



Thank God for Joseph

He's the last of 42 people listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Some even question if he should be listed since he wasn't biologically related to Jesus. But he was the legal father. Today, we get to look a little closer at the man named Joseph. I'll be honest, this was one of the more difficult sermons to write, mostly because we know so little about him. I thought about having a sermon on everything that Joseph ever said. If we would do that, we could just have a moment of silence and I'd say, "Amen." There's not one recorded word that ever came out of Joseph's mouth. But that doesn't mean there isn't a sermon to be had from this instrumental and influential person in our Savior's life. As in many cases, sermons or lessons are more caught than taught. And that's the case with Joseph. He is the epitome of someone whose actions speak louder than words. Let's see what lessons God has in store for us from this man.

And perhaps the first lesson that jumps off the page is his **gentleness and love**. Imagine being Joseph. He is engaged to Mary and for them, that meant they were legally bound. We get marriage licenses. They would have had engagement licenses. And somehow he finds out that Mary's pregnant. And he knows it's not his. According to Matthew's gospel, this is his response, "He was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, so he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

That's remarkable. Hurt people usually want to hurt back. And Joseph could have really hurt Mary. Besides ruining her reputation, according to Jewish law, which took God's gift of marriage so seriously, Joseph could have taken Mary to court and she would have faced the death penalty. That would have been culturally acceptable and maybe even the culturally expected thing to do. Maybe you remember that one scene from Jesus' life where the elders have dragged an adulterous woman into the streets and Jesus steps in and says, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). That woman could have been Mary. That's how serious adultery and betrayal was deemed. Seemingly at this point, Joseph didn't know about the angel visit yet. He didn't know about the miraculous conception. He just knew that the woman he had pledged himself to was pregnant. But he doesn't think about himself. He doesn't think about his own feelings. He doesn't think about being right. He thinks of Mary. And in so doing, he thinks of her unborn child.

Do you see God's hand at work? Our subtitle for our Jesus' Family Tree series has been, "God's Faithfulness Through the Generations." We looked at Abraham and how God kept the promise of the Savior alive through a miraculous birth to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Or last week we considered the royal line of David. And even though the nation was overcome by the Babylonians, God kept a remnant alive, keeping the promise of the Savior alive. And now God works through Joseph. I've often thought about how God used Joseph's protective nature to keep Jesus safe from King Herod later on. But I don't know if I've treasured God's hand in what it meant that he picked someone as gentle and loving as Joseph to preserve the line of the Savior even at this point. If Mary had been engaged to some hot-headed, I'm-not-going-to-be-embarrassed kind of a man, Mary could have died and so could have an unborn Jesus. But God in his wisdom used Joseph's gentle love to preserve our salvation.

And it makes you wonder, how can God still use our gentleness and love for his purposes? The pressure is off a bit – the Savior being born into the world doesn't depend on our gentle love. Jesus was born, lived, died, rose, and ascended into heaven. His work on earth is done. But he still uses us to do his work of bringing the news of that salvation to others. And there's a reason he says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all" (Philippians 4:5). Or people will recognize you as a disciple of Jesus by your love (John 13:35). So let's make that our prayer today. Be thankful that God used the gentle love of Joseph to preserve Jesus' life, but also ask that God might give us a spirit of gentle love so others can know that Savior.

Now there's other lessons we can learn from Joseph. Besides his gentle love, another sermon we "catch" from him is his **Faithful Obedience**. In no way am I saying that Joseph was perfect. You may get Christmas cards with halos around Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. We know from Scripture, that Jesus was the only perfect person to walk this earth. But that doesn't mean we can't learn some valuable lessons from Joseph's faithful obedience and how God used his faithful obedience in our Savior's life.

Consider some of the things Joseph did. After an angel says, "Don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded her. No questions. No bartering. No, "What's in it for me?" No, "Prove it." Just faithful obedience. Or how does the Christmas story begin, "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree... So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David." If Joseph would not have obeyed the royal decree, not only would he have gotten in trouble with the law, God's 500-year promise that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem wouldn't have been fulfilled.

And it continues. After Jesus is born, an angel again appears to Joseph, "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back." I love the simplistic way Scripture says what happened next, "So he got up, took the child

and his mother during the night and left for Egypt” (Matthew 2:13-14). No, “How’s this going to affect my job?” No, “Can’t I say goodbye to my family?” God speaks. Joseph obeys.

It could have been so easy for Joseph to say, “I didn’t sign up for this.” But God signed him up and Joseph took the responsibility and privilege that God had given him seriously and he sought to faithfully carry it out. Whether it was protecting Jesus’ physical life or being a spiritual leader in the home, Joseph faithfully obeyed. And consider how God used that in our Savior’s life. Yes, Jesus was perfect. But he was also tempted in every way that you and I are. If Joseph had just said, “Nah, Mary, you take Jesus to synagogue. I’m going to watch the game,” how could that have been an extra temptation for Jesus to carry out the 3rd commandment of keeping the Sabbath Day perfectly for us? Or if Joseph had said, “We’re going to cut back on offerings a bit this year. It’s a tough economy,” how could that have been an additional temptation when the devil offered Jesus the riches of the world? Point – God’s used and earthly father to teach Jesus about his heavenly Father’s will. God used Joseph’s faithful obedience as a tool to strengthen Jesus in his perfect obedience for you and for me.

What has God signed you up? And I’m going to single out dads here a bit. Whether you’re a biological dad or stepfather, don’t underestimate the lessons your children catch from your faithful obedience or lackthereof. Statistics are off the charts about a father’s influence on their children’s spiritual well-being. If this “church thing” often takes a back seat, chances are, it won’t be super important to your kids. If you don’t selflessly love your spouse as Christ loved the Church, your sons may not love their wives as God designed and your daughters may not look for that in a husband. I don’t say that to pressure you. I say it to encourage you. Look how God used Joseph. Embrace the role that God has given you. You’re not asked to raise the Savior of the world under your roof. But you have opportunity to make an eternal impact on your children as you lead them to their Savior.

And if that feels like a lot of pressure, again, imagine what Joseph was going through. Talk about pressure. I can only imagine what was going through Joseph’s mind as he bundled up Mary and Jesus and headed south to Egypt. “The Savior of the world’s life depends on me.” Or imagine the sweat Joseph felt when they temporarily lost Jesus when he was twelve. Yes, there was pressure. But Joseph could still sleep well at night because no matter the situation he faced as a husband, a father, or a citizen, he **trusted the Lord**.

Without a doubt, Joseph knew he would screw up his role. Yes, we’ve highlighted his gentle love and his faithful obedience in our lesson today. But without a doubt, Joseph wasn’t always gentle. He wasn’t always loving. He wasn’t always the faithful, obedient child of God. And if he were today, I’m sure he’d be the first to confess that (and it would be the first time we’d hear him speak). How can I be so sure? Because let’s go back and see one of the first things we hear about Joseph. After an angel told him not to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife. The angel also instructed him, “And you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” And that’s exactly what he did. He named him Jesus.

When Joseph first heard that Mary was pregnant, he asked, “What child is this?” But it didn’t take him long to praise, “What a child this is!” When the shepherds came and worshiped this boy, he was amazed. When Jesus was forty days old and Simeon lifted that child into his arms saying that he has seen God’s salvation, Joseph marveled at what was said about this child. When 12-year-old Jesus was giving lessons to the temple teachers, “Joseph was astonished.” Simply put, by God’s grace Joseph knew the baby under his roof would live up to his name. He would save people from their sins, including his. Including yours. And so today, as we conclude our 3-week look at Jesus’ family, join me in praising God for the 42 generations of God’s faithful grace. But most of all, trust the One who’s at the end of the line. Jesus is not just the carpenter’s son. He’s your Savior. Trust in him and may that lead us to respond with gentle love and faithful obedience so others see him as the same. Amen.

EYEDROP: Joseph never speaks a recorded word in Scripture, yet his life speaks volumes. When hurt and confused, he chose gentleness over retaliation. When God spoke, he obeyed—without delay, without conditions. Through Joseph’s quiet faithfulness, God protected the Savior of the world. And ultimately, that Savior protected Joseph as Jesus lived up to His name: “The Lord saves”—including Joseph, including you. Today, thank God for the way he used Joseph’s gentle love and faithful obedience to secure our salvation. Amen.