

I hope you all had a great thanksgiving. I hope it was full of all the things you hope it was full of... some connections with people you love... some yummy food... and hopefully an extra day off of work.

If you had the opportunity to sit around a table with people in your life who are important to you this past week, depending on how often you get quality time with those folks, the question may have come up... what's been going on in your life? And whether you haven't seen the person in a week or if you haven't seen the person in a year, how many of you know you aren't going to tell them everything that's happened since the last time you saw them?

In fact, even if you wanted to tell them everything that's happened since the last time you saw them, I'm sure you wouldn't be able to do that.

If I asked you to tell me about how your year has been, you couldn't tell me everything you had to eat, everything you wore, what the weather was like every day, who you saw, what you said... and so on and so forth about every single day... no, if I asked you to tell me about how your year has been, you'd tell me a few highlights... moments of time that have stuck with you. Moments that were important. Exciting. Painful.

For us, **Life isn't measured in time. Life is measured in moments.**

While I might not remember what the weather was like or what I ate for lunch at all last week, I could tell you about many moments over the span of my life. And the same is likely true for you.

There's lots of things I can't remember from this past week, but...

I remember the time me and one of my best friends in high school stayed up all night and we ate a dozen Krispy Kreme donuts, drank

a ton of Hawaiian punch, and ate too many Hawaiian sweet onion potato chips... and I got sick all over his bathroom. A good moment.

I can tell you a 25 minute long story about the night my son was born. A lot of you have probably already heard it.

I can tell you about the time, our dog Delilah started having health issues and within a week we had to make the decision to have her cross the rainbow bridge. A sad moment.

I'll always remember the moment the vet sat with us and reminded us about how Delilah had a great life with us because we took her everywhere we went. A good moment.

I can tell you all about the moment in 2008 when I asked Bethany to be my wife... I took her to a favorite spot on our college campus and shaking with nerves, I got down on a knee and asked her to be my wife. And I was elated when she said yes.

And I'll remember the day our little girl Phoenix came to live with us... an emotional, but good moment.

I couldn't tell you about a LOT of time that has gone by in my life, but I can tell you about some moments. Because life isn't measured in time, it's measured by moments.

As we move towards Christmas, we're going to look at holy moments leading up to the birth of Jesus. Moments that mean a lot to us as we reflect on them... many of which were moments that they probably remembered vividly for the rest of their lives, as well. Holy Moments.

And today, we're looking at a powerful moment in the story of the birth of Jesus and there's one main point I want you to walk away with today.

## **You have no idea what God can do through one moment of obedience.**

You have no idea what God can do when we are willing to do what he calls us to.

I hope we all have moments from our lives when we obeyed God, even though we had a whole list of reasons why we didn't want to. Moments when we felt prompted to do something or say something or give something and we DID IT. We can look back on a moment in our lives like that and can sometimes be amazed because of the outcome of our obedience. In hindsight, we see the value.

Last week, I shared the story of someone else's obedience to God that was a holy moment for me. They felt prompted to give, and they didn't know that I was trembling in my own generosity, trying to be obedient to God, but wondering if I could do it. And their holy moment of obedience to God giving me and Bethany a gift was God's very presence for us.

But we've also had those moments, where we feel prompted to do something, to say something, give something... and it's not easy... and we have a list of reasons why we don't want to do it... and so we don't do it. And we look back with regret on those situations. Realizing that we missed an opportunity to bless someone or be blessed by God through our obedience.

As we start our holy moments Advent series, we are looking at Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus... and a holy moment in his life. The birth story of Jesus in Matthew starts in 1:18

*18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.*

Now, everyone's familiar with Mary. She gets lots of moments in the Bible. But not only do we not talk about Joseph much outside of his connection with Mary, the Bible talks very little about Joseph.

In Matthew 13:55, we're told that Jesus was a carpenter.

In Matthew 1:19, we're told that Joseph was a righteous and faithful man.

In Matthew 1:20, we're told that he's a descendent of David.

In Matthew 1:16, we're told he's Mary's husband

In Matthew 13:55, we're told that he's Jesus's earthly father.

We honestly just don't see much of Joseph in the gospel narratives. We see him in the early life of Jesus, the classic Christmas story. And the last time he's present in the gospel is when Jesus is 12 years old and his parents accidentally got separated from him at the temple.

It's pretty well accepted that he died shortly after that. That would help explain why he's never mentioned after that. That would also explain why Jesus, looking down from the cross, asks John to care for his mother. Because she would've needed someone if Joseph had passed away prior.

That's pretty much all we know about Joseph.

Now, in our scripture today, we read that Mary was engaged to Joseph. And it's important for us to understand what engagement meant for them.

In the United States in 2022, the median age of people getting married was 29 years old. And that's kind of what we picture when we picture an engaged couple, even though we all know you can get engaged at many different ages in life. And you've probably heard this before, but in the ancient near eastern culture that Mary and Joseph were in, it would've been assumed that an engaged

female was 13 or 14 years old... maybe even 12... and that's really young, but that's just how the world was.

And when she found out from the angel that she was pregnant, they were engaged... and so she hadn't been with Joseph intimately yet, and so when Joseph would've heard this news, he would've been devastated beyond measure.

Because of the cultural context, he would've been more devastated than maybe a person would be today if they found out their partner was pregnant who they hadn't been intimate with yet.

Cause in our world, legally, engagement means nothing. There's no legal standing you have and there's no obligation. Until you say "I do" you can jump ship, and it wouldn't be ideal, but technically, you were never married, so while it's a very difficult to break up an engagement, it's just a break up.

In the ancient near east, an engagement was a legally binding act. Legally, they were essentially married, but in the time leading up to the wedding, they weren't allowed to consummate their union until the formal public ceremony that officially made them husband and wife had taken place.

So, when we hear they're engaged, it would've been like they were married, without being able to engage in the gift of sex that God gives for married people. And so, if Mary had sex with another man, this would've been horrible for Joseph.

The woman that Joseph loved and pledged his life to, not only did she disobey God, she would've dishonored her family, and she would've completely disgraced Joseph. He would've been humiliated, even by his community.

It was such a grievous sin at times in Israel's past, Joseph could've had her stoned to death, though we don't believe that really happened much, if at all, by the time the first century rolled around.

More than likely, a more common option would've been to take her before the council and accuse her so that the shame was on her and his good name was cleared. But after that, Mary would've been disgraced and would've likely faced a difficult life alone... potentially having to sell herself to make ends meet.

Joseph was in a horrible position. The woman he pledged his life to cheated on him, and now his next choice could ruin her life forever.

But what we see in the next few verses is that Joseph was a righteous man. He didn't want to disgrace her... he didn't want to shame her. He didn't want her to face a life of public ridicule and judgment.

Here's what he thinks - Matthew 1:19 - **19** *Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[e] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

He thought about divorcing her quietly. Don't make a big deal about it. Let people think what they're going to think, but he's not going to publicly accuse her... But what he didn't realize was that in his lowest moment, he was going to experience a holy moment.

Cause while he's considering this, we're told this Matthew 1:20-23 - **20** *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[f] because he will save his people from their sins."*

**22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”<sup>[g]</sup> (which means “God with us”).

Now before we look at what Joseph did, I want to pause and look at what Joseph didn’t do. Joseph didn’t try to explain away the dream. He didn’t try to blame the dream on the hot pocket he had the night before. He didn’t negotiate with God or try to talk himself out of it. He didn’t try to ask any clarifying questions. He didn’t ask God for another sign with more angels and more affirmations of what he saw in the dream.

Here’s what we see in the very next verse - Matthew 1:24-25 - **24** When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Joseph did what the angel of the Lord commanded. And if there’s one statement that I pray would be true of all of us... it’s that we did what God commanded us.

Part of having a strong relationship with God is the rhythm of obedience... I listen to the holy spirit and obey.

Without knowing all the details and what it all meant... Joseph shows us this reality - **You don’t have to understand completely to obey immediately.**

If you know God was in it in the beginning, you don’t need every detail, you don’t need to know how everything is going to work out, you don’t need to know the final cost.

Think about everything that Joseph DIDN’T know. He basically didn’t know anything about what was to come. He didn’t know that he and Mary would have to make a 100 mile journey to

Bethlehem for the census while she was pregnant. He didn’t know they’d have less than ideal birthing facilities. He didn’t know that King Herod would issue a decree saying that every boy under 2 would be killed and feel the fear of hiding from that threat and being on the run. He didn’t realize the weight and the guilt of other innocent boys being killed because of his son. He couldn’t know the weight of raising the son of God.

Without knowing all the details about what this would mean, Joseph woke up and did what the Lord commanded him.

And at some point in your life... God is going to speak to you through the Scriptures that you read in your personal devotions or the Scriptures as you hear them in a sermon... or through the gentle whisper of the holy spirit, God is going to prompt you to give something or say something or do something. And you’re not going to know all the details. And you’re going to have to decide if you’ll justify, excuse, and delay... or if you’ll obey him.

One of the most freeing things I’ve ever experienced in my faith is when my wife Bethany and I were struggling with a decision. A decision about whether we were going to follow God where he was nudging us... or not... and I’ll be honest, I was paralyzed by the fear of failure. And Bethany said, in her wisdom -

Success or failure is whether or not we obey God.

**Obedience is our responsibility, the outcome is God’s.**

I remember a moment my friend gave me \$1,000 and said, please give this to someone who needs it. And God brought a family to mind who had just recently been evicted from their home and I remembered that they had better couches than me and a better TV than me, and I wondered if they would spend it wisely or not. And I remember the moment God said, that’s none of your business. Your job is to obey me.

## **Obedience is our responsibility, the outcome is God's.**

We may never know the impact of our obedience to God. We may not see every time we're blessed or someone else is blessed because of our obedience to God, but friends

You have no idea what God can do through one moment of obedience.

Whenever I was a kid, I was at church camp, and we were worshipping through song, and I feel so connected to God through singing, it's one of the most meaningful ways I connect to God. But also, as a kid, I had voice nodules. And that means that if I'm too loud, I lose my voice. In fact, preaching twice on a Sunday morning often leaves me feeling hoarse for the rest of the day and I have to rest my voice and it takes a day to recover. But even so, I can't help but sing during worship, because I love connecting to God that way.

At church camp, my voice was going and I couldn't sing anymore... we sang a lot at church camp. And I said, God, I need a tambourine... I need a tambourine so that even though I can't sing, I can make a joyful noise of worship to you... and a few minutes later a guy came up to me and gave me a tambourine. God answered that prayer in a miraculous way, and I was so grateful to God, and I asked John later why he did that and said this – "I don't know. I just felt like God told me to."

One moment of obedience spoke a word of encouragement and faith into the life of 14 year old David, who had a whole lotta teenage angst and was uncertain about himself and uncertain about his faith, and through his act of obedience, showed me that God was with me and frankly that God was real, and he helped to affirm that gentle whisper I heard from God to become pastor.

## **You have no idea what God can do through one moment of obedience.**

The problem though, is that many of us know what God wants us to do... we just need to do it.

I've sat through many small groups and sermons and persona time in scripture where I hear God's word and reflect on God's word and I say - wow, that's really good. And then I go on continuing to live my life the way I've always loved it.

Some of you are begging God for direction in your life, but you're not doing anything with all the direction he's already given you... We need to do more with what we already know. When God's Word guides you, do what it says. Even when you don't fully understand why and even when you don't like it.

Joseph didn't have the details... he just did what the angel told him to do.

I want to go back to Joseph's dream for a minute. Joseph didn't have all the details, but he was fortunate that he was told the importance of his obedience from the angel. We heard it in Matthew 1:20-21 -

*...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[f] because he will save his people from their sins."*

Jesus was conceived by the Holy spirit. Why did this matter? Because it means that Jesus didn't inherit the sin nature from his earthly father, he was conceived by the Holy Spirit - so he was born with a spiritual nature. And because of this, Jesus could live his whole life without sin... and so when he suffered on the cross and died... he wasn't dying for his own sin, he was dying to

set us free from sin and the punishment of sin... he was dying to defeat evil and sin once and for all.

As the angel said - he will save his people from their sins.

There's no sin too great for God's grace to forgive. There's no one too far away for God's love to pursue. Joseph probably didn't understand what all of that meant... he just obeyed.

And that's all we need to do.

Obedience is our responsibility – the outcome is God.

And we are recipients of God's grace and God's blessing, in part because of Joseph's willingness to be obedient to God.

And while we don't hear about it directly, we can assume that Joseph probably faced opposition for his obedience. People probably looked at him funny, either accusing him of sin or laughing at him for staying with a woman who clearly was messing around on the side.

And that's part of what it means to be obedient to God.

Matthew 5:11 says - *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Following God is going to make people's heads turn. Obedience is difficult.

You gave how much of your money away?

You're not having sex until you're married?

You're forgiving the person who trashed you on social media?

You're using up your PTO to go help your neighbor move?

You're going to church when you're on vacation?

You actually read your Bible?

You actually believe what it says?

You're actually going to tell people you're a Christian?

Saying yes to God isn't always going to make sense to other people... sometimes it won't even make sense to us.

Obedience is difficult. It will likely cost you something. But...

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you don't know how your obedience might immensely bless you or change someone else's life else... you don't know how your obedience today might become a holy moment for you or someone else.

You don't have to understand completely to obey immediately.

As you know, Christmas is right around the corner. On Christmas Eve we have 4 Christmas Eve services - 3 and 5 are family oriented... designed to engage kids of all ages. 7 and 9 are traditional. And Christmas is the least threatening time to invite a friend to church. And I want to give you an opportunity.

On your way out today, we're going to have invitation post cards available, and I want to encourage you to take one. I don't want you to take one for your fridge, I want you to take one to give away. And I want you to ask God for direction on who to invite to Christmas Eve worship. Maybe someone's already coming to mind - great. Invite them. But maybe God is going to bring someone to mind. Keep it nearby in the next week or two and ask God every day - God - show me who you want me to invite. And

then when you feel the nudge - invite them to come and sit with you.

You have no idea what God can do through one moment of obedience.