

Hope for Significance

Good morning on this day! So glad to celebrate our Savior's birth with you this season. Wanted to welcome you especially if you are new or visiting or don't consider yourself a Christian, if it's your 1st or 500th time welcome to the family. And you have found us in the series the Thrill of Hope. We've been considering that without hope it feels like you've lost everything, and can't do anything. But if hope is alive it feels like you can do almost anything, and you have everything. And that is especially true with what we are considering today. In fact here's a take away. If you don't have hope for significance. *Life can seem aimless without purpose.*

To back this up I have to tell you a story from the 80s. The year is 1982 and the man was named Larry Walters. Early in life Larry had purpose and aim. He was born to be a pilot and he was going to fly. The only problem is Larry didn't have perfect sight which was needed then. Because of this he took a less than job in his mind as a truck driver. He came home from work each day sat in his lawn chair and vegged out. He did the same thing every day, until one day after he had an idea. He'd had enough of purposelessness. He was going to tie weather balloons to his lawn chair and achieve his dream. With the help of some friends and 43 weather balloons later he took off from sunny California. Larry was spotted by two commercial airliners who were approaching Long Beach Airport. At that point Larry was 16,000 feet in the air. 3 miles up. There he was among the airplanes with a sandwich, a pellet gun, and some beer. After 45 minutes just sitting there he finally took his pellet gun and shot some of the balloons - slowly descending down. His lawnchair came down eventually even after he dropped his pellet gun. And he was safe and sound. The first thing he said when he landed, "It was something I had to do. I had this dream for twenty years, and if I hadn't done it, I think I would have ended up in the funny farm." He needed significance and found it in flight. He was famous for a while going on talk shows, a motivational speaker, and did ads. But he later ended his own life at age 44. Larry driven by purpose and perhaps died because he didn't have one.

A study done among 7000 51-61 year old people also concluded that those who have purpose may live longer. Professor Rodanzi from Icahn School of Medicine also said in correlation with this report, "The need for meaning and purpose is No. 1," Rozanski adds. "It's the deepest driver of well-being there is." So the question is, do you have a purpose? Is there something for us to do? Or are we a random cosmic collection of cells that occurred by happenstance. And perhaps an even better question. If you have a purpose, how you doing at living it out?

That's why I love being in this place with you and meeting with God. We get to hear from his Word. And God assures I actually made you on purpose for a purpose. You are not here by chance. You are not an accident or a collection of cosmic dust. I formed you and made you, fearfully and wonderfully. One of the greatest sections of Scripture that describes not only that we are saved, but that we are sent. Ephesians 2 Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been

saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves a gift of God not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them." (8-10) *You are not just saved from something (sin and death and hell) - you are saved for something* (the good works God set for you). You have a purpose. It is to glorify God with the short time you have here on earth.

And we get to talk about this through the lens of one young lady who probably didn't know all God had planned for her, until an angel appeared and revealed it. Her name is Mary and she would have one of the most significant purposes, to be the mother of the Savior of the world, Jesus. And through the announcement of the angel and the reaction by Mary we can learn a thing or two about our own purposes. So there it is can you turn to your neighbor and say, "Mary's child is King."

When I was in high school I worked for a movie theater, Regal Cinemas in Orlando Florida by UCF. I loved the job meeting others being paid to be polite, and loved meeting and talking with my co-workers. I'll never forget when I was leaving that job. The co-workers had taken my cup that I brought to get something to drink. They all said and signed something on that cup. Best Wishes Dustin! It was so great meeting you! I'll miss working with you! Thank you for being kind! But I will never forget what one of my managers wrote. He said, "I'm not sure what you thought of me, or what I think of you, and that's ok." Basically, I'm not sure we meshed. And I didn't know what to do with that. It's very honest, brutally so. But my mind thought why do I need to hear that? Why would you write that? And I didn't know what to do with that, because honestly I wanted everyone to like me. I wanted everyone's approval.

Do you know what it is searching and straining for the approval of others? Perhaps it is an underlying reason you try so hard - you want them to like you. An underlying reason you try to be so kind, or funny or charming. There are many ways to seek the approval of those around us. But is it possible to keep and sustain the approval of those around you? Nope. The emotions and outlook of people wax and wane like the rising and setting of the sun. Their approval and thoughts of us will be wishy washy.

I think this has a lot to do with Mary's story at Christmas. Mary is engaged to be married, but is not quite there. And the news that she will be pregnant without being wed, must be a little unnerving. She asks, "How will this happen?" But I wonder if she also considered, "But what will people think?" Because the world at that time was very strict when it came to sexual morality. To be pregnant and unmarried at that time was a huge cause not for public approval, but public disgrace. Her character would be in question. The old ladies in the grocery aisle would be giving her the stink eye for a baby bump and no man. And if her worth and significance was tied to the approval of others she wouldn't be doing so well.

But that's why I love what the angel says to Mary. Gabriel appears and what does he say to her, "Greetings, you who are highly **favored!** The Lord is with you." (28) Into Mary's story at a time where she is simply a peasant girl living in the little town of Nazareth. No stature or big name. No reasons for high praise and public approval. God says Mary I want you to know something, "You are highly favored." Me? Yes you! And she will need that going forward. Need it when the working of God in her life, when one of the greatest miracles, turns into public disgrace. She will need to know and remember how God feels.

What about you this Christmas. Perhaps you haven't had the approval of those around you. Tiff with friends or spouse. Maybe work isn't going so well and the boss never seems to like your work, or it's not enough. Maybe you feel unloved or unloveable because of what you have done. Let me be the angel Gabriel, "Greetings, you are highly favored and the Lord is with you." How can I have the audacity to say this. Because of Mary's Son Jesus. This son wouldn't just mean favor for Mary, but for any and all who believe. When Jesus was born a choir of angels lit up the sky and they announced the favor of God. Do you remember the song, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his **favor** rests." (14) And if you are taking notes here is a takeaway. *Significance comes by seeing yourself favored by God.*

In the Christian classic the search for significance there is a quote that says, "Our true value is based not on our behavior or the approval of others but on what God's Word says is true of us." So if you are in Christ Jesus what does the Word of God say is true? How great the love of the father that we should be called the *children* of God and that is what you are. (1 Jn 3:1) He takes great delight in us, he rejoices over us with singing. (Zph 3:17)

But how far off we sometimes are from this understanding. How many times our emotions rise and fall with the feelings of others. So if we are to repent of something today it is to repent of putting people in the place of God. If we rise and fall on their approval we are letting them be God. We need to repent for the times their words stood above his. Of seeking the praise of others, more than the praise of God our Father.

And thanks be to God because of Jesus Christ. Jesus comes to get right what we got wrong. So that the Father's favor would be secured once and for all. Jesus would live, die, and rise so that the performance that deserves all applause would be his, and would be given to us through faith. Through faith we are credited Christ's performance and his approval. How great are these gifts in him.

But the story of Mary has more to teach us. How many of you would say that you are planners. That's good, it's good to have a plan. Fail to plan and plan to fail. Right now Amazing Love is in the planning and processing stage of what it might look like with another full time pastor. What might we be able to accomplish for the sake of God's glory and Kingdom. I was reading on why it's good even to have a vision board. An article said, "Visualization is one of the most powerful mind exercises you can do." If you write out the goal, you can then take the steps to accomplish said goal. There is power in writing it out, praying about it, and taking it to God.

I bring this up because I wonder what was on Mary's vision board before Gabriel showed up. She's on the knot.com counting down the days. Where going to stay here in Nazareth, he'll be a carpenter. We'll have 4 children and a white picket fence. (I won't have to bear public disgrace for being pregnant, or fear for our lives escaping to Egypt.) But how quickly did her vision board and plans change? (snap) Can you snap. I was reading from the OT about a seige in Samaria, and people were starving. But God told them, don't worry it will change tomorrow. People didn't believe, but sure enough. The army fled from fear of the Lord and they looted their camp filled with gold and silver and food. Snap. That should give comfort to how quickly God can turn things around. Gabriel shows up, scrubs the board and gives the new plan. And what is Mary's response? "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." (38) There are a lot of reasons to like Mary but this response is chief among them.

These are words of faith and humility to go and do whatever the Lord says. And she teaches us our next takeaway. *Significance comes not from being slave to my plan, but servant to God's.*

Some of us have lost hope because the plans we had for our lives didn't pan out. And it's hard when that happens. This is when you see a 40 year old buy a Corvette, it's been documented as part of a mid-life crisis. It's hard when what we envisioned was not God's plan. And yet. What did want God for Mary more or less? Better or worse. Was a white picket fence an easy life with 4 kids as great as God's plan for her? No way. His plan would be better (not easier or more comfortable but better) She would be mother of the son of the Most High. The greatest honor for any human on the planet. Who has a more honored position than Mary? She could scrub from her board, white picket fence and put on Mother of the Son of God.

I wonder how many of us need to go back to the vision board, scrub somethings. Put something new that God is doing in your life. I get it, it didn't turn out so what - are you saying he's not up to anything good right now? Or maybe leave it open. How many of us need to keep the board but keep the eraser handy. For our God has reminded us, "Submit yourselves, then, to God... Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."(4:7, 15)

A great example prayer of submission was written by Pastor John Wesley. He penned this, "I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours." I think this prayer teaches us Mary's posture. *Significance is not found in position, but in possession.* As Wesley said as long as I am yours and you are mine, doesn't matter the position. Another way of saying it teach me contentment to be a has been, a never was, a rockstar, or simply average in the world's eyes, just so long as I'm favored in yours. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the temple of God than have high position among the wicked and lost.

You know it is hard to talk about significance without talking about legacy. What is the legacy that you are leaving. Now there is a part of me that is cynical about the discussion because what deep working knowledge do you have of your great great grandfather or mother? Do you even know their names? I consider the words of Solomon who said, "No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them." (Ecc 1:11)

So the question is why do we remember Mary? Why does she have a legacy that generations of people have talked about and are considering? Is it because of Mary in and of herself - or is it because of her tie to one much greater, her link to the Savior of the world Jesus. Yes we hear Mary wrapped her child in swaddling clothes, pondered the events of his birth and treasured them. But every parent does that with their child, perhaps not the manger part. Why do we remember Mary? Not because of Mary but because of Mary's greater son. Consider the woman who had been forgiven much and extravagantly poured out a whole bottle of perfume on Jesus feet and he said, "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (14:8-9) Friends, there was only one name that matters, to one name every knee shall bow, only to one name can you call on it and be

saved. That name is Jesus. So we learn. *Significance is found in linking our story and activity to His story.* To a correlating degree the more we max out for that name - the more it matters.

So as we leave. You want significance? Let me ask you? How is your story and activity tied to his? And to what degree? When you go to school are you going just for you, or for him to glorify him by what you will learn and do someday. When you work whose kingdom are you building and who is it for? Is it in service to God or to yourself? When you have free time are you built up to serve better, or built up to serve yourself. You are free to lose yourself in service to Him, and in that there will and forever be significance. For the reality is that if you are in Christ it is ours to make much of him, regardless of what the world makes of us.

Because he is the King of Kings, and lord of lords. The one worthy of all praise, all glory, and all gifts. He is the one reigning then and reigning still who invites us to reign with him. He is the Savior God who has given both significance through the cross where we are forgiven, and purpose through the cross as he calls us to our own cross. He is not only the greatest name, but the only name that matters. He is what the angel told Mary, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. His kingdom will never end" (32-33) May you find significance in your service to him. Amen.