

Home For Christmas
Week 2
Matthew 1:18-25
“The Stepfather”

Introduction

What should I bring before The LORD when I come to bow before God on high? Should I come before Him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Would The LORD be pleased with thousand of rams or with ten thousand streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the offspring of my body for my own sin? Mankind, He has told each of you what is good and what it is The LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly before your God. **Micah 6:6-8**

Last week we looked at the Virgin Mary, and how she was chosen by God by His own sovereign election in order to give birth to The Savior of the world. And while we acknowledge that she was a good and righteous young woman, we also know that she was a sinner in need of saving just as we all are. I am not trying to discount Mary’s “goodness” as it were, but I am also being mindful of the fact that The Scriptures tell us that in the sight of heaven.

...There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. **Romans 3:10-12**

So we must be ever mindful not to “deify” either Mary or Joseph. While they were both spoken of as “righteous” in the *Bible*, it is because God declared them to be so by His wondrous grace! They were given righteous credit, because they took God at His word. It was their trust in God, that caused them to be declared as righteous in the sight of heaven. This is how we are saved as well. We believe God, and we are given righteous credit. This reality can be found all the way back in the book of Genesis.

Abram believed The LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

So along these same lines, God, in His sovereign election, chose not only a woman to bear His one and only Son, but He also chose a man to be that Son’s stepfather. We read Mary’s story in *Luke* and Joseph’s in *Matthew*. Both were descendants of King David as shown in their respective genealogies given in the gospels (Mary’s in *Luke* and Joseph’s in *Matthew*). They were the perfect couple to raise The Son of God.

So today, I would like for us to take a closer look at Joseph’s story. Most of us are well aware that he was a carpenter by trade (**Matthew 13:55**). But what else do we really know about the man that God chose to help raise His Son, The Messiah. I believe that the first chapter of *Matthew* reveals a great deal for us in regards to the heart of Joseph. He was a man of great faith and humility. And it would take a very special person indeed to try and guide a perfect child from heaven through this sinful world.

I imagine there were many times in Joseph’s life where he felt inadequate. Just think of how much weight was on that man’s shoulders. He was not sinless, but he was chosen to raise a sinless Savior! I wonder if he felt discouraged at his inability to live out a perfect example before his son. I have raised a few sons myself, and I remember all too well, how I was never able to be as godly as I needed to be for them. So I can only imagine how Joseph must have felt!

But today, for the sake of this particular study, I want to focus on the good things about Joseph’s character. Things that make him stand out when juxtaposed against the sinful men of this world. And if we look closely into Matthew’s nativity narrative, we can see the kind of man that The LORD uses. Joseph was a man much like God has called us to be through the prophet Micah. He was a man who *acted justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly* with his God. And that my bothers and sisters is what God requires from all of us. Please allow me to explain.

Do Justly (vs. 18-19)

The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

Matthew 1:18-19

As previously mentioned, God not only chose Mary to parent His Son, but He also chose Joseph. If this were not the case, then God would have allowed Joseph to get his divorce and leave Mary to raise Jesus on her own. The fact that the angel was also sent to Joseph enforces the notion that God did indeed choose both of these people for the purpose of raising The Savior.

Now we have already established the fact that neither Joseph nor Mary were perfect in the eyes of The LORD. They were both selected due to God's sovereign election as well as His wondrous grace. They were given grace, because both of them believed The Word of The LORD. This is indisputable truth, borne out in the Scriptures themselves.

Also as we mentioned last week, a betrothal in those days was considered a marriage, even though the couple had not yet come together as man and wife. And the *Bible* clearly tells us here that Joseph was a "just man". So what does a just man do when he encounters difficulty and needs to make an important life decision? He looks to The Scriptures for his answer.

Obviously, Joseph did not believe Mary's story of an immaculate conception. He cared deeply for the young woman, but as I am sure most of us would, he doubted her story. So he looked to the only place that he could find for the answer, namely The Word of God. In The Law of Moses, a remedy for such a predicament can be found. Moses allowed for divorce in the case of adultery.

If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, he may write her a divorce certificate, hand it to her, and send her away from his house.

Deuteronomy 24:1

In the eyes of The Law, Joseph and Mary were already married, even though their union had not been consummated. So Joseph's only remedy for what he saw as Mary's indiscretion could only be resolved by a legal divorce. So Joseph, being a "righteous man" saw this as his only choice. He would act according to God's Word. This is how we know that Joseph was just. He wished to obey God, even when dealt a crushing blow such as this. He didn't seek vengeance, or abandon all control of his emotions. He prayerfully sought God's remedy for his problems.

So many people today are able to behave themselves, until troubles come. Then they show who they really are. As it has been said, "when you get squeezed, what's inside you comes out." But a just man, such as Micah describes, seeks God's counsel, when his back is up against the wall. Just men handle themselves justly, for they care far more about doing things God's way.

I personally am very good at losing my temper. But to do so, doesn't accomplish God's will for my life. Therefore, I am required as a Believer to relinquish my ill feelings and allow God to be my defender in all things. One of the verses that I try to recall when I am faced with infuriating circumstances is found in the book of James.

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

James 1:19-20

Now, I wasn't there at the time, but I do understand a few things about human nature. And I am fairly confident that Joseph was none too happy to find out that his betrothed was carrying a child that he knew was not his. But instead of reacting in anger, he sought to do the will of God. Instead of going out in vengeance, he went to The Scriptures. These are the actions of a righteous man. And This is the kind of man that God uses!

Love Mercy (vs. 19)

So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. **Matthew 1:19**

Not only did Joseph seek God's Word for a remedy, he also took no delight in punishing Mary. Because he was a just man, he loved mercy. He had no desire to see the one he cared about subjected to public disgrace. So he decided to put her away privately. There was no lust for vengeance within him. What a noble heart this man had! Most men in his position would have wanted to lash out at the one who had hurt him, but this was not Joseph's way. Joseph was a man who loved mercy, and he was willing to extend mercy to Mary. Remember, at the time, he didn't believe her story. He, like most of us would do, assumed the worst. But even then, he had no desire to punish this woman that he loved.

The word that Micah used when he declared that God intends for His people to love "mercy" (translated faithfulness in the CSB) is *chesed* in the Hebrew. It is a word that is often translated in *The Old Testament* as "loving kindness". David used this word often in The Psalms to describe what he considered to be the greatest attribute of our God. The word simply means "grace". Those who know of God's grace know full well that it speaks of being given something that we do not deserve. It was by God's grace, that He chose Mary to deliver the Savior. It was by His grace that He chose Joseph to become His earthly father. It is God's grace that sent His Son into the world to save us. And it is by that same grace that we are saved. To be chosen of God is to not only receive grace, but to long to share it with others. God's lovingkindness, His *chesed*, to the sinful who do not deserve it, is truly a remarkable thing.

To seek vengeance or to slander those who have wronged us is an insult to the grace that we have received. In the book of **Matthew Chapter 18**, Jesus tells a parable of a man who owed a massive sum of money to the king. When the man begged for mercy, the king forgave his debt. Then shortly thereafter, this very same man violently confronted another man who owed him a paltry sum, and even threw him into debtors prison. When the king who had forgiven him the insurmountable sum heard of this, he was outraged and said:

...You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?

Matthew 18:32b-33

Those of us who have received God's grace should also be willing to share that Grace with our brothers and sisters. We are to be lovers of mercy and grace. I have been astounded over the years at how many "so-called" Christians are willing to gossip and slander their own brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus commands us that if we have a problem with a brother or sister then we should go to ***them***. Not to everyone else mind you, but to them. If the perceived wrong is not worth talking to the offender about, then it is not worth talking to anyone else about either. Simple as that.

Joseph was a righteous man. He didn't have any desire to expose Mary to open shame in the community. But rather, he preferred to handle the matter discreetly. He was a lover of mercy. So he was willing to show grace, rather than slander. Is it any wonder that God wanted this man to raise His Only Begotten Son? We are called to be the same as he; to act justly and to love mercy. And wouldn't the church be a wondrous place indeed, if we all lived according to this command? I for one would like to be remembered as a man of grace, rather than a man of retribution. Be merciful and leave the vengeance up to God. For He has said:

Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says The LORD. **Romans 12:19**

Walk Humbly With Your God (vs. 20-25)

But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

**See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name him Immanuel, (Is. 7:14)
which is translated "God is with us."**

When Joseph woke up, he did as The LORD'S angel commanded him. He married her but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus. Matthew 1:20-25

This is a truth that we must never forget: When we humbly seek God's guidance in all that we do, He will give us that divine guidance. Joseph wanted to do things according to God's divine Law, and as a result, God gave Him clarity in how he should proceed. Remember the verse we read earlier that commands us to be slow to speak, quick to listen, and to not seek retribution? Now we see what happens when we obey that command. The LORD sent His messenger to Joseph to reveal the truth to Him. Mary was in fact telling the truth after all. And God gave Joseph the specific instructions in the way that he should conduct himself.

And what did Joseph do when he received the Word from The LORD? He humbly obeyed. For you see, God's methods and God's will are not always made readily available to us, but by prayer and The Word of God, He instructs us in the way that we should go. Then it is our responsibility to humbly trust and obey. Just as Mary accepted and believed The Word of The LORD and replied, **"May it happen to me as you have said."** (Luke 1:38), Joseph responded in similar fashion. Joseph believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Is it any wonder that God chose these two to raise the most wonderful child who would ever live?

When Joseph woke up from his dream, he did exactly as The LORD had commanded. He took Mary as his wife. He named the young child Jesus, meaning *"The LORD brings salvation."* And he did his very best to provide for this wondrous gift that he had received. Jesus, The Son of God, grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:40), and just as the angel proclaimed, he came to be known as *Immanuel*, meaning God with us. For He was in fact one of a kind, fully God and fully human at the same time. He came to reveal to us the very nature of our Heavenly Father.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word. Hebrews 1:3

At the Name of Jesus, every knee will bow... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10-11

Christ came as a gift of God's marvelous grace to offer forgiveness for our sins. And what must we do to receive this wondrous gift of grace? We must, as Mary and Joseph did, believe and receive Him so we can be forgiven. So in the business of this season, I ask this one question of you this morning: have you received God's gift of grace? *The Bible* says, that **if we confess with our mouths "Jesus is LORD," and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we shall be saved (Romans 10:9).**

And once we have accepted Christ, we are called to become living sacrifices to His glory (Romans 12:1). And to do this, we must **"act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."** For these are the very same people that our God uses. This is the kind of person that I wish to become. How about you? Let all those who believe in Him say... Truth!!!