



What Was Mary Thinking? Are You Ready to Think Like Mary?

Every year Christmas comes around, I feel a consuming sense of happiness and oppression circling each other. The happiness comes from the childlike pleasure I still get with the Christmas season. I love nearly everything about Christmas from the contemplation of the birth of Christ to the lights and carols and the sparkle in the eyes of those who wish me a merry Christmas. The oppression comes with that dread that I won't get it right with Christmas, I won't take the time to enjoy it, I will miss out on what could have been. It is like that every year...concerts I wish I had attended, time I missed with my family because of work, the guilt of not doing enough for others. There is that feeling of having let the Christmas season slip past me and not gotten out of it what I should have had. I do know well enough that is not the reason for the season. It is after all about Jesus and the gift He is to us, but I still fall short in how I travel through the Christmas season. I have learned something though that I want to share that will mean all the difference, not just in the approach we take to the Christmas season but even more, to how we live each day this coming year.

James, one of the brothers of Jesus, has written a spectacular letter that provides rich insight into life. It is a practical help to anyone who wants to get it right with God and those people God has given to them. The book of James is not mystical, and it certainly does not have the intricate theology of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, but it is a great place to begin if you want to live the best life possible. James starts his book by introducing himself to those reading. **James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**, (James 1: 1a NIV). Before we turn to the primary discussion on this brief prologue, a crucial point must be made. Lest we mistakenly think that James is implying that Jesus Christ is not God but something other than God, it needs to be mentioned that the connective that puts the two together, "God" and "Lord Jesus Christ" is translated "and" in the English but the original Greek word that is used there is "kai" which means much more than simply and. Kai was a way of bringing two ideas or objects or persons together to indicate they were the same somehow. You might use the English word "even" to bring out this idea. It could then read instead, "...servant of God, even of the Lord Jesus Christ". In other words, God is another way of describing Jesus Christ, just as Lord is. Rather than separating God and Jesus Christ as two separate beings, James is actually putting them together. If you want to see God, there is Jesus Christ. Looking at Jesus Christ, then there is God. That is how you should think of this. God and Jesus Christ are one.

Now, James refers to himself as a servant of God and that is most interesting. He could have spoken of himself as the brother of Jesus, which of course he was. Or he might have noted that he was a child of God or a friend of God or even a believer in God, but he does not. It is servant and that is important to realize. He is not the only one who had this title in the Bible. Moses also, the mighty leader of Israel, both in the New Testament and the Old Testament, is referred to as a "servant of God". ...**making atonement for Israel, in accordance with all that Moses the servant of God had commanded.** (1 Chronicles 6: 49c NIV) **and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb...** (Revelation 15: 3 NIV). Paul also called himself a servant of God in his letter to Titus. **Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ...** (Titus 1: 1 NIV) Daniel, the great prophet to whom God revealed more about the end times than anyone other than John the Apostle was in fact a servant. He was enslaved by the Babylonians and forced to work

for Nebuchadnezzar their king. Although Daniel was given tremendous honor by Nebuchadnezzar, he was nonetheless a servant the entire time.

It is striking that when the angel Gabriel came to Mary in person, he made it clear to her that the reason she was going to be as a virgin giving birth to Jesus was because she was "highly favored". Perhaps we should consider seriously some of the details here. Mary lived in a tiny village where everyone knew everyone else's business. Rumors would be flying when Mary started showing. Impoverished women do not suddenly start gaining weight unless of course they are pregnant. Who was the father? Was it Joseph her betrothed or someone else? Joseph of course considered moving on from Mary because of her scandalous pregnancy, knowing full-well he wasn't the father. The rest of her life, Mary would have to live with the questions and skulking gossip regarding how she conceived Jesus. Then of course, there was the impending crucifixion that would break Mary's heart. Highly favored hardly seems the case and yet that was God's view of her. This conception was because Mary was so valued by God. We all know how wonderful it was that God chose Mary to have Jesus, but at the time, it might not have seemed so great.

Mary's response to Gabriel's news was terse yet packed with a lifetime promise. **"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.** (Luke 1: 38 NIV) The Church would be much different if it was comprised of those who took this same pledge. "I am the Lord's servant." That would mean that Jesus would be in charge of every single soul within the Christian community, and He would direct each action and decide every plan. Not all believers in Jesus take this step forward. It is one that requires absolute trust in God as a good and faithful King. There are two assumptions that must be made if this is played out in you. 1. You know who is in charge. It is God every time. Moses faced a great crisis of faith when the Lord drew him toward the burning bush and gave him the action plan. "You will go to Egypt and lead my people out of slavery." Moses was scared. He did not see how he was competent enough to take the reins of such a great responsibility. Sometimes it demands courage to be God's servant. Think just what Moses would have missed if he backed out of going. We face the same decision in our lives with God.

2. Details matter. You have no idea perhaps why God tells you to do this and not that, go here and not there. When God through the prophet Elisha told the Aramean general Naaman to go dunk himself seven times in the Jordan river if he was to be cured of his leprosy, each detail mattered. Not six times but seven. Not in one of the beautiful rivers in Aram but the muddy Jordan. Naaman threw a fit when he heard the instruction. **Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.** (2 Kings 5: 12 NIV) Fortunately for Naaman, his advisors convinced him to just try it! When he relented, Naaman was healed of the leprosy and his life was reborn in a sense. You may not understand why the details of God are important but someday you will see why, and you will forever be glad you took them seriously.

Many Christians pray like this. "God if you do this, then I will do as You Say." Who is the servant then and who is the king? Mary's amazing realization that the Lord was king, and she was His servant changed the course of history. Who knows what might happen if you make the same determination? You are the very one our Lord wants to use to make a difference in the world, the part of it that you can impact. The only way you can truly find out what your purpose is in life is by being a servant of Jesus Christ. He has made you wonderfully and in such a way as to inspire awe. Psalm 139: 14 makes that clear! **For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.** (Psalm 139:13-16 NIV) With God having paid so much attention to detail and careful development in making you, are you not the least bit curious why God has made you as He has? If, like Mary the mother of Jesus before you, with humility and commitment you make the same declaration as she did, that God can do with you as He pleases, you will find out just why you have been placed in this world.