

Session 2

December 9, 2018

JOSEPH'S OBEDIENCE

Matthew 1:18-25

Without a doubt, Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, is one of the great unsung heroes of the faith. We know little about him; but what we *do* know is all good. He was a descendent of David, placing him in the lineage of the Messiah he raised. He was a carpenter by trade, considered a common but honorable profession. He was acknowledged as the father of Jesus by those of his region (John 1:45). He observed the Jewish feasts and festivals (Luke 2:41-42) and is last mentioned in Scripture as leading the family to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. He is notably absent after that. His absence at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee in John 2 as well as Jesus' concern for the welfare of His mother Mary at His crucifixion in John 19 suggest that Joseph had died sometime prior to the public ministry of Christ. Yet Joseph was a remarkable man, chosen by God to participate in His divine plan of redemption. The initial announcement of Joseph's involvement in that plan gives us a simple but important picture of who Joseph really was.

Joseph was an honorable man (vv. 18-19). Our introduction to Joseph comes at the announcement of Mary's pregnancy. Both Matthew and Luke make it clear that Mary and Joseph were already engaged to be married when he became aware that she was expecting a baby. Imagine the anguish Joseph must have felt! Their engagement had been morally pure, the baby was not his, and Joseph would be well within his rights to shame Mary publicly for her seemingly disgraceful behavior. But even before Joseph is told, Matthew quickly points out to the reader that this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This union of the Holy Spirit and the virgin insured that Jesus was God incarnate, free from the taint of human sin, and thus fit as the substitutionary atonement He was destined to be. Joseph's preliminary decision to "put her away privately" demonstrates both his love for Mary personally, as well as his desire to shield her and her family from the shame that would surely accompany the apparent scandal.

Joseph was an open man (vv. 20-23). The verb tense here indicates that Joseph's mind was made up...but barely. The most likely scenario is that Joseph had been anguishing about the best way to handle the situation and had just settled on his course of action when God suddenly intervened. It's noteworthy that Joseph walked sufficiently close to God that he was open to God's methods (in this case a dream) and His message. The message contained important *information*: the baby was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and He would be a son. And the message contained *instructions*: take Mary as your wife, and name Him Jesus, which basically means "the Lord is salvation." The angel of the Lord then explained the significance of the name itself (v. 21b), followed by Matthew's explanation of the significance of the whole event in verses 22 and 23.

Joseph was an obedient man (vv. 24-25). The character of the simple carpenter is demonstrated in his simple obedience. This was no doubt the first good night of sleep Joseph had enjoyed in a while! Immediately upon his rising, he followed through on his commitment to His God and His betrothed. The implication is that he married Mary immediately, removing any possibility of disgrace while at the same time affirming his full participation in God's plan for their new

family. It's significant that she remained a virgin until giving birth to the Lord. This too, removed any doubt as to who the father of this child really was. Finally, the father called the firstborn Jesus, fulfilling both the command of the angel and establishing the purpose for which Emmanuel had come.