

Series: Christmas (2006)

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Message 1 of 4

WHEN THE IMPOSSIBLE BECOMES BELIEVABLE

Introduction

1. Max Lucado, in his book *God Came Near*, contains the following dialogue: **pp. 29-32**.
There is a certain mystery, or as some would see it, a kind of absurdity about the incarnation.
2. Consider what it was for Joseph. He was asked to believe the impossible, what sounded to him as the absurd. How could he do that? How did **the impossible become believable**? Think about it for a minute. Mary, dear sweet Mary, was with child. Joseph had not been intimate with her. They were engaged - espoused - legally joined together to be married at a later date, but not yet - and she is with child! And she tells him that it is the will of God that she is to bear the Son of God! Joseph had to learn what we have to learn. The impossible becomes the believable when God is in the picture. More about that later!
3. This is not just a nice Christmas story. The impossible things that Joseph had to believe are the same things that we must also believe. And what I hope to show is that what had to happen to Joseph in order for him to believe the impossible, also must happen to us. But when it does happen, the impossible is no longer viewed impossible, but as the believable, and even the essential.
4. Let's consider together what impossible things Joseph had to believe and how he came to believe them.

I. THAT MARY WAS PREGNANT WITH GOD (In order for Joseph to believe this seemingly impossible concept, he must first believe several things)

A. Mary had not been unfaithful to Joseph (even though she was pregnant and it was impossible that the baby could have been his).

1. Common sense said that Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph. That was the only way

for her to be pregnant. It certainly did not make sense and it was certainly out of character for Mary, but there was no room for any other explanation.

2. In fact, Joseph was so convinced, that he saw no other way out than to divorce his espoused wife. He had two choices. He could publicly expose her. She would at the very least be disgraced. Or he could discretely seek a bill of divorcement and put her away quietly. Presumably Joseph would then be free to seek another wife and Mary would get along the best she could, but at least without the awful stigma that could have followed her.
3. The account does not fill in all of the details, so here is some reasonable speculation. What we do know is that an angel appeared to Mary (Luke 1) telling what was soon to happen. The angel convinced Mary of her condition and she rejoiced in the news. Somehow Joseph hears the news (she probably told him), but he does not endorse the explanation. If she had not been unfaithful to him, then she would have to be a virgin, pregnant with God, but that is impossible!

B. Mary had been chosen to bear the Messiah (Out of all the women who ever lived, Mary was the one given the highly favored position).

1. Joseph very likely was familiar with the OT. He was called a righteous man. Isaiah 7:14 spoke of the time when a virgin would conceive and bear a son and that son was to be called Emmanuel.
2. I assume that Joseph believed the OT, and he was aware of and believed that prophecy. But the idea that such a promise would apply to his espoused wife was more than he could accept. Again, out of all the hundreds of years that had passed since this prophecy and after all of the thousand upon thousands of Jewish virgins that had lived, the odds were virtually impossible that this could be fulfilled in his espoused wife!

C. Mary's baby had been conceived by the Holy Spirit (Certainly a mystery, but at least this much had to be true. This baby was God incarnate). Mary was happy, filled with singing. Joseph is totally bewildered, seeking a quiet divorce. I think he wanted to believe the best about Mary, but the odds were too great against it all. Such a birth was, from his perspective, impossible. Mary, pregnant with God, it couldn't be! The initial

hurdle was Mary's pregnancy, but that was not the only challenge in Joseph's journey from the impossible to the believable.

II. THAT THIS BABY WOULD BE THE PROMISED SAVIOR

A. His name reflected His mission

1. When Mary received the angelic announcement, she was told that she would give birth to a son and that his name would be called Jesus. Jesus was equivalent to Joshua or Yeshua - Jehovah saves.
2. I am not too sure what resonated in Mary's heart when she heard his name, but she was given a most interesting promise about her baby to be born. He would be great. He would be called the Son of the Most High. He would possess the throne of David. His kingdom would never end. (Sounds like Isaiah 9, doesn't it?)
3. But salvation had another side. Perhaps best reflected in another Messianic prophecy, Isaiah 53, the Savior would not be characterized by reigning, but by suffering and dying. That was a problem for many Jewish teachers. In fact, some dealt with the dilemma by proposing the existence of two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign.
4. Regardless, salvation was salvation from sin and sin involved a sacrifice, and there was a picture of sacrifice in the OT, but it was no ordinary lamb – it was God the Son! But how could this God-child be the Savior? Hearing that His name would be called Jesus had to press that question.

B. The announcement confirmed the mission

1. After Joseph had decided what to do about Mary, but had not yet acted upon it, he had a dream. An angel appeared and confirmed the same story Mary had received. (Matthew comments that all of this took place to fulfill the prophecy spoken of by Isaiah in chapter 7, verse 14. Apparently Joseph connected the dots of the announcement by the angel to the Scripture he knew and believed this to be the will of God as confirmed by the Word of God. This one to be born was Immanuel, “God with us”).
2. The name, “Jesus”, was given to Joseph just as he had spoken it to Mary, but with an important difference. To Mary the emphasis was on the reigning King (see Luke

1:31-33). To Joseph, the emphasis was a Savior from our sins. It was necessary for Joseph to embrace by faith that Mary was pregnant with God and that the baby would be the Savior. But how could he do that? Before we answer, there is one more impossible issue Joseph had to consider.

III. THAT GOD WOULD DWELL WITH THEM

A. God would dwell with His people

1. From the beginning, God designed man to have fellowship with Him. In the garden it was Adam and God and then a brief time later, Adam and Eve and God. But after the fall into sin, the relationship between God and His creation was changed.
2. God was separated from His people. He was the High and Lofty One. He was the awesome God, and after sin, He struck terror in the hearts of His people. Man would now run from God and hide from God instead of seeking His presence and enjoying His fellowship.
3. But in the separation, there was a promise of His coming in reconciliation. The prophets spoke often of the One who would come and dwell among them. It was spoken about in Scripture, but still viewed as virtually impossible. God dwelling with sinful men, how could that be?

B. God would dwell with this couple

1. As amazing and absurd as this may appear, God would dwell with this new family. Joseph was instructed to take Mary as his wife and to care for her and the child that she would soon bear.
2. Consider this. Joseph was to be the one who provided for his family - the one who took care of his wife and baby. Yet the baby was God dwelling among them! Isn't this an impossible concept? Absolutely! So how did Joseph believe all of this when it all seemed so impossible? How did he move from impossible to believable?

Conclusion

1. **Lucado, *God Came Near*, pp. 33-34.**
2. Now here is the point. The only way that Joseph was able to move from the impossible to the believable was the intervention of God. God spoke through an angel and Joseph

believed what God said. That which was impossible became believable and acceptable because God changed Joseph's heart.

3. The same is true for us. The Gospel, Jesus, the Son of God, coming to earth in the flesh, dying on a cross to bear our sins, rising from the dead on the third day, ascending into heaven and scheduled to return again in God's time ... it is all impossible. To the human mind it is absurd. But it is true. The very Christmas story with a pregnant virgin and the incarnation of deity and God dwelling with man – it is all impossible – but it is believable because what is impossible with man is possible with God! When God made it clear to Joseph, the impossible became believable!
4. The reason some of you don't believe the Gospel it is because God has not visited you. You are ready to write it off as a nice story, a mythological account of God coming to man. Oh, you are nice about it. You don't wish to make any public displays, but the whole thing sounds pretty unreal and impossible to you. That is not going to change unless He invades your heart!
5. Just about the time we are ready to walk away, the Holy Spirit of God takes the Word of God and generates new life in us. He regenerates us and we respond with faith, crying out for mercy because of the recognition of the sinfulness of our condition, but at the same time believing what just seconds before we would have written off as impossible and thoroughly absurd to consider with any serious intent. What made the difference? Immanuel, God with us!
6. Joseph would have never believed that Mary was pregnant with God, that the baby would be the Savior, and that God would dwell among them, had it not been for God coming to Joseph. The same is true for us. We would never believe the gospel without God coming to us. And to most of us, He has. The Christmas message for us is God has come and He dwells in us. Impossible? It sounds that way, but we can believe it! It is His promise! Some of you remain skeptical. It is our prayer that during this season, perhaps even this morning, God will open your heart and the impossible will become believable – that you will trust Christ as your Savior and begin your journey with Him! No gift could be greater at this time of year than the gift of God's grace to be received by undeserving sinners whom He brings from doubt and denial to confident trust in His Son, the Lord

Jesus Christ!

7. *Valley of Vision*, “The Gift of Gifts”, pp. 28-29