

Matthew 1:18-25

Date: Sunday, 12 December 2021

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Sermon: The Faith of Joseph

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Scripture

Matt. 1:18 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. 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:

Matt. 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Transcript

Embarrassing Moments

Have you ever had an embarrassing moment? I have with my clothes. I've had sweaters that were inside out, and back to front. You'd think that I would have realised that it was inside out and back to front. It just feels uncomfortable. Not to mention the fact that other people look at you weird for doing so.

Today, we're continuing our short Christmas series. Preparing ourselves for Christmas. And we come to the passage that many of us know. We know the story. Mary is pregnant with Jesus. And Joseph, her betrothed finds out about it. And today, I thought it would be worthwhile to focus on the faith of Joseph just for a moment. Because essentially, when Christ comes into Joseph and Mary's life, Joseph's life is like my sweater. His life is turned inside out and upside down. And I want us to see that Joseph's experience, is something that each one of us goes through. I want to encourage us to see the truth that what Joseph goes through is something that we go through. That we are never left the same when we encounter Jesus.

As we draw near to Christmas, it's worth asking, "have I responded to Jesus?" Have I changed in response to coming to know Jesus? Because if we have truly encountered Jesus, you'll be inside out and back to front, upside-down. Let's talk about three points.

He brings us low.

He calls us to obedience.

He came to save.

He Brings Us Low

I want to talk about the first point, that when we encounter Jesus, he brings us low. Because that's what he did with Joseph here. Let me show you,

Matt. 1:18 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.

Matthew 1:18 (ESV)

I need to explain to you what betrothed means here. Because it's a little different to when an engagement occurs. You hear of stories of engagements breaking up before the wedding. But a betrothal is something more serious legally than an engagement. To break up a betrothal meant that you had to divorce the person. It had serious implications for the parties involved, personal, social, familial, financial repercussions.

The betrothal would last about one year, but they wouldn't live together during that time. So you can imagine when Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, it would have rocked his world. He hadn't been with Mary at all during that time. And get this, we as the audience, as the readers and listeners know that the child was from the Holy Spirit. We know what's going on.

But if you put yourself in Joseph's shoes. At this time when he finds out about Mary, he doesn't know what's going on. It would have completely floored him. It would have completely changed his life. It may have changed the way that he saw Mary. Could he trust Mary after finding out that she was pregnant and he was not the father? His world would have been left in tatters, upside-down, inside out.

But consider that this was God's way of preparing Joseph to be Jesus's father. It's God's way of preparing Joseph's heart to receive Jesus into his home, into his family. It was God's preparation, humbling Joseph, making him low. And when we think about it, doesn't God do that to us? Doesn't he often bring us low in order that he might prepare us? To receive Jesus Christ into our hearts? To prepare us for an assignment he wants us to do?

I know that as I reflect on my own life, there have been moments that God has brought me low. In big ways. But in little ways as well. Losing glasses on a mission trip so I couldn't see clearly. Which caused me to see clearly that I needed to trust in God. That I needed to throw myself into the arms of my loving Heavenly Father. Losing friends along the way that helped me see that I needed to live more humbly before God and before others.

And I'm sure that as you reflect on your own life, you realise that there have been aspects which God has had to change, mould, shape. As one author writes,

You discovered things about yourself that you didn't want to know: that you were a sinner; that the person you had ignored or despised or opposed was the Saviour you needed. Your view of yourself, your life, your future, the things that mattered most to you - all came under threat. You had this in common with Joseph: you did not understand at the time that God was at work to prepare you to receive Christ.

This Christmas time, as we remember the true meaning of Christmas, as we remember that Christ came into this world, taking on human flesh, it's an opportunity for us to reflect. It's an opportunity for us to reflect on our own lives and think about the ways that God has brought us low. Just like Joseph. In order that he might prepare us. To receive him. In order that we might receive him.

Being brought low isn't something that is pleasant. Who enjoys being humbled. Who enjoys being last, and low? But when we look at Jesus Christ, when we look at Joseph, that should be the theme of our lives. We should see that being humbled, being last, being low is normal. Like Joseph, being humbled is part of God's plan for us. It may be uncomfortable, but it's necessary.

He brings us low.

He Calls Us to Obedience

But then, when we continue the story, we see that God calls us to obedience. Please have a look with me at the passage,

19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Back then under Jewish law, it was a capital offence to commit adultery. But because Israel was under Roman rule, it would have been very unlikely that this would have occurred. But I admire what Joseph does, because we're told that he is a just man. Another way to put it is that he was a righteous man. He wanted to do what was right, but he also wanted to do things with grace and mercy. Just as Micah 6:8 says, "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with the LORD." We're told that he didn't want to put Mary to shame. He could have divorced her loudly, he could have made a big thing of it, but he chose to divorce her quietly.

But then God speaks into Joseph's life. Joseph has an encounter with God. And, Joseph obeys. Joseph listens to the LORD and obeys. Please have a look at the passage,

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:

*Matt. 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"*

(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

It was worth reading that out, for us to pay attention to exactly what Joseph did. It may have been hard. Because really it goes against everything logically that Joseph was considering. Joseph was right in considering divorce, based on what he perceived. Joseph was right in his limited understanding of the circumstances that he was presented with. But just because he was right in his limited understanding doesn't mean he had the full picture. God had to send an angel, a messenger, in a dream of his in order to get God's perspective on his circumstances. In order for him to understand more fully what was going on. That it was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. In order for him to understand that this was actually a miracle. That Joseph was about to welcome the king of the whole world into his own life.

Joseph was challenged to welcome Jesus as saviour. Are we willing to welcome the saviour into our lives, like Joseph? Many of us say yes, but let's go further than that. Joseph was challenged to obey the LORD. And in a way, God was preparing Joseph to be the father to Jesus Christ. To be the father of the incarnate son of God.

I must admit that it is hard to be obedient to God when things don't make sense. Why should I love my enemy, when they have done me so much wrong? We can't see the forest for the trees. But just because we don't understand, doesn't mean we aren't to be obedient. Just because we find it difficult to obey, doesn't mean we are

let off the hook. It's in our obedience that God shapes us, in order to prepare us for what comes up in our lives.

It's like with parents. Telling their children what to do. You know when they get to the age where they're asking that dreaded question, "But why?!" "Because I said so!" Sometimes, you just wish children would take your word, because you are acting in their loving and wise interest. You know that they need to do maths because it's an important life skill. You know that it's best for them not to put the fork into the powerpoint. It's the same with the LORD, at times, there are times when he calls us to obedience, and we may not see the big picture, we may not understand but we are still called to follow him.

This Christmas, as we remember Christ being born, are we willing to remember that he calls us to obedience? Even when things don't make much sense? Do we have the faith to trust and obey God in circumstances that we do not understand?

Because he calls us to obedience.

He Came to Save

Finally, let's look at the third point today. He came to save. I want to show you again from the passage,

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."

Matthew 1:20-21 (ESV)

Christmas is a time to celebrate Jesus. Jesus born in a manger. It's an opportunity for us to sing Christmas carols. It's a time where we give one another presents. But really, the core of Christmas is this, that Jesus came to earth that he would save his people from their sins.

It's really easy for us to get carried away with everything else. Lunches, dinners, presents, Christmas carols. But at the very heart of why we gather and celebrate Christmas is because of Jesus.

He will save his people from their sins.

He will save us from our sins.

He will save you from your sins.

Let that sink in for a moment.

He brings us low. He calls us to obedience. But not before he saves us. Not before he rescues you and me from our sins. Not before he offers the free gift of eternal life to each one of us through his birth, life, death and resurrection. Not before he offers salvation that we might be born again.

People wonder why I talk about sin. But that is at the heart of Christmas, that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

In the past, I would sometimes be a little disappointed by Christmas, because sometimes the presents I got are not things that I expected, nor wanted. But the older I get, the more I realise it's not about the presents given to me. It's the greatest gift of Jesus Christ that God has given me. That's what I am most thankful for.

Maybe when you open your presents this Christmas, if you're a little disappointed, remember you have the greatest gift you could ever receive. The Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.