
Emmanuel: Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph is quite an enigma in Scripture. The whole of what we know about him is revealed in a few short paragraphs. He is not mentioned at all after Jesus enters his ministry. Although it is not sure, most believe that Joseph died early in Jesus' life. So the Scriptural account of his life is brief.

Yet, he was chosen to be the man to rear the Lord Jesus. He would be the one to love Jesus' mother, to nurture and admonish Jesus as he grew up, to read Him God's Word and teach Him a trade and life's lessons. We know that Joseph lived long enough to pass on his carpentry skills and to be identified in the community as Jesus' father.

He is usually portrayed as a simple man. I am inclined to differ with that view and quite sharply so. Yes, he was a humble and seemingly, as reserved man. But no one simple could be faced with enormous responsibility that he had.

Whatever his personality was – however he carried himself with his family and friends – we know that this man was deeply godly and filled with grace and character.

The Character of God's Man

(v.18-19)

Joseph is a man with a problem. How he handles this is going to be a real test of his character.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

His Situation

(v.18)

These verses give us just briefly what he faced. He was engaged to a young lady. They were betrothed. They had taken their marriage vows in front of witnesses and promised to give themselves solely to each other. The marriage supper and the consummation were joyous events in the future. Now he is confronted with the fact that his betrothed is pregnant. In fact, she claims to have conceived by the Holy Spirit. He knows he is not the father. But how could this be possible?

His Struggle

(v.19a)

What an agony he is in. When he reads Deuteronomy 22:13-30, he finds that Mary is to be taken out and stoned if he brings a public accusation against her. Yet he loves her. The text here shows us what kind of man he was.

He was a righteous man.

He has been justified by faith. He was a man who was committed in principle and practice to doing what was right. He was a man of integrity and honesty. He had a deep sense of the holiness and character of God. He was someone who believes that God was pleased when his people are holy.

He was a merciful man.

He did not want to expose Mary to public humiliation. He loved and cared for her. In spite of his rights in this situation to humiliate her and to protect his reputation, he was moved with mercy.

His Solution

(v.19b)

His purity and mercy met one another in the best solution he could think of. He would give her a writ of divorcement, but do it privately and secretly. In this way, he would not partake in what appeared to be her sin and would not be identified with it while not subjecting her to the painful humiliation of a public trial.

But still he was considering what he should do.

Character is both developed and displayed in the fire of testing. What we are made of inwardly and spiritually is exercised and exhibited by agonizing decisions. The hotter the fire and purer the gold.

The Communication of God's Word

(v.20-23)

The Bible says that after he considered this solution, an angel came to him. At the point that he is about to make a mistake, God gives clear and unmistakable direction for Joseph's life.

²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

This godly man is going to be sustained in his faith by the receiving of God's Word. Truth is our great need in the midst of perplexing problems.

In God's Precepts

(v.20a)

"Do not be afraid, do not hesitate to take Mary as your wife." Ah, here it is. Have courage and conviction to do what is right.

Sometimes we just simply have to have the courage to do what the Bible tells us to do. We are a fearful and hesitant lot. We can think of all sorts of things that can go wrong. Fear and hesitancy are the mortal enemies of godly obedience.

In God's Perspective

(v.20b-21a)

Here is what is actually going on. God tells Joseph the facts that he would otherwise not know.

The Bible gives us the perspective on life. It tells us what is actually going on. Now notice, I did not say it gives us *a* perspective on live. Rather, the Bible is *the* perspective-because it is God's perspective.

In God's Purposes

(v.21b)

God had purposed that Mary would bear a son, that he would be named Jesus and that He would save His people from sin. This is God's purpose for this infant boy.

We can only know God's purposes by coming to His Word. Yes, people may help us – but they will help us best in direct relation to how of the Word is in their help.

In God's Promises

(v.22-23)

In the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, God had spoken a promise. Believing that promise enabled Joseph to do what he did. He watched the very details of what God said unfold before his very eyes.

A virgin conceived - His lovely maiden was expecting and that is what this text said would happen. As astounding and unbelievable as that may be, it still was so.

A child born - This was still yet a future realization for him. He had several long months to wait to see this part of God's promise fulfilled.

A Name understood - This child would gather up all the Emmanuel texts in the Old Testament and be the reality they pointed to. He would truly be "God with us."

This is what sustains the faith of all believing people. We hear God's promises and believe them to be true and live like they are great realities. Some we will see fulfilled quickly; others will wait months and for some, it may well be long into eternity.

The Commitment to God's Method

(v.24-25)

All of these phrases drive home the importance of obedience. As foolish and scandalous as his actions were going to appear to be, he still committed himself to simply doing what God had said. In doing so, his character demonstrated itself in godly conduct.

It Was Immediate

(v.24)

He wakes up and did right away what the angel had told him to do. There was no longer any struggle or turmoil or anguish. His love for God and his love for Mary met in an immediate obedience.

We need this in a real way today. Today, Christians want lots of time to begin to think about maybe obeying God if we understand all the ramifications. We ponder it. We predict what will be all its outcomes. Sometimes, loved ones, we just simply have to hear God's Word and do it. We have to do this individually and corporately. You, each of you, ought to have an internal commitment that says, "When I hear what God's Word tells me to do, I will do it." And we as a church must do that as well.

It Was Sacrificial

(v.25a)

Matthew makes a point that Joseph and Mary did not consummate their marriage until after Jesus was born. For 9 months, they lived as man and wife and yet chose not to enjoy their physical union until later. We do not know whether this was required or not. We do not that the testimony of Scripture points to their sacrificial obedience.

*It Was Complete**(v.25b)*

Joseph committed himself to obedience all the way to the end. When the child was born, Joseph and Mary named Him Jesus. Their commitment to God's method of obedience carried them all the way through in every detail.

Reflect and Respond

What a couple this is. Mary, a servant submitting herself to be at God's disposal and Joseph, a just and merciful man committing himself to immediate, sacrificial and complete obedience.

We can observe that this is how all God's people have their character developed and displayed.

There comes a problem which tests and tempts us.

We go to God's Word to find God's precepts, perspectives, purposes and promises.

We obey immediately and completely and sacrificially.

Joseph is an example of justice and mercy coming together. And that is precisely what the cross is. It is the justice of God being satisfied so that the mercy of God may be exercised. At the cross, Jesus received God's justice so that we can receive God's mercy. That is why we can come to the Table this morning.

It is our obedience that we must examine. Joseph left us a marvelous example to follow. Let us examine ourselves to see if we are committed to obeying God.

Jesus has come to save his people from their sins. Has he saved you from yours? Will you not this morning trust Him and bow to Him and be saved?