

MY JOURNEY FROM DOUBT TO FAITH

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ December 13, 2015



¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 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, 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 be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. (Matthew 1:18-24)

Dear fellow pilgrims on the journey to meet the Messiah,

Have you ever had one of those moments in your life where you just stop and think, “This can’t be happening to me?” Maybe it’s a domino effect of a sequence of bad events happening one after the other. Maybe it’s a catastrophic bill you weren’t expecting. Maybe you waited until the last minute before you bought someone a gift. Maybe you remember that you left the house without your pants on. OK, maybe that last one only seems to happen in dreams, but I think we can all relate. When the weight of your burdens just seems like it’s too much. What’s a person to do in a circumstance like that?

I’ll tell you what I was ready to do, I was ready to crack, I was ready to walk away from the problem. Maybe you’re wondering what my problem was. You’ve probably heard about it before. My fiancée was cheating on me. I had suspected it for a little while, but then she comes out and tells me she’s pregnant, and who’s the guy? That’s the real kicker – she said it was God. She said she was the one who was carrying the Messiah who was promised for thousands of years. Can you believe that? Would you believe that if you were told that story? I didn’t. It just seemed too convenient that God was the excuse for her sin.

And yet, there was a little part inside of me that felt pity for her. She was just a young girl, she made a mistake. But that didn’t mean she needed to be stoned to death. I’m glad that the Law of Moses gives us a loophole to divorce someone quietly, for just about any reason. I had in mind to do that. I’ll admit it, I didn’t believe Mary. But this isn’t the story of how I didn’t believe Mary, but rather it is the story of MY JOURNEY FROM DOUBT TO FAITH.

It always amazed me growing up, as I heard the stories from the Torah and the prophets about all those great people through whom God worked wonders. How he came to our Father Abraham and promised him more descendants than stars in the sky. How he used Joseph to save our family lineage by having his brothers sell him into slavery. How he used Moses and Joshua to lead the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Oh it would have been amazing to be around at that time, to wonder at how great God was, the miracles he did during that time.

But it had been so long since he acted like that. It had been so long since there had even been a prophet to give us a revelation from God. It seemed for many like God wasn't going to act in that way anymore. Oh sure, there had been some who had claimed to be from God, but it didn't take long before people realized they didn't. It didn't take long for people to realize they did it for their own selfish reasons. But I never thought God would work so directly in my life.

Yea, I know, being brought up as a God-fearing Jew we were taught that God doesn't need to prove himself to us, because he has given us his Word, he has given us his promises. But really God? You're doing this to me. Like I said, at first I thought Mary was telling a tall tale, a tale about how God the Spirit had impregnated her. It would have taken a messenger or a miracle of God to convince me this story was true. I couldn't believe it on faith, on just the word of Mary.

But you know what? That's exactly what happened. I had just decided on my course of action to divorce Mary quietly and was settling in for a night's rest. Then God's favor rested upon me. I had a dream. And not just any dream – a magnificent dream – of an angel. It seemed so real. The angel confirmed everything that Mary had said. His exact words were, **“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.”** It struck me that the angel brought up one of my great forefathers – King David. It was true, I was a descendant of King David, but that didn't mean much nowadays, there was no king on the throne from David's line, it almost seemed an insult to the prophecy that said there would be a king.

But it was that title “son of David,” that reminded me, that made the second part of the prophecy make sense. **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** I was from the line of David, and the Messiah would be from the line of David. He would be my son. Well, he wouldn't be ‘my’ son, he was still God's son, but God was allowing me to be the earthly father of the Savior. He was working everything out, just like the prophecies predicted.

To think, I was ready to ditch out on this opportunity. I was ready to put Mary away. How foolish I was when I just thought selfishly. And then what would have happened? Well, to put it simply, I wouldn't have been a part of God's plan. God still would have accomplished his purpose – just like he did throughout the rest of history – he just would have done it without me. I never would have had a chance to get to know my Savior personally, I never would have had the chance to teach him or be taught by him. How much of an opportunity I would have missed out on. I would have missed out on “God with us.”

Before the angel left he reminded me of the words of the prophet Isaiah, words that I remember from my youth. **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means ‘God with us.’”** As those years passed I came to appreciate that phrase even more. Jesus truly was and is ‘God with us.’ For so long it had been common to wonder what kind of Savior God would send. Jesus made it clear. He was not the kind of Savior who would overcome our physical enemies, he would be the Savior to overcome something much greater – our spiritual enemies.

And when the angel left me, I bolted upright in bed. Even though it was the middle of the night, I went straight over to Mary’s house and knocked on her door. Yea, it was a little awkward explaining to her dad that I wanted to see his daughter at this hour, but I could put up with it. When Mary appeared, I ran to her and gave her a big hug and whispered in her ear, “I believe you,” “an angel came to me and told me everything.” “It’s going to be OK, I’m still going to marry you.” Thank God I took advantage of the opportunity. This was MY JOURNEY FROM DOUBT TO FAITH.

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Why am I telling you this? I’m telling you this because it’s important, but I’m also telling you this to see everything in your life as an invitation from God to be a part of his blessings. Just by the fact that you’re here this morning indicates to me that you do believe the message, and that at least this morning it was worth it to wake up and come hear God’s Word. But I want to encourage you in every aspect of your life.

There will be times, maybe you’ve experienced them already, that make you wonder, “why me God?” There will be times when things don’t always seem to be going your way. There will be times when God’s message just doesn’t seem to apply, or it doesn’t take priority in your lives. It’s at times like that when you start to think like I did when I was prepared to divorce Mary. Your intentions may be pure, at least in your minds, but you just don’t want to deal with it, you don’t want to take on the responsibility. You feel it would be too much. Ultimately, you don’t trust God.

It took an angel coming to me in a dream to make me realize, to make me re-prioritize my life. But it doesn’t need to take an angel for you to remember that. It shouldn’t need to take an angel to tell you of the blessings that come from following God’s plan. It might seem easier to take a Sunday off, it might seem easier to not go to the extra Christmas services, it might seem easier to not give as generously, it might seem easier to excuse yourself from sharing the Christmas message, from participating in God’s plan. But is it? Because God is going to accomplish what he wants, with or without you. And if it’s without you, then just think about the opportunities you may have missed, the blessings you have forsaken.

And no question the greatest blessing you might be risking, is the blessing that Jesus came to bring – to save his people from their sins. I can vouch for it – there was not one time that I could in good conscience had to discipline Jesus for doing something wrong. In fact, there were more than a few occasions where Jesus, respectfully, reminded me of the way I ought to conduct myself. But Jesus did more than just show us the way, he is the way – simply by believing in him.

Believe me, this doesn’t mean everything in your life will be hunky-dory. It doesn’t mean there won’t be problems. It doesn’t mean that everyone will like you and no one will offend you. But it does

mean one thing. God is still with you. Jesus is still “Immanuel.” He is still there with you as you face problems and difficulties in your life. He is still there with you not just to help you overcome problems, he is there to remind you that he has already overcome the problem.

So knowing we have God with us, we can overcome our doubts and faithfully follow God. We can faithfully look forward to the blessings God has prepared for those who follow him, blessings we otherwise wouldn't have. We can look forward to the blessings that come from being in God's house regularly, blessings that can come from sharing the gospel message with someone new (and seeing them grow in their faith), blessings that come by generously sharing your blessings with others.

We are all on a journey – a journey called life. This journey allows us to take many different paths, make many different decisions. But not all of the paths lead to the same destination. In fact, there's really only one path that makes a difference. It's the path that Jesus made, it's the only path that leads to heaven. And I guarantee you, any regrets you think may come from following this path will be far outweighed by the blessings. Because not only is God with us here, but this path leads to where we will be with God in heaven. Praise be to God. Amen.