

“Obedience on Display”

- Introduction - Advent, Series: “Down to Earth”
 - 1st week: Love on Display
 - 2nd week: Humility on Display
 - Last week: Belief on Display
 - Today: Obedience on Display

Tension: Difficult to settle on a characteristic that is ‘most significant’ to the Christmas Story, but if it were not for obedience, would we be where we are today? Would our world be redeemed if Mary had not been obedient to God’s call on her life - to give birth to the Messiah? What if Joseph didn’t obey the angelic dream to put aside his plans and take Mary as his wife? As we’ll hear about in our primary Scripture reading today, what if Joseph didn’t take his family and flee to Egypt when Jesus’ life was in danger when he was a child? Living into God’s preferred future and embracing the possibilities born of faith doesn’t just happen because God desires it, women and men must partner and participate with God by obedience and by doing what God says to do.

Matthew 2:13-15 NIV

Scriptures like this one reminds us that Jesus was born at a particular time in history and was born into a dangerous context where all was not well and bright.

At this time in history the Jewish people lived under the thumb of Roman oppression and Herod is in power and will do anything to maintain that power and the kingdom he has built

Historians tell us that Herod was a ruthless and murderous dictator, killing anyone who posed a threat—including one of his wives and two of his biological sons.

Kept order and ruled by military might...

Study Bible: “The birth of Jesus, God’s agent, into the sinful imperial world brought two responses. The powerful center rejects him. The empire strikes back as Herod, Rome’s vassal king over Judea, tries to murder King Jesus, while insignificant people from the margins—the Gentile magi, or “wise men”, and Joseph and Mary—welcome God’s initiative.”

Buechner: “For all his enormous power, Herod knew there was somebody in diapers more powerful still...the one thing the powerful seek more than anything else is to remain in power.”

Herod has all of the male babies 2 and under in Bethlehem and surrounding area killed...and as one scholar states, “**the Bethlehem toddlers become the first martyrs of the gospel.**”

In this context, disobedience meant death

Obedience - we don’t like that word - think of obedience as controlling, restricting - need to rethink obedience in context of faith

- Popular view= avoid getting into trouble; don’t do this, don’t do that, follow the rules - not about rules, it’s about relationship
- Biblical view= getting into God’s will (preferred future)
 - Obedience is For our good, protection, safety, well-being
 - **Down to Earth by Mike Slaughter** “Regardless of what you’re facing, obedience is more than simply wishing for circumstances to change. Obedience is not a half-hearted, ‘Well, God, maybe you can help me out.’ Obedience means believing that God can do a miracle in our lives and then aligning ourselves with what God wants, not what we want. Obedience is not a hazy mental exercise. It’s not ‘Someday when God asks me to do something big, I’ll consider it.’ It means an out-of-control, doesn’t-feel-right, maybe-it-might, how-can-this-be...Yes!”
- In the context of faith, disobedience means death, as well. Maybe not physical death, but death of possibilities, death of relationship, and Death of ‘light’ and witness
 - Can’t call yourself a ‘friend of God’ and not be obedient

- Rachel Billups: “The world is waiting for some light - light that will not appear magically in the sky but will shine and is shining through you. That light comes through obedience. This world is waiting for your light. People want to see it, to experience it, to know it’s possible to live a life of obedience to God. The world is waiting on your ‘yes’”.
 - **Your ‘yes’ could not only change your life; but could change the life of others, as well**
 - **Example? (how someone else’s obedience has helped you to be obedient?)**

Reflecting on the attitudes of key people throughout the Scriptures and the history of the church, there are A LOT of people who were obedient to what God had called them to do. What if they had said, ‘no’?

- What if Michelangelo had said, 'Nope, I don't do ceilings.'
- Or if John Wesley had said, "Nope, I don't do preaching in fields."
- Or Moses had said, "Nope, I don't do Pharaohs or mass migrations."
- Or Noah had said, "Nope,, "I don't do arks and animals."
- Or Rahab had said, "Nope,, "I don't do enemy spies."
- Or Ruth had said, "Nope, I don't do mothers-in-law."
- Or David had said, "Nope,I don't do giants."
- Or Peter had said, "Nope,I don't do Gentiles."
- Or Mary had said, "Nope,I don't do virgin births."
- Or Joseph had said, “Nope, I don’t do already-pregnant wives”
- Or Paul had said, "Nope, I don't write letters"
- Or Jesus had said, "Nope,I don't do crosses."

- Jesus’ obedience made path for reconciliation
 - What path is blocked because of our disobedience
 - God may ask you to do things that don’t sit well with you initially; Don’t tell God ‘Nope’; Be obedient
 - Easier said than done? How??

- **Path to Obedience**

- Remember
 - Shared history of what God has done in the past
 - Mary having heard the stories of Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...people who have said Yes to God and how God was with them, **That ‘God has been, God is, and God will be good and faithful’**
 - Individually, how God has been faithful before - God has always taken care of us
- Trust
 - God has your best interest at heart
 - God’s promises are true
 - Saying we trust God is one thing, but living out that trust is a very different matter
- Step (Act)
 - Step into
 - When Mary asked the life-bending question about become the mother of Jesus, wouldn’t have been an ‘easy yes’, but Mary chose obedience, and said, Yes
 - When Joseph asked to care less about what others would think about him and his pregnant bride and to take Mary as his wife, it wouldn’t have been an ‘easy’ yes’, but Joseph chose obedience and said, Yes
 - They said yes to those initial requests and took those initial steps, but then they went on saying yes and taking steps of obedience...
 - Getting to where God would have you comes about through a series of yes’s, and through obedience
 - Over time as relationship grows closer, don’t even have to think about the ‘steps’ - obedience becomes a way of life, and that really is the goal of faith

Closing