

Joke: A cowboy on a long journey stops at a small town to wet his whistle, he ties up his horse outside the saloon and enters. . .

The town's folk are a bit uneasy about newcomers so they watch him closely. He makes his way to the bar and orders a beer. The bartender opens his beer and sets it down on the table. And tells the cowboy, "I'd be careful if I was you. Town's folk don't take kindly to newcomers, they give em a hard time, and well you're a newcomer."

"Is that so?" The cowboy lazily says as he rests his head on his fist and sips his drink. The bartender turns around slightly annoyed by the response rolling his eyes. The cowboy stays a good ten minutes finishing his drink, he then walks back outside to continue on his journey, but when he gets outside he finds his horse to be missing.

The cowboy storms back into the bar, draws his pistol, and fires a shot into the ceiling. He looks around at all the townsfolk and then says, "Alright, which one of you sidewinders stole my horse?"

The town's folk looked at each other and then back to the cowboy. You could hear a pin drop. "Well, nobody knows? One of the townsfolk finally blurts out.

Alright, well I'm going to go back to that bar and have myself another drink. If I finish that drink, go back outside, and my horse still ain't there, I'm gonna have to do what I done in Texas. And I don't like having to do what I done in Texas."

The cowboy, true to his word, goes back to the bar, drinks another beer, goes back outside, and like magic his horse is back. He jumps on his horse like it never left and begins riding out of town. The bartender needing to know runs outside and calls out to the cowboy, "Excuse me, sir! I gots to know, what'd you have to do back in Texas?"

The cowboy turns around, looks at the bartender and said, "I had to walk home."

Journeys (90 Miles)

We began our Christmas series last week talking about waiting. And waiting is something many of us don't like, or find hard to do. We like fast food, and Amazon Prime with next day delivery.

Today I want to talk about journeys. But before I do that let me share one more point that I didn't share last week about waiting. We need to wait with expectation.

Talk about price is right contestants.

As believers we do not need to see it or have it but we should be excited and waiting in expectation for it. If God promised it, it is coming.

Ok, now let's pick up today's message talking about journeys.

Let's begin in the gospel of Luke. . .

Luke 2:1–3 (NIV): In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

Caesar issues a decree, and because of that decree families across Israel set out for their hometowns. For some, the trip was relatively short. But for others, it was quite the journey.

And for Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem it was quite the journey. It certainly was no walk in the park. It was a long and difficult journey of about 90 miles. The terrain was far from flat, and, to be honest we don't really know if there was a donkey. Scripture doesn't give us that detail. Either way to travel those 90 miles would have likely taken the better part of a week. . .and one other important detail we can not forget. . .Mary was nine months pregnant. So, donkey or not still not an easy trip.

I wonder what those conversations must have sounded like along the road.

Luke 2:4–5 (NIV): So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Their journey to Bethlehem, in many ways, is not unlike some of the journeys we all take. See the truth is often times, on our journey, God wants us to just trust Him even if we aren't sure where He is leading us too.

And how many know sometimes it's difficult to trust Him when we don't know what the outcome might be?

And it would not have been easy for this couple. There would have been bumps along the road, I dare say there were some large, uncomfortable bumps. I mean Mary being nine months pregnant any bump would have been an uncomfortable bump.

And the outcome at the end of the journey? We know because we've read or heard, the story probably in some fashion every Christmas season. So, in the words of Paul Harvey, we know the rest of the story. But for Mary and Joseph, the end was yet unknown.

So, today let's spend a few moments with "Journeys." Three to be exact, Mary and Joseph's, Jesus', and ours.

Before we do that watch this. . . **show 90 miles video from skit guys.**

And with that let's begin and consider first. . .

1. Mary's (and Joseph's) Journey

Mary and Joseph's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was surely a taxing undertaking. But their journey didn't begin on that rough road.

Let's read from the first chapters of two of the gospels.

First from Luke. . .

Luke 1:26–31 (NIV): In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

An angel appears, that would be enough to get the hearts of most of us beating rather rapidly! (**Talk about deer stomping and heart racing**)

But then the message comes. You, a virgin pledged to be married, will have a son – but not by your fiancé Joseph, no this will be God’s son. And The angel, after delivering that news, and let’s face it that was quite the news, says the most “guy thing” ever. . . “Don’t be afraid!”

Now I don’t know about you but if I was Mary I think it was already too late for not being afraid. First an angel shows up, then tells her she’s expecting a baby and she had never even been with a man. I mean how do you run home and explain that one to mom. And the Bible doesn’t say how old Mary was but most scholars believe she was around 15 or 16 years old.

And then Mary, having heard from God’s messenger, must now pass on the news to Joseph. What’s he going to think. He certainly knows he’s not the dad. But God had done something beautiful in the midst of her journey toward motherhood.

Let’s read from Matthew’s first chapter. ..

Matthew 1:19–21 (NIV): Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet 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.”

What I love about the beginning of Mary and Joseph's journey, that would eventually lead them to Bethlehem, is the beauty of God showing just how much He cares for each one of them.

God has his messenger reassure them. "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid" and "Mary, do not be afraid; you have found favor with God"

And they listen. And they follow. And their journey begins.

And at least they knew where they would end up.

But the truth is church God may want to take you someplace on your journey that you don't know where He is taking you. He did it to Abraham.

Watch this. . .

Genesis 12:1 (NIV): The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

In other words, Abram go boldly where no man has gone before. Abraham had no idea where his journey would take him. But he trusted in God still.

And church we too must trust Him the same way.

And that was the beginning of their journey but now, let's turn our attention to Jesus.

2. Jesus' Journey

But before we do you need to realize that ninety-mile trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem for Mary and Joseph, trip may have been complete but the their journey, it wasn't over, let's continue that journey from the gospel of Luke as we are introduced to the beginning of Jesus' journey. . .

Luke 2:6–7 (NIV): While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

The “ they” here refers to Mary and Joseph. They have finally completed their long journey to Bethlehem. And though there was no room in the inn, there was room for them and the baby Jesus in a manger. And Jesus, the Son of God, is born a helpless infant, placed into the care of these earthly parents.

But. . .the journey of the Son of God did not begin here.

1 Peter 1:19–20 (NLT): 19 It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. 20 God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.

God chose him as a ransom when? Long before the world began. . .

And then in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. . .

Philippians 2:5–8 (NLT): You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Think about that: Jesus, who existed in the glory and perfection of heaven, leaves the throne room, brings heaven to earth in the form of a baby and choose to embark on a journey that would lead him to the brokenness of our world, where He heals. He forgives. He loves. He walks on water. He turns water into wine. He teaches. And as He teaches the crowds hang on his every word. Then He, eventually, Himself hangs on a cross. But the journey didn’t end there, no three days later. . .“ Up from the grave, he arose!” What A Journey!

And why would Jesus make this journey? So that we might know Him, and in knowing Him, experience abundant life.

And that brings us to our journey.

Jesus says in John 10:10. . .

John 10:10 (ESV): The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

What I love about that verse is what it tells us about the thief, he comes only. Only to what? Steal, kill and destroy. So, know this church the enemy when he comes to you it is not to bless you, help you, or comfort you. He comes to steal your joy, kill your relationship with God, and destroy your destiny and trust in the God of your salvation.

And if he can get you to believe the lies he tells you, they will rob you of the abundant life that Jesus died for to give us.

Jesus chose to journey among us so that we might “have life, and have it abundantly.” I think all of us want that kind of life. Amen.

So, now let's look a bit closer into our Journey

Imagine taking a hike through uncharted territory. There are moments when the path is smooth, the scenery is beautiful, and everything feels right. But then, there are times when the path becomes rough and unclear when the destination seems distant. But through it all, we keep moving forward because we know the journey has a purpose and the destination is worth it.

Jesus' journey was much like that. He knew the destination, the cross. And because of the cross and resurrection and the grace that He shows us that brings about our salvation, He knew it was worth the difficult road He had to travel.

Hear this church God's grace isn't cheap it was expensive, it cost the life of Jesus, so we better not abuse it.

And it's because of HIS journey, we may have hope in OUR journey.

Heaven sent it's very best to allow us to be restored to right relationship with God.

And I for one am so thankful for His love that is unconditional, His grace that is sufficient and His mercies which are new every morning.

Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV): Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now let me pause to say this. . .the cross was not a joyous occasion. It was no joy hanging from that tree, it was excruciating. Yet the Scripture tells us, for the joy set before him he endured the cross. What made it joyful was that Jesus fulfilled His mission, His purpose and in so doing He saw you and I coming into right relationship with the Father. And so, He willingly endured the pain, and suffering knowing that His sacrifice would bring about salvation for many. And He waited in expectation for us to say yes to Him.

And as I mentioned you have been brought with a price. That means even if you don't think you're worth it, if others don't think you're worth it. Jesus says you are.

And I don't know about you but I think I would much rather hear what He has to say to me than some other folks.

Let me give you a little theology lesson is that alright? You ready? There is one thing never given in Scripture, you know what that is? Your opinion. So, it doesn't matter if you may think you're not worth it, it doesn't matter if the enemy says you will never measure up. God says otherwise.

Let me get back to, journeys. . .

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT): God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

God decided when? In advance of you loving Him, obeying Him, following Him. He decided in advance to adopt us into his own family.

I am so grateful to be adopted into the family of God.

1 John 4:9–10 (NLT): God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. 10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

That's love. Real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

John 3:16–18 (NIV): For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

So often we stop at verse 16 but look what it says in the next verse, For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Maybe you haven't begun the journey with Jesus. Let me encourage you to taste and see that the Lord is good. He is faithful even when we are not.

You can trust Him and even when your road gets rough, Jesus has been and will be there along the way. Leading you to the path of righteousness.

He will never leave you or forsake you.

Maybe your unsure about this Jesus? Maybe you've heard to many different opinions.

Let me say to you that Jesus loves you. When the verse we just read says "whoever believes" will have eternal life, it's talking about you and me. No matter the journey you've been on.

Maybe your journey has been everything but . . . I want to encourage you once more to choose, not tomorrow, not next week, choose today, right now and begin a new journey. A journey with Jesus.

And when you do Scripture tells us that we become a new creation.

Wherever you find yourself today, on whatever journey you are traveling, I need you to know that Jesus loves you. It's not just what he does, it's who He is. God is love.

He is for you not against you. He didn't come to condemn the world but to save it. He loves you so much that. . .

Romans 5:8 (TPT): But Christ proved God's passionate love for us by dying in our place while we were still lost and ungodly!

Oh wait it gets better yet. . . ,

1 John 3:1 (NIV): See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Next week we will continue our series as we look at the star.

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