



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 12th January 2020

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25**Subject:** Part 4 – Joseph

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." ²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." ²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

Living through momentous occasions are not always easy and may not be perceived as such at the time. We see this when we read the various accounts throughout Scripture; for example, when Noah was building the ark, during that 120 years he warned the people, but they did not understand the times they were living in. Many of the people whom God chose to be His instruments were not always aware of the significance of their times, their words or their actions.

When Mary and Joseph were betrothed, I'm sure that they were not aware of the significance of their contract with each other. Yes, they knew they were being promised to each other for the rest of their lives, that was momentous enough for them I'm sure, like anyone married knows. But theirs was to be of greater significance because once they were betrothed to each other, God wanted to use them in a very special way. Amazingly the writers of all four Gospels as well as the writers of the Epistles tell us little to nothing about Mary and Joseph but what is said has a lot to teach us, often there is a lot in a little within Scripture, as in this case. Verse 18 sets the scene for us –

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph when she found that she was with child, as it says in this verse. It's quite possible that both Joseph and Mary were quite young when they were betrothed. Girls were often betrothed as young as twelve or thirteen, and boys were usually a few years older than that. There were three stages to a marriage.

The 1st was the arrangement of the marriage which was almost always arranged by the families of the bride and groom, often without consulting them. A contract was made and was sealed by payment of the mohar, the bride price, which was paid by the groom or his family to the bride's father. The mohar served to compensate the father for wedding expenses and to provide a type of insurance for the bride in the event the groom became dissatisfied and divorced her.

If all parties agreed then the 2nd stage was the kiddushin, the betrothal. This was a determined time, which was considered legally binding as soon as it was made

and therefore it could only be legally broken like a divorce process. It lasted generally a year. During this time, the betroth didn't live together, in fact it was a time where fidelity was tested. During that period the bride and groom usually had little, if any, social contact with each other.

Then there was the 3rd stage, the huppah, the formal marriage where it would be consummated, and as the text says "before they came together" that is prior to the marriage and prior to the consummation. Sexual purity is highly regarded in Scripture, in both testaments. God places great value on sexual abstinence outside of marriage and sexual fidelity within marriage. Mary's virginity was important evidence of her godliness. Her reason for questioning Gabriel's announcement of her conception was the fact that she knew she was a virgin (Luke 1:34). This testimony protects from accusation that Jesus was born of some other man. It was in the 2nd stage, the betrothal stage when Joseph was told that Mary was pregnant, during the time of testing fidelity.

While Luke focuses on Mary's perspective, Matthew actually focuses on Joseph and what was going on in his heart and mind. Joseph's name means *May he Add or a Joyous addition*. We don't know much about Joseph, only later on that he was a trade's person, but we don't know his age, or what he looked like etc, but God took care of whom he chose. No words of Joseph are ever recorded – No record of his emotions or his interactions even with the angel, but his actions do the speaking. His perspective begins in verse 19

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Although Joseph and Mary were only betrothed at this time, he was considered her husband and she was considered his wife. So Mary's pregnancy would have been devastating for the whole family as well as for Joseph. Why did

Joseph want to end this quickly and quietly? Remember at this point Joseph had no reason other than to believe that Mary was lying about how she became pregnant and was an adulterous or maybe, she was telling the truth, but could he believe that really? This must have been confusing, even devastating. He'd been hurt at this point! Can you imagine it?

Remember at the time when this happened, the Laws of the Old Testament applied. There are 613 Laws known as the Mitzvot, of these 25% were regarding relationships. God forbids adultery as we see in Exodus 20:14, but in Deuteronomy 22:23-24 it goes on to stipulate that a betrothed virgin who committed adultery was to be stoned to death.

I don't know how many of the population who be around if that law was to be applied to-day! God's standers are much higher than ours but this is what He placed before His people and for good reason. No doubt about it, the Law was clear as to what should be done, but this was not a normal happening. The very fact that he did not resort to the penalty of the law been administered shows he was in a dilemma. We are not told how Joseph was told the news of the conception, but we are told how he dealt with it.

Joseph had two problems, at least in his own mind with this situation. The first problem was, because of his righteous moral standards, it would not have been right for him to go through with the marriage because of Mary's pregnancy and he knew that he was not the father. The second problem was, because of his righteous love and kindness, he could not bear the thought of shaming her publicly (a common practice of his day in regard to such an offense), much less of demanding her death, as provided by the law (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). He had been shamed (if what he assumed had been true), but his concern was not for his own shame but for Mary's. He was not wanting to disgrace her by public

exposure of her supposed sin. He must have loved her deeply, which is why he determined simply to put her away secretly.

The Greek word here means literally to “put away”, which was the common term used for divorce. Joseph’s plan was to divorce her secretly, though before long everyone would have guessed it when the marriage never materialized. But for a while, at least, she would be protected, and she would live. Even though he wanted to divorce her secretly, a private bill of divorcement, such as is indicated in Deuteronomy 24 would require the two parties to get 2 or 3 witnesses that he and Mary could trust to say nothing. There would be no judicial procedure. There would be no public knowledge. There would be no fanfare. Nobody would need to know. It was stated at that time that you did not even need to write the cause for the divorce in the statement. So that she could go away without anybody ever really knowing what had happened. It was done secretly. Now this wasn’t necessarily God’s pattern, but this was what was allowable in the laxness of the day in which Joseph lived. So he had those options.

Whichever way you look at this, Joseph’s response was exceptional, don’t you think? He didn’t want to hurt her. May God give us hearts like that. Why? Because he was a righteous man, a just man which is how Matthew describes him, he was what many of the kings in his genealogy were not, with the exception of a few.

To call him a “*just man*” puts him in the same class with Zacharias and Elisabeth because the Bible says that they were righteous before God, walking in all his commandments and ordinances, blameless. It puts him in the category of Simeon, of whom the scripture says he was righteous and devout. He was a real



god-fearing Jew, and he knew that he had to be obedient to God's laws and God's laws say when somebody does that, there are consequences.

What does it mean that Joseph was a "*righteous man*"? The term is very pointed in the Greek, it is the word (dik-ah-yos). Thayer's definition of the word is very telling indeed. ***"used of him whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God."***

Bishop Handley Moule the great Greek scholar interpreted the word to mean one anxious to do his true duty, both religious and domestic; that means to both honour God and honour his family!

In the narrower sense it means, rendering to each his due and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed by words or shown by the manner of dealing with them.

Jon Courson described Joseph as both a moral man and a merciful man, and he commented that to find a man who is both moral and merciful, is a very rare combination! Often we can find those who claim to be moral, they see that their ways and thoughts can often be above others, and they run the risk of being judgemental. Often when a man is merciful, it is because he requires much mercy because of the things he has done. So moral and merciful is indeed a rare combination, qualities that we as God's people such cultivate.

The very definition of justice requires you to consider the facts and acknowledge the evidence. Joseph was just. The conception of Jesus created a crisis in the life of Joseph. Mary was pregnant. Joseph knew he wasn't the father of the baby, at that time he didn't know anything about the revelation which he would get later on. Did he experience the normal emotions of jealousy, anger, betrayal? How could he not be troubled or disappointed? Yet Joseph wanted to spare Mary both punishment and shame! Her sin was great (at least in Joseph's

unconvinced mind). But Joseph seems to genuinely love her and reveals a deep desire to protect her! Doesn't the Bible say that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8)? Parents know this very well!!

It did cause Joseph distress and it was a real dilemma for him, which required a God given revelation to put the difficulty and perhaps fear which he may have had, even feelings of betrayal when he first heard of Mary's news, to one side. Joseph was willing to bear Mary's public humiliation, like Jesus is willing to bear our public and private sin, exchanged our shame and justify us. Mary was innocent but we are not, and our guilt is real and tangible.

Joseph was indeed a Godly man. This is what Godly men do when they are hurt. They don't hurt back. Very powerful illustration of godliness. You and I know that the flesh wants to hurt back, the flesh wants a pound of flesh, some kind of satisfaction. Joseph was not frothing at the mouth, treating death, and retribution. Even though it seemed like he was betrayed by the women he loved, he was determined the hurt in his heart wouldn't determine his actions. According to the law he had the right to stone Mary. What would you have done if you were in Joseph's shoes? God surely chose the right man to protect Mary and Jesus as a child.

His relationship with God first and foremost had impacted his heart and mind, he knew law but acted in grace. He knew his rights but acted with loving concern for Mary. He could have exaugerated his good name by a public divorce and received the understanding and sympathy of everyone but instead he acted very discreetly or as the verse say's "secretly". This action would not have help him but cast a shadow of doubt upon his reputation. He was, it seems, willing to go that road not because it was the easy one but on and account of his love. When the heart is pained it is capable of anything, unless God steps in. It is at times



like this when genuine godliness is noticeable from the spurries. That's not to say that Joseph was not hurt and did not feel disappointed, if not very confused and did not know what to make of Mary's account. This man knew what true love is. He was evidently not getting married to find love, he had a quality of love that he was bringing to the marriage as well as a host of other qualities. He is a breath of fresh air, someone that you can admire. So it says in verse 20,

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

There was a lot to take in and he had a lot of figuring out to do. I'm sure he was thinking '*Is it God or not? It's Mary, an ordinary girl betrothed to me, is she telling the truth, or what am I to do?*' I don't think that quoting Isaiah 7:14 would have helped the matter, but what did, was not human reason or even spirituality, but a God-given encounter with Heaven. As Joseph was mulling it over, he fell asleep, however, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and allayed his fears. Heaven came not with an answer but with the confirmation and command to proceed. No human agency was involved, but only heaven itself.

The angel addressed him as Joseph son of David just as we read in the genealogy. The angel confirmed God knew him by name and lineage, and had chosen them. This verse emphasizes the supernatural character of the whole event. The angel confirmed to Joseph that Mary's pregnancy was conceived by the Holy Spirit. It was blessed confirmation not revelation, which assured him that this was indeed an act of God. The details are all there even his own troubled heart and mind is addressed with the words in verse 20. "*...do not be afraid..*" Fear can be positive or negative, for most it is the latter. It can paralyse us and prevent us from doing even the will of God, doing what is right, it can and does enslave people if not



dealt with. It can also work to our advantage and save us from doing foolish things, or being foolish. It has saved us perhaps more than we realise.

While God was preparing Mary's womb, he was preparing Joseph's heart! The special revelation would serve several purposes. Joseph was called by God to serve as the earthly father to the unborn child and protect both the child and mother. The special revelation included assurance; guidance; explanation and of course information about the future destiny of the child. Once again the average Christian is rescued by God's revelation!

Joseph in his mind was wanting to do the right thing, Joseph was making a decision, even a godly decision, but it took God to help Joseph to make the best decision. God can and does this for us, if we walk closely with Him. Just when we think we've made our minds up, we know the plan of action we think we should take, God can come along and expand the peripheral and tells us of another way, God's way, which is always the best way. Often what we think as good can get in the way of best.

Joseph woke up and obeyed. That is not necessarily easy. But we need to wake up to what God wants us to do for His Glory and obey.

You know, by Joseph going ahead to marry Mary, it probably looked like to the community that it was Joseph's baby; if he divorced her, he could have said that he hadn't anything to do with it, but marrying her, his society would have seen him as a participant of unrighteousness. There are always people who will rush to judgement and not stick around for an explanation. Imagine, the faith it took for Joseph to believe what the angel said and walked into the situation. There was a sacrifice to be made on Joseph's side, he was stepping into a situation where there may have been labels put on him, *could he have lost business? His*

standing in his community? The whispers after him? It wouldn't have been easy. Joseph was amazing, despite everything, even the stigma, Joseph decided to obey the Lord. Joseph is such a great example to us. He refused to be ruled by his emotions, he rejected emotional decision making and obeyed the voice of God at all cost.

The birth of Jesus creates a predicament in every person's life. In what way, you may ask? The birth of Jesus forces us to make a decision about Christ—and His claims. The coming of Jesus will often produce a dilemma. Making a decision about Christ and his claims will often put you at odds with the popular culture's views of science and culture and philosophy. Victor Raymond Edman used to say; ***“Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light.”***

We are told in verse 21 what the angel told him;

“And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (1:21)

As if to reinforce the truth of Jesus' divine conception, the angel tells Joseph that Mary would bear a Son. You notice he didn't say, *“And Joseph, you will have a son. To thee will be born a son.”* No, the angel said that she would bring forth a son. Joseph would act as Jesus' earthly father, but he would only be a foster father. Luke's genealogy of Jesus through Mary's line accurately says ***“He was supposedly the son of Joseph”*** (3:23, emphasis added). The Bible is very careful about never naming Joseph as the father of Jesus. For example, in Matthew 2:13, it says, ***“Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt.”*** Always the mother. Why didn't he say, *“Take your child and your wife”*? Why ***“the child and the mother”***? Joseph is removed from the identity of being the biological father. 2:20 of Matthew, ***“Arise, and take the***



young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel:” It’s always the child and his mother, never Joseph as the father. The angel gave him further instruction. ***“And thou shalt call his name Jesus:”***

Joseph was told to name the Son Jesus, just as Zacharias was told to name his son John (Luke 1:13). Jesus’ purpose and significance was made clear even before His birth. Jesus is a form of the Hebrew Joshua, Yeshua, or Jehoshua, the basic meaning of which is *“Jehovah (Yahweh) will save.”* All other men who had those names testified by their names to the Lord’s salvation. But this One who would be born to Mary not only would testify of God’s salvation, but would Himself be that salvation. By His own work He would save His people from their sins. Jesus’ name and mission are the same. He really is God and he really does save. His name was common and human but still divine.

The expression *“he will save His people”* is significant. The implication suggests there are those who are not His people. The revelation is not meant to exclude people who want to be his people; for in the New Testament we do not see a single example of anyone wanting to come to Christ *on Christ’s terms rejected*. *John 10:26-27 tells us; “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”*

In what way will Jesus save His people from their sins? The Lord Jesus will save from the penalty of sin; the power of sin; the bondage of sin; the guilt of sin; and in a profound and ultimate sense—from the consequences of sin—that is punishment, condemnation, God’s judicial pronouncement of guilt resulting in eternal separation from God. There are several interesting passages of Scripture where Christ is said that he chose people *“from among men (worldly men)”*.

We as Christians are called out of this world, redeemed from the market place of sin; we are called to a life of separation—we live away from sin, above sin; to conquer sin to live victoriously over sin.

Joseph could of made the situation all about him, *how did he feel about it, that it was all happening to him?..* but we see God had a plan in all of this, it was bigger than Joseph and Joseph realised that, especially as the angel confirmed the news was indeed God ordained. The devil can try to cloud us to focus on our pain, on our hurt, and not God in the situation and God's plan. But look at what Joseph could have missed, if he had done that. Look what we could miss if we do that. Joseph didn't take on the victim mentality . If only we surrender all our hurts, so he could use it for His Glory : Roman 8 v28 (we must obey).

Matthew comes in with a commentary in verses 22 and 23. The narrative breaks here. The angel isn't speaking anymore. Matthew talks and this is what he says:

²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

Matthew confirms that the birth of Jesus fulfilled prophecy. The basic elements of prophecy given are;

1. Prophecy is the Word of the Lord (not the opinions, speculations or musings of men). The future is revealed by God not by men.
2. The prophet is simply the messenger.
3. Prophecy must be fulfilled. It will always come to pass.

The supernatural revelation given to Joseph was the Lord clearly confirming that the birth of Christ was a fulfilment of prophecy given in the Old Testament. The

name of the Son born to a virgin would be Immanuel, which translated means, “God with us”. The fact that a virgin would be with child is marvellous—a pregnant virgin! Equally marvellous is that she shall call His name Immanuel, and He was literally God with us.

The Old Testament repeatedly promises that God is present with His people, to secure their destiny in His covenant. The Tabernacle and Temple were intended to be symbols of that divine presence. The Hebrew for tabernacle is “mishkan”, which comes from “shakan”, meaning to dwell, rest, or abide. From that root, shekinah has also come, referring to the presence of God’s glory. The child born was to be the Shekinah, the true Tabernacle of God (cross reference with John 1:14). Isaiah was the instrument through which the Word of the Lord announced that God would dwell among men in visible flesh and blood incarnation—more intimate and personal than the Tabernacle or Temple in which Israel had worshiped.

Joseph received a special call and in verses 24 and 25 we see his reaction to the call: *And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.* (1:24-25)

Such direct communication from God we see on other occasions in Scripture (see Genesis 20:3; 31:10-11; Numbers 12:6; 1 Kings 3:5; Job 33:14-16). It should be noted that all six New Testament occurrences of the Greek word for dream is “*onar*” are in Matthew and concern the Lord Jesus Christ (see 1:20; 2:12-13, 19, 22; 27:19). Joseph’s reaction was immediate obedience, doing as the angel of the Lord commanded him. We can imagine how his feelings and outlook of the situation must have changed. I’m sure he had feelings of amazement, relief,

and gratitude. Not only would he be able to take his beloved Mary as his wife with honour and righteousness, but he would be given care of God's own Son while He was growing up. Apparently the marriage ceremony, when Joseph took her as his wife, was held soon after the angel's announcement.

Matthew makes it clear ; *“and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son”* assumes that other children were born to him and to Mary during the course of their life together as husband and wife. The fact that Jesus' brothers and sisters are spoken of numerous times in the gospels Matthew 12:46; 13:55-56; Mark 6:3; prove that Mary and Joseph did not remain virgins perpetually, as some claim.

As a final act of obedience to God's instruction through the angel, Joseph called His name Jesus, indicating that He was to be the Saviour. Joseph was not simply dealing with an unplanned pregnancy or an unwed mother. The shock and embarrassment at first was more than Joseph could bear. Yet it is inconceivable that God would entrust His Son into a family where the father was not totally committed and faithful to Him. Can this be truly said of us here this morning? God sees your heart and mind. There is nothing hid from Him.

We know nothing else of Joseph's life except his taking the infant Jesus to the Temple for dedication (Luke 2:22-33), his obedience to God when he took Mary and Jesus into Egypt to protect Him from Herod's bloody edict and his obedience returning when God instructed (Matthew 2:13-23). Joseph's Godly obedience to God continued in his life, as we see him take his family to the Passover in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve (Luke 2:42-52). We have no idea when Joseph died, it could have been well before Jesus began His public ministry or around

that time. It probably was before Jesus' crucifixion, because from the cross Jesus gave his mother into the care of John (John 19:26).

Joseph's predicament (vv.18-19) required a special revelation from God (vv.20-21); a serious and persuasive appeal to prophecy (vv.22-23); and a radical obedience within Joseph (v.25)!

If you live your life walking closely with God, and being obedient to His word, there may be times in your life that may not seem significant at the start, but God can and does use you or the situation you find yourself in, (even the bad ones, the difficult ones, the ones that cause you sleepless nights, even when you are in the right), he can use them for his Glory just like Mary and Joseph; for we know that all things work together for those who love him, and are called according to his purpose. But remember the scriptures also say, that those who love him keep his commands.

There are many things that stand out to me when we look at the impact God had in Joseph's life. He was a remarkable man, and a great example of a godly man. A man who was able to look at difficult situations, not with his feelings of hurt, anxiety, fear, image conscience, even victimhood, but he stood back, muddle the situation over and acted morally and merciful. Do you think, you could be like that? Joseph honoured God, Joseph honoured Mary, his wife, Joseph also honoured his family. Another thing about Joseph that stands out to me, and maybe to you, was that even in the mist of trials, difficult life altering trials, Joseph was open to hearing God's voice, and not only that, but he actively obeyed God immediately. Joseph left the bible pages quietly, but what an example in action. Surely His actions, even his reactions have a lot to teach us about being truly godly in our lives. *Amen.*