

Mary Did you Know?

III – Corrie ten Boom

Out of the 2nd World war comes the true life story of the Ten-Boom family. The German war machinery, under Hitler, was expanding it's strength in it's attempts to create a pure Aryan race that would rule Europe. As part of their purification program, they sought to cleanse Europe of the Jewish race by exterminating them. To enable this Hitler captured the imagination of his people by casting a captivating vision of a German Europe. Many, including parts of the church, were caught up in this vision and actively participated in enabling it. But as Germany expanded it's territory, there was at least one family in Holland that refused to embrace this vision – the Ten-Boom family.

It was a family that consisted of a father, elderly and weak; with his 2 daughters. Together they could not agree with the persecution inflicted upon the Jews, and in obedience to their Christian convictions, they determined to assist Jews – children, ordinary men and women, to escape Hitler's expanding and all embracing extermination. They became part of the underground train.

At great risk to themselves they would take in a Jew here, a Jew there, and house them. They built hiding places in the attic, the basement and the closets. They would drill their charges on how to hide under 30 seconds if the police ever came knocking on their door – and they would keep and feed these men and women until they could arrange to smuggle them out of the country.

For several months they were able to fool the police. Many were the night when they asked – “Should we do this? What if we are caught?” But their response was always the same – “These are God's children – how can we not do this?” and so they continued.

Eventually the police got wise and the fateful day when the Ten-Boom family was caught red-handed arrived. The Gestapo visited them, and discovered their ploy, and the Jews in hiding, dragged them out and charted them away. The Ten-Boom family itself was charged and

imprisoned in a concentration camp. There their elderly father eventually died, while the two daughters suffered untold hardship. Their health was broken down, and eventually ruined.

Each day they cried out to God for help, but each day their resolve remained firm that their obedience to Scripture to care for the alien had been obedience to the Lord, and that they had done the right thing, no matter how hard the trials.

Eventually one of the daughters – Betsy, contracted pneumonia and died in prison, but her sister Corrie survived the Holocaust, and lived to tell their story, and all thought the years she rejoiced in what they had done, even though they had paid such a high and terrible price for their obedience.

In the 6th month God looked upon the earth wondering “*In which family will the Christ Child be born*”, and his eye befell a young couple, Joseph and Mary, still yet to be married, and chose them as the host. Both came from the line of David, which God had already said would be the prophetic heritage of the Messiah, and both pleased his heart because he saw in Joseph a righteous man who would act on godly conviction, and in Mary, a woman of courage who would also act on godly conviction. He also saw in both of them a couple whose hearts would be obedient to him. And so God chose and sent the Angel Gabriel to them.

Mary's story is told us in Luke 1, while Joseph's is in Matthew 1.

When the angel Gabriel told Mary what God wanted of her, she fully understood and asked “*But how can I conceive since I am still a virgin?*” And Gabriel explained that this would be a miracle – after all God is the author of life, and he created the universe from nothing – creating a fetus in a virgin womb would not even begin to compare with the magnitude of creating a whole universe. Mary understood this, and submitted herself to God's will. She said “*I am the Lord servant. May it be to me as you have said*”. In other words, if you'd allow me to amplify her intention and words, she said “*Lord, I belong to you, you are my God, I am but a servant – Lord, you can do*

whatever you desire with me and with my life as long as it brings glory to you”.

These are deep words. In today’s equivalent they would be

- *“Lord, I am yours – you can do whatever you choose with my life.”*
- if you should choose to take it because it brings glory to you, then I gladly give it to you.
- If you should choose to strike it will illness to honor yourself, please do, I will not resist, I will not begrudge you, I will not require an account of you, or spend my time moaning and grumbling.
- If you should choose to take away my career and send me to serve as a missionary elsewhere – my life is yours Lord!
- If you should choose to have me remain single all my life long – and that my womb remain barren, and my manhood never sire a child – so be it Lord I am your servant! I will gladly do it for you.

These were Mary’s words. Obedience that does not begrudge God. Uncomplaining obedience. *“I am the Lord servant. May it be to me as you have said”.*

When the Angel approached Joseph, Joseph was a man in love, and he was confused by all this. His bride had began to show signs of pregnancy and yet Joseph KNEW that he was not the father; and every time he asked her, she gave this strange story of a dream and an angel. Had she been raped while she was asleep? Had she infact been unfaithful to him, he didn’t know – he just knew that he was not the father. He wasn’t about to judge Mary, or shame her, he just wanted to bring this thing to an end and heal from the emotional trauma of her betrayal. And so he determined to break the relationship quietly.

And then the angel visited him!

Once Joseph knew that this was indeed what Mary had told him, he resolved to obey the Lord and marry her. He too said *“I am the Lord servant. May it be to me as you have said”.*

I do not think at that point either of them could have forseen what impact their obedience would have on eternity.

- That this child who was heralded by an angel would become the Savior of the world
- that he would go to the cross for mankind
- that because of him many lives would be saved and turned to God
- that you and I today would be living as Christians, seeking to align our lives with the will of God
- that men and women would be healed miraculously
- that the dead would be raised
- that the deaf would hear again
- that the blind would see

ALL this I do not think they foresaw . . . they probably only saw that they needed to obey the Lord in the here and now!

So many are the times when we choose to disobey God, or we miss the cues of his will, and later on say *“If only I had known! If only I had realized how important that decision was. Oh Lord, if only you could reverse time and allow me one more chance!”* Mary did not know, but she obeyed, and as a result, today her name is remembered all over the world, and we will eternally be grateful to her because she changed the course of history with her simple obedience, and has touched you and I as a result. Just through simple obedience!

Mary probably did not known also, how much that obedience would cost her!

- It almost cost her her relationship with Joseph.

Now in the traditional society she lived in – much like our villages, the likelihood is that nothing is hidden from the eyes of the community. Community is wonderful, but in a traditional society - nothing is hidden – community comes at the cost of privacy. In your village everyone knew you, and knew your father and your fathers father, even your great grandfather. They knew when you were circumcised, what you cried out, who you cursed in your pain, and how you staggered away. Nothing is hidden, there are no secrets!

- Immediately Mary missed her first period, her girlfriends would have known.

- Her mother would have recognized with growing concern, her morning sickness.
- Her father would have seen the mid-section expanding and gone to ask her mother.

Nothing was hidden! And on enquiry, all Mary could say was that an angel visited me.

Imagine a scene, Mary is with her friends, and they have all noticed and have been whispering behind her back, but finally they come out with it and ask . . .

“So Mary, whatz-up? What have you and Joseph been doing? I hear the other day you went out to the potters pasture on a date, huh, what happened.”

And Mary would have responded and said *“What are you talking about, we haven’t been out anywhere.”*

And they’d say *“Come-on Mary, were not fools, we know what’s happening! Si ni we’ve seen you gaining weight. Huh, we know these things”*

“Oh that!” Mary would reply *“An Angel visited me”*

And they’d say *“Whatever”*.

Or they’d say *“Oh yeah, we know. And was the angels name . . . Joseph?”*

Snide comments, whispering behind her back, sniggering as she passed by. Mary was the village girl who got pregnant before wedlock. This was the price Mary paid for her obedience.

And for Joseph – the men probably cornered him and said

“Ai maze Joseph. Couldn’t you wait? Nini hii ume fanya?”

And Joseph would defend himself *“It wasn’t me, it was an angel”*

And they’d say *“Eh bwana Joseph, Ukivunja mguu ya Mbuzi, just admit, stop trying to deny, we could do a DNA test” (TRANSLATE).*

Or they say *“HUH! Are you saying some ka-teenie chomoka’d and beat you to it. Do you know who it is we deal with him?”*

There was no reasonable way Mary or Joseph could explain this thing. And as a result

- They probably lost their reputation as a godly couple
- They probably were shamed in the village
- They probably were rebuked by their family

This was the price they paid for obedience.

But there was more yet –

- They probably did not know the anxiety they would feel at the opposition of the Sanhedrin
- Or the sorrow they would feel to see their son arrested and beaten up.
- Or their anguish as their son was crucified

This was the price they paid for obedience. But their obedience changed the course of history. This fact has been well caught in the words of this song.

As I meditated and prepared this sermon this week, I was struck that this Christmas time is world’s AID’s day, and that Kenya today has 1.8 million AIDS orphans. That number is going to grow astronomically over the next 10 years.

There is no way we can start up enough children’s homes for these destitute orphans, and even if we could, growing up in an institution cannot compare with growing up in a family. Repeatedly studies have shown that institutionalized children do not turn out as well as those in family. 1.8 million orphans, and that does not include

- those who have been orphaned by other circumstances
- those who are thrown away in the rubbish heaps
- those who are thrown down pit-latrines
- those who are abandoned in hospitals after birth
- those who are thrown into the bush for dogs to find.

1.8 million children.

There is no way either that the Govt. can cater for such growing numbers. The only hope is if the people of Kenya would open up their homes and take in 1 or 2 orphans. The only way is if the Church would lead that procession.

There are 3 categories of people that God promises to defend and care for because often times these are the 3 categories of people in society that are most easily marginalized – it is the widow, the alien refugee and the fatherless orphans! Of these 3 God says in Ex 22:22

"Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. ²³ If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴ My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless."

That's how passionately he defends them. They are his children. And at this Christmas time his eyes are roaming over us, and he asks *"Who will care for my special children? What family can I place them in? Who will be a Mary, or a Joseph for me."*

The appeal is simple. And the obedience needed to fulfill it is simple. We can raise up many objections

"What if?

But who?

And then?

Maybe?"

It's one of those matters that you could theorize on infinitely,

- or create possible obstacles after obstacle
- reason after reason
- why now
- why not tomorrow
- how inconvenient it is . . .
- and you could put it off time and time again . . . as Mary could have . . .

but what God is looking for is someone who will say *"I am the Lord servant."*

Who knows what the potential of that child for the kingdom will ever become? To adopt or foster an orphan may not be convenient for you or I. It may in fact cost us dearly . . . but who here has the courage to say *"I am the Lord servant. May it be to me as you have said"*. Many of us have the capacity, and God has blessed us abundantly.

Some of us here even have empty bedrooms in our home that we call "Guest Rooms", but they see a guest only 2 – 3 times a year, and God is asking *"Would you give me that room? Would you take in my child?"*

For other of us here God has blessed us with all the children we wanted. He filled our cup . . . now he's asking *"Would you bless me with one of mine that needs a home?"*

For others yet God has said *"I have so many children that need a home, give me your womb, and give me your dreams for marriage, and take in my children"* Would your response be *"I am the Lord servant."*

My prayer is that as a result of this Word from the Lord, at least 10 of us here will. And not just new born infants, but the older children that nobody really wants, and the HIV children that are shunned, and the disabled whom everyone sees as a bother. I know one delightful 2 yr old child who is blind, and the likelihood is that no-one will ever adopt her because they see her as a bother . . . but she is God's child, and he is looking for a home for her . . . would you take her in? 10 single people or families.