the first Christmas song ever written and it is amazing. Mary is going to have a baby although she has never known a man. Her reputation is going to be ruined. She may lose family. She may lose friends. She may lose her betrothed. She may lose everything. ...but she sings....

When you get into a situation where you think you are in over your head when you are following God's will, but it is getting more dangerous and difficult by the minute, don't worry - worship. Don't panic - praise.

Mary had every reason to be worried sick, but instead of worry, she worshipped. Instead of panicking, she praised because she believed the angel who came to her with ... the promise.

Let's pray. Eternal God, whose faithfulness endures from age to age, we pray knowing that you will not forsake us. You have come to us as a child born of Mary, full of promise and grace. Through the power of your Holy Spirit this Holy One, Emmanuel reveals forevermore the depth of your wisdom and the wonder of your salvation. As we commit our lives to him and learn of his will we give you thanks for your manifold gifts which embrace all of life.

We pray that by your compassion you will sustain the lonely, give hope to the despairing, and fill the fainthearted with courage. Help us to comfort, encourage and strengthen others as we minister in Christ's name. Make our very presence a source of solace and the assistance we offer a means of healing. May your patience become an example to those who struggle for righteousness and await the results, and may your sending the Prince of Peace be an incentive to us and all people who yearn for peace. Fill us with the vision of the prophet Isaiah, who proclaimed release to the captive, liberty to the oppressed and good news to the poor.

Hear us as we pray for those on our hearts this morning:
Lord, our salvation comes in an infant born of a woman. We give thanks for Jesus Christ, that he calls us to be members of his household of commitment. Empower us to respond obediently to those tasks set before us and make us worthy to be called his disciples in all that we do.

1. Neil Eskelin in Neil Eskelin's Daily Jump Start(tm), Copyright (c) 2004, <http://www.neileskelin.com>.

2. Second to None by Charles Garfield, Business One Irwin, Homewood, IL, 1992, p. 202.