

Fearing God's Activity

12.21.08

Intro.

1. What was the emotional state of those caught up in the first Christmas? Fear
2. Pretend you never heard the Christmas story but believe in God.
 - a. Hear about angel appearing to teenage girl...another appears to Joseph in a dream...angels appear to shepherds...wise men come from afar...how do you respond? Unbelievable
 - b. What if it happened today? How would it be reported? Skeptical
 - c. How would you respond if you were Mary or Joseph?
 - d. When God is moving in your life, what is your response?
 - i. How are you responding to God's activity in your life? God's activity usually comes in the form of change. (change in relationships, finances, beliefs, etc - not saying God is behind all the change, but he's certainly in all the change). How are you currently responding to the change in your life?
 - ii. He is changing things & He expects us to shift. This is the essence of repentance. If we don't shift, we'll end up resisting.
1. Joseph - Your fearful because he threatens your relationships and reputation - Matt.1.18-21.
 - a. How all this affected Joseph's relationships with family, Mary, friends & community. Since he was a good man he couldn't wed Mary. To marry her would be a tacit admission of guilt. His (and her) reputation was negatively impacted and he would have to live with that stigma.
 - b. Application:

- i. You're thinking about quietly moving away from God's best b/c it sounds like wisdom. If you move out of timing with the Lord's will, He'll just send you a warning – like he did with Joseph– to remain on the path..
 - ii. Taking a stand with a person or group, or even walking away from a relationship b/c of sin, values, direction or God tells you. It can lead to separation or alienation. Matt.10.34ff.
 - 1. Dale leaving his job b/c of Dow's stance with homosexuality.
 - 2. My stand on membership & marriage

- 2. King Herod – You're fearful because he threatens your life (world/kingdom – something you highly prize/the way you want things to be) – Mt.2.3–18
 - a. Herod had a little monarchy and he feared anyone he considered a threat to his government. He thought this baby would dispossess him. He had already killed his favorite wife & two sons b/c he was paranoid that they were conspiring to overthrow him.
 - b. The reason some of you are resisting God's activity is b/c you're not getting your way. In fact, you go on the offensive. Like Herod, you say, "I'll just kill it." You end up destroying others & yourself in the process.
 - i. You think others are the problem – "I wouldn't be having this problem if you were out of my life."
 - ii. It's manifesting through – depression, apathy, agitation, aggressiveness, hostility or defensiveness.
 - iii. You have to readjust your life. God is crashing into your world through a life issue.
 - c. Nothing will stop God's plan. This wasn't optional (the incarnation). God will get it done.

- i. Don't say it isn't time. You can either embrace the work or resist it, but you won't stop the work. Denial and/or resistance is futile.
- ii. Just think how different life would have been if Herod had embraced Jesus. Jesus was no threat to Herod. He was Herod's answer.
- iii. Summary: Your fearful b/c he threatens your world. You need a mindshift to embrace what God is doing in and around you. **If there isn't, you'll end up fighting the very thing that can save you.**

3. Mary – Your fearful of the unknown – Luke 1.26–34

- a. “Isaiah 55.8” She didn't know what to expect; how it was going to happen and what to do next. She didn't have the 1,2,3's. God calls us into things that may seem ridiculous but they're of Him. When following Christ, he doesn't let you stay beside the still water, “He leads you beside the still water...on the way to the valley of the shadow of death.”
- b. It's best to expect the unexpected from God. Mary's reputation was destroyed, yet she gladly accepted God's best for her life. The unknown of God is always better than the known of man. Accepting the unknown involves risk, losing reput, being labeled, uncertainty, etc.
 - i. God isn't concerned about your dignity, but about seeing His will accomplished through you. Jesus' dignity was ruined by dying on the cross, but His Father's will was done.
 - ii. You're saying, “I don't know where this is taking me, what's going to happen, what the end result will be with this change that is happening in my life, etc. This isn't pleasant, it's been very hard.” You have to trust in God's goodness
 - iii. God will often use undignified circumstances, ungodly people and purposeless task in your life to

reveal your heart. If we all had the same opportunity as Mary, how many of use would have done it and been happy about it? Mary had to wait 30 years for her reputation to be vindicated. Her acceptance of the unknown revealed her heart.

- iv. Some of you want the specs on God's activity in your life & God isn't going to give them to you. You're upset because you can't figure out what's next & God isn't saying a word.
 - 1. Ill of Pres. Bush going to Baghdad, Iraq to surprise the troops for Thanksgiving. Some were put out b/c they had to wait, but didn't know who they were waiting for. Was the inconvenience of the unknown worth it for them?

4. Shepherds – You're fearful of the unexpected way God works – Lk.2.8–14

- a. Revelation of the angel; word for shepherds; great singing. The whole ministry of Jesus – birth to poor parents, ministered among sinners, call 12 average guys, dying on cross. It all seems so sensible now – we would do it this way – but it really isn't sensible.
 - i. Think of yourself as Mary's neighbor.
- b. When God is doing something powerful it can create a lot of concern. We might even be tempted to say, "It's not God." They called Jesus demon possessed; his ministry wasn't of God. All because it was unusual.
- c. How do you know if something is of God? Look at the babies. God's plans aren't always logical, but they are verifiable by looking at the fruit.

But, my ultimate response to God's gift is one of thanksgiving, obedience and acceptance – Mt.1.24; Mt.2.10; L.1.38; L.2.20

Expl. - Great fear will turn into great joy if we'll accept God's all wise plan. All of these people are peaceful and joyful. The only one who isn't is Herod because his plan is at odds with God's plan.

God understands our fear but he doesn't understand our pride which rejects his activity.

Today, What is it that's causing fear, agitation, depression or hostility? The thing that caused fear for Joseph, Mary, Herod & the shepherds was God's activity. It could be the thing that stirring fear in your life is the activity of God. You have a choice. You can either resist it in fear or accept it in faith.