

A Broken Christmas: An Unbroken Faith
By Jason Huff
December 24, 2018

Being a follower of God is not for the faint of heart. Long before the days of Jesus, God's people learned just how difficult God's road could be. Abraham was called to travel nearly a thousand miles from his home and live in a land that he could never truly call his own – a land promised to his descendants to come. His grandson Jacob was given the name Israel by God. Israel means, "He wrestles with God." Joseph was sent into captivity into a foreign land; 400 years later, his children's children's children were slaves in that same land. God led them out of slavery and gave them a home, but the faithful always found themselves outnumbered by those who would turn to other gods. The judges wrestled with God. The kings of Judah wrestled with God. The prophets wrestled with God. Being called by God, being assigned the task of speaking to God's people with His messages – that was a challenge too.

Mary and Joseph continue in that long line of God-followers who served God despite the costs. We know the nativity scene as we've seen it in art, in movies, in countless sermons. But the truth always tends to be darker, dirtier, grittier. We see how life was in ancient times – how Mary accompanied Joseph to Bethlehem, even though she didn't have to register, probably to avoid questions back home. Surely it would have been easier for a woman late in pregnancy not to travel – if it's dangerous now, it was far more dangerous then. We have pictures of her riding on a donkey, but likelihood is, she walked like everyone else. That they were denied room anywhere to have the baby – especially in Joseph's ancestral home, where surely he had relatives and cousins – probably shows that Mary's pregnancy made them outcasts in their family. To have a child in a stable or a cave...it adds to the humiliation.

Yet in the midst of all these crazy difficulties, God comes through, and He affirms these new parents, blessing them for their willingness to accept His plan. Shepherds come at the birth, amazed by the announcement of the angels that the Messiah has been born. Simeon, the old holy man led to the temple by the Holy Spirit, confirms the promises made to Mary and Joseph that they indeed are parenting God's promised one. Star-watchers from the East eventually come bearing gifts of royalty...gifts that will pay for a last-minute sojourn in Egypt to escape the wrath of a cruel and vicious king. Things are hard, but God never breaks His promises.

As we've been doing our series "A Broken Christmas" over the last several weeks, we have seen that Jesus came to set our world right by breaking the things that went wrong in the fall of man. He broke the endless cycle of sacrifices that only covered up our sin before God. He broke the chains of sin that kept us bound. He broke the powers and principalities of this dark world. And He broke our hearts – He proved our inability to save ourselves and broke our pride and idolatry in order that we might have hearts made of flesh, hearts that accept God's love, hearts that will serve Him.

But some things are never broken. God never breaks His promises to us. God never breaks faith with us. While we are prone to wander, God is always trustworthy, always reliable, always does what He says He will do. He is never less than perfect. He is never less than holy. He is never less than loving. And as He proved to Mary and Joseph, He always comes through.

Through two millennia, the faith once delivered to the saints has never been broken. It has been attacked on every side – by the might of Rome, by the swords of pagans, by conquerors, by rulers, by governments, by police, by laws. It has been persecuted across the globe, from Western Europe to the eastern reaches of Russia, from China and Japan to the shores of America itself. Bibles have been burned, congregations destroyed, saints martyred. But the faith continues.

The faith has faced challenges from within. Those who claimed that Jesus was a different God from God the Father, or something less than divine Himself. Those who tried to turn the church from a place where all were welcome to worship our triune God into a moneymaking venture. Those who denied that faith alone is what saves us. The church has splintered into factions and sects and denominations. Yet the faith still stands through all of it, standing on God's holy Word, His light to us, standing on the promise of Jesus that we too will experience a resurrection like His.

We are here tonight to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We come because of an unbroken faith, a faith passed down to us over the centuries, a faith that tells us that there is hope in a hopeless world, light in a darkened world, and peace in a war-torn world...and that hope, light, and peace is named Jesus. As we sang just a couple Sundays ago in church, "Take this world, but give me Jesus."

Give me the King of Kings lying in a manger; give me the baby born King of the Jews; give me Immanuel, God with us; give me the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace, the Mighty God, come to rescue us, coming as a child so that He might truly relate to us in every way but sin, and in so doing remove sin's curse from us. On this night, when our minds are filled with a day to come filled with presents and treats, may we stop for a moment and remember the only gift that truly matters.

If you give me an Xbox or a big screen TV, give me a car or a boat or a plane or a home, give me all my flawed human heart desires, I will enjoy it for a time. But the games will become stale; the pixels will burn out; the car and boat and plane will rust; the wood in my home will eventually rot. Only the gift of Jesus is eternal. Only He promises everlasting life. If we receive Him into our hearts, if we truly celebrate Him in our lives and make room for Him each day, we will have been given the one gift that will last forever.

And that's what we also celebrate tonight – the forever part of the gift. If Jesus was merely a good man with a curious birth, there'd be no reason to come together tonight. If Jesus was only a symbol of goodwill and charity, it's not worth coming out into the cold to hear me talk, that's for certain! And if Jesus was nothing less than the Son of God, in the flesh, the once-for-all time sacrifice for sins for all who are given faith – well, then, we all look pretty silly spending this night together.

But we believe the promise. We believe the unbroken faith. We believe that Jesus not only lived and died but lived again, and lives forevermore, and will come again to claim us, to raise His people from the dead, to take us into His permanent and eternal Kingdom. We are here tonight to celebrate not just Jesus' first coming but to welcome His second and await His return.

He will not return as a babe in a manger. He will come in power and might, in glory and splendor, and the whole world will see Him for who He is. Some will sing praises, some will curse, some will mourn, but all will bow down before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the great I Am. We worship the babe in the manger knowing that He is the Almighty, who willingly shed His rightful authority and glory for our sakes, to obliterate our sins and to claim our souls.

And that is where we stand tonight. Will you bow now or later? Will your hardened heart keep you outside the stable door? Or will you be moved to confess your sin and fall in line behind Jesus, obeying His will? Because the faith that has remained unbroken for 2,000 years will one day no longer be necessary. That's because faith will become sight; belief will become proof. Will you, on this night of nights, prepare your heart for Jesus' coming, so that when He returns He might already have found a home there?