

**THE BIG IDEA: What we put our faith in is more important than how much faith is in us.**

### The Take-Off

Last week we made one simple statement: The birth of Jesus changed everything, and as a result, it must change those of us who are followers of Him, too.

We can't encounter a Savior who changed the world and not be changed ourselves.

Now, there are multiple ways that we can be marked by the birth of Jesus, but during the weeks leading up to Christmas morning, we're focusing on 4 characteristics - 4 BIRTHMARKS - that we think should be in the very DNA of believers who have experienced what the Bible would call the new birth into the kingdom of Jesus.

Last week, we talked about how we are marked by hope: a hope that came to the world, not from the world; a hope that can hold us when everything around us is falling apart; and hope that is given on earth by those whose hope comes from heaven.

As followers of Jesus, we must be people of hope, and we learned that when we have hope, we give hope, and often that giving of hope is done through the very practical form of our tithes and our offerings.

In short, you giving to God allows us (the church) to give to men.

In order to transition into the next birthmark, let me ask you a hypothetical question: how much would you give if you knew that you would never run out of what you were giving?

Probably a lot, because you'd know that you'd always have enough. It's a no-brainer, right?

But what would you do if you knew that you'd never run out, but you weren't able to get more until you'd already given away what you had?

That little tension you just felt is the realization that faith is involved in that second scenario, and faith is the second quality that we believe is a part of the DNA of followers of Jesus.

Many may not really understand what faith even is, but God teaches us a lot about faith in the story of Mary found in Luke 1:26-38.

We'll highlight some truths about faith, and then I'll tie it all together in the end! For now, let's understand that...

## **1. Faith leads to favor**

- a. The angel told Mary she was highly favored by God (v. 28) and that she had found favor with God (v. 30)
- b. Mary didn't receive favor because God picked her name out of a hat
- c. **It was Mary's life up to this moment that had prepared her for this moment!**
- d. That's huge for those of you who question the moments you're in. How you respond now will go a long way to determining how God moves later.
- e. Mary obviously had lived a life of faith - dependence - in God because the Bible teaches us that:
  - Faith gets the Lord's attention (Matthew 8:10)
  - Faith in God leads to God's support (2 Chronicles 16:9)
  - Faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6)
- f. You want the Lord's favor like Mary? Believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.
- g. Faith seeks Him, and knows that faith will always lead to favor.

## **2. Faith may want to understand, but faith doesn't have to understand**

- a. Faith has gotten a bad rap over the years by people who think that blind faith is Biblical faith
- b. It's not. Questioning doesn't mean we have less faith, and Mary proved it here
- c. Look at how she responded:
  - She was troubled (v. 29)
  - That word means severely agitated (insides like a washing machine in full cycle!)
  - She was curious (v. 34)
- d. Faith is able to see the data and not allow it to outweigh what we know about our Dad!
- e. We see this played out in Abraham's life in Romans 4:18-21
- f. Against all hope, he hoped. He faced the facts but still had faith. He was fully persuaded that God could (and would) do what He had promised.
- g. He was able to see the data and yet still trust the Dad!
- h. Mary did, too, which is why, in verse 38, she said yes.

### 3. Faith says yes to God

- a. When it was all said and done, Mary's response was yes. Faith's response is always yes to God!
- b. She was able to say yes because her faith was anchored in who she knew that God was
  - her Lord
  - a God who does what He says
- c. One last observation before we start to land this, and it's a biggie, so big that it's today's Big Idea: what we put our faith in is more important than how much faith is in us
- d. Mary didn't need to have a ton of faith because she'd put her faith in the right place
- e. So Mary has questions, is afraid, and still believes in God's ability to do what He said He'd do
- f. That's faith, and when we know God that personally, our faith will always say yes to His requests

#### The Landing

Let me wrap all of this up with a quick illustration that will help all of us understand how faith marks us

I've got some really dirty water here, the kind that could cause someone to get sick

It's full of bacteria, dirt, etc., and I'm wondering if anyone would drink it and believe that it wouldn't harm you (no)

But what if I had a device that would allow you to drink it by filtering out the pollutants? Would someone drink it then?

LifeStraw

- It will purify the water
- We don't understand how, but we can still benefit from using it
- Only works if it's utilized

Just like faith

Faith accepts that God is who He says he is (Knowing His character)

Faith acts in accordance with what God says He will do (Knowing His Word)

Faith accesses the power that God says He will give (Knowing His presence)

The LifeStraw doesn't work because I have a lot of faith - heck, looking at dirty water and having faith to believe it'll

be clean when it hits my mouth is tough! - but because the process is proven

Jesus is proven, and we can trust in Him.

Let's pray.