

- We are continuing this week in our 5-week Christmas series called “Christmas Re-imagined.”
 - We do not want to miss magnitude of what God did and the special nature of those he involved in his story.
 - This series is a look into what might have happened if those that experienced the events back then had responded differently. A blend of “what if” and looking at what actually happened.
 - Last week we looked at what we do with unmet expectations in the life of Mary.
 - This week we focus on the other half of Jesus’ parents, “What if Joseph walked away?”
 - What might have happened if Joseph had walked away from Mary and had ignored God.
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- Dad’s have the ability to influence our lives in ways beyond our imagining.
 - Every single person in this room has been shaped by their fathers.
 - We learn skills from our dads. I love to build things, fix things, work around the house and yard. I learned a lot of that from my father. Often when I get engaged in a project, I find myself thinking about my dad.
 - We get values from our dads. We remember things that they told us. We remember advice in key situations. Sometimes it was simply the quiet strength of being together. Sometimes it was a key word. Sometimes simply watching them model how to live. I learned more about how to live in marriage from my father than anyone else.
 - Other times what we learn is not so great. We learn from their absence from our life.
 - We learn hurt and rejection. We learn patterns of anger or addiction.
 - Our greatest memories and deepest hurts are often from the same man.
 - I wonder the impact of his dad on Jesus life.
 - I wonder as he went into full time ministry at age 30 if his dad was still around. I wonder what lessons he learned that he passed on to his disciples that he learned from his dad.
 - I wonder how often he spoke of his dad. I know he spoke a lot of his father, but what about his dad.
 - Because while God was Jesus’ father, Joseph was his dad.
 - I wonder what things he did and ways that he responded he learned from watching his dad.
 - I wonder what went through his mind when he was hanging in agony on the cross.
 - I wonder in the moment when his father was blocked from him and he cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” if he remembered his dad.
 - I wonder the impact of this man, a man about whom we know very little, a man who we have nothing recorded about anything he ever said.
 - I wonder if the greatest act of Jesus was a reflection of greatest act of his earthly dad.
 - And mostly I wonder what might have been different if Joseph had, in all his humanness, turned his back and walked away.
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- The lesson of Joseph, whether you are a man or woman, young or old, is that **IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE.**
 - It is only when we have the courage to follow Jesus from his perspective that our lives have an impact that outlasts us.
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- The bulk of what we know about Joseph is recorded in the writings of Matthew, one of the 12 disciples.
 - I am sure he heard the stories from Jesus and maybe even from Mary about Joseph. He recorded for his readers a little of how Jesus birth happened and Joseph’s role in it.

Matthew 1:18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

- We explored this a little last week. We saw the unmet expectations of Mary and how her world was turned upside down.
- Matthew, writing from the future, knew that this baby was a miracle conception.
- Divine DNA proceeded from the Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit. This is so important because without this, Jesus would not be God. If not born of a woman, then not fully man. It is this uniqueness that made him the perfect sacrifice for us.
- While Matthew knew all this, Joseph did not.

19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

- There is so much wrapped up in this sentence.
- When I was younger, I assumed Joseph was going to divorce Mary because he did not *know* that the Holy Spirit was responsible for her pregnancy.
- It was not that he did not know – he did not *believe* her.
- Consider again how Hebrew marriages worked:
- 1. Most often the marriages were arranged. In all probability, Joseph and Mary knew they were going to be married for some time. A contract had been drawn up and agreements made. Since it was a small town, they had probably known each other or at least who each other was for years.
- 2. The engagement or betrothal. This time period lasted up to a year and during this time, the couple was legally married, but not living together not having consummated the relationship. This time was to test their fidelity and integrity. It was a time to spend much time together, to work on loving each other, to know as much as you could about each other. To spend time in each other's homes with the future in-laws.
- In order to break the engagement, you had to get divorced.
- 3. Was the marriage ceremony itself. The beginning of a life and family together.
- They were in phase 2 and when she was found to be pregnant, it was catastrophic.
- I guarantee there was quite a discussion between Mary and Joseph. I am sure she explained it to him. I am sure she described the visit of the angel. I am sure there were tears.
- But no matter what she said, no matter what she tried to explain, all he could think, naturally, was that Mary had been unfaithful.
- It must have torn him up inside. His heart had already come to trust in her, she seemed incapable of doing such a thing, and it must have felt like his heart just fell out of his chest! He loved her. He had planned so much. Now she was shamed. He was embarrassed. They were both laughingstocks. The subject of gossip and whispers and innuendo.
- His own parents and family would have wanted her gone. They did not want their son to marry this woman. It would have sullied their son's honor and brought his honor into doubt. It would tie their family together with another family whose daughter was promiscuous and lead to the assumption that this was Joseph's child.
- The contract could be torn up. The deal was going to be off.

I. Joseph could have walked away.

- Joseph had all the power in this situation. Mary had none. Joseph had the moral high ground. Joseph could have done a whole host of things.
- He could have exposed Mary to total disgrace. He could have made a public spectacle of her, telling his side of the story, gaining sympathy for his plight.

- He could have made Mary out to be a villain. She was to blame. I am a good guy and this is how she treated me. I am spurned. It could have even raised his standing with the people around me by pushing Mary into the mud. It wasn't going to ruin his life!
- He could have had her executed. He could have led the charge. He could have demanded the justice that was in the law. Then he wouldn't have to see her regularly and be reminded of his hurt and disgrace.
- This story is the only one of the ones we are examining that actually tells us some of what the person was planning to do. He was planning to walk away.
- Joseph did not believe Mary. He was convinced of her unfaithfulness. He was going to end the relationship. To him, his decision seemed like the right one.
- Joseph was a man of character. We are told he was "faithful to the law." Some versions say he was a righteous man. He had a God relationship. He already pursued a right life and a right response to God. He was a man of character.
- We are told that not only was he a man of character, but he loved Mary and was considerate of her.
- He chose to divorce her quietly. By severing the relationship without fanfare, he would buy her time and shield her from much of the disgrace and shame that were going to come anyway. Even then, the one thing he would do is distance himself from it all.
- Have you ever been utterly convinced of something? I mean, totally convinced. You knew in your heart that you were right. You thought it through. You considered the information you had.
- You used logic. You put all your arguments right in your mind. You would persuasively argue your point with others. You would animatedly discuss your view.
- Have you ever done that . . . and then found out you were dead wrong?
- From Joseph's viewpoint, he could only see things one way.
- There was no room for other interpretations.
- He was logical. He was thoughtful. He was considerate. And he was wrong!
- His perspective on his situation was not informed by the Holy Spirit.
- That's our problem. Logic, emotion, the world around us all fall short.
- **IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE.** Courage needs to be informed by a viewpoint that is not our own. Joseph needed a different perspective. We need a different perspective.

II. Joseph needed God's viewpoint.

- Joseph was on the verge of blowing it. He was on the edge of walking away from God's plan and in doing so he would have missed out.
 - He needed a new perspective.
- 20 But after he had considered this,*
- To consider means to ponder, to deliberate, to revolve around in your mind.
 - I guarantee it was all he could think about. It was the first thought on waking up and the last thought when he went to bed. He would go through the motions, make small talk with those he ran into, try to sleep but it would not come. Listen to a message the synagogue that he would remember none of.

an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

- Joseph, I know this all seems like the right thing to do. Don't do it.
- Mary is telling the truth. Marry her. Build a home together.
- This is no ordinary son. You are to call him Jesus (not Joseph after his father, which was one of Jesus brother's names)
- This is no ordinary son. He will save his people. He is the promised one. You are going to be the dad of the focal point of history. Your actions will echo down through time.
- You are my caretaker for my son. I am appointing you to raise my boy.

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

- Joseph, I know this seems like a disaster to you. Listen to me. Obey me. Adjust your life to me. Don't be afraid to do what I am asking of you.
- **IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE.**
- Now we reach the second moment in Joseph's life where he could have turned his back. First, he could have done it simply based on his best consideration and knowledge and personal convictions.
- Now he has heard from God himself.
- I had coffee with another pastor recently who was facing a difficult decision and asked God to speak to him in a dream to help him know what to do. Have you ever done that? God, please show me clearly so I know what to do?
- God showed Joseph. But when he woke up, he was still faced with a huge decision. Do I listen? Do I change? Is God's word enough for me to pull the trigger?
- He could have continued on his path. He could have carried out his plan. He could have easily dismissed the angel as a nightmare or bad food or the result of what he was wishing in his head.

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

- He "did" – to act rightly, do well, to carry out, to execute

III. Joseph acted based on God's perspective.

- Joseph put God's call above all other voices. It was not easy. There is a reason why the angel began his instructions to Joseph with the words, "Do not be afraid . . ." Joseph, this is going to take courage.
- It will take courage to resist the plunge towards public vindictiveness. You have to keep your mouth shut and support Mary, not only privately but publicly.
- It will take courage to listen the voice of God and not succumb to the pressure of your family and friends.
- It will take courage to remain true to Mary in the face of societal pressure and disdain.
- It will take courage to abstain from sex until after the birth of Jesus.
- When we act with obedient and sacrificial courage, it sets a pattern.
- After Jesus was born, and Herod was out to kill Jesus, Joseph had to do it again.

Matthew 2:13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

- After he did this, and lived there for a while, it happened again.

Matthew 2:19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

- Joseph began a pattern living that took God at his word. A pattern of courageous decisions. A pattern of wholehearted following and adjusting. A pattern that Jesus saw growing up. Experienced.
- A pattern that could have been an entirely different pattern. One that said no because it was easier. A pattern that take the way society works instead of the way God leads. A pattern that put self before others. A pattern that lived convinced of his own rightness instead of allowing God to break the box.
- Instead, Joseph modeled sacrificial love.

- When he took Mary as his wife, he decided to bear the responsibility and shame as if he and Mary had sinned!
- He moved to Bethlehem, then Egypt, before ending back in Nazareth. His life was chaotic.
- Even when he came back, he had to endure shame, score, rumor and unbelief. Even 30 years later, no one ever believed that Jesus wasn't Joseph's son. When people questioned Jesus identity, they said:

Matthew 13:55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son?"

Luke 3:23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.

- Joseph accepted the responsibility of caring for Mary and family even though they had to constantly live under a cloud of public shame, as though they were guilty of immorality.
- Joseph accepted the commission to be a dad to a son that ultimately wasn't his.
- How we respond today matters. Our choices in the here and now impact our children. They impact those around us. They even have eternal consequences.
- **IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE.**
- It takes courage to say no.
- It takes courage to say yes.
- It takes courage to face our sins and hang-ups.
- It takes courage to reject what all our friends say is OK and follow God's wisdom.
- It takes courage to risk comfort for something that is needed and important.
- May we act with courage and sacrifice in the face of difficult choices.
- Don't walk away. Don't ignore God's voice. Don't resist his gentle convictions. Don't do your own thing because it seems right. Listen to his perspective. Act on that instead.
- Jesus' dad (Joseph) heard from Jesus' father (God).
- He listened. He obeyed.
- 30 some odd years later, as Jesus hung on the cross, I wonder if he was strengthened by the example of his dad.
- As he chose to bear shame that he did not deserve.
- As he cared for a humanity that did not believe what he said.
- As he loved and cared for those that many saw as unworthy.
- As he endured the mocking and whispers of those who put him down.
- As he poured out his life despite the unfairness of the situation.
- I wonder if he remembered the example of his dad.
- And Jesus, God and man, who was adopted, accepted and loved by Joseph as his own, died, so that you and I can be adopted, accepted and loved by God as his own.