

Date: December 5, 2021

Series: *Christmas Through the Eyes...*

Title: *Joseph*

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Preacher: Mark Adams

A few years back I came across the story of how Country Western superstar, Kris Kristofferson, became a Christian. The year was 1972 and Kristofferson was already a star with hits like, *Me and Bobby McGee* and *Sunday Morning Coming Down*. But he had lived a rough life---a sinful life---and he confesses that he was carrying a load of guilt.

One Sunday a friend invited him to go to Evangel Temple, a church in Nashville where many Country Western Stars worshiped. At the end of the service, the Pastor Jimmy Snow, asked the people to kneel and then he said, *"If anyone here is lost, raise your hand."* Kristofferson says, *"I didn't go to church a lot, and the notion of raising my hand was out of the question but all of a sudden, I felt my hand going up and I was hoping nobody else was looking because everyone had their head bent down praying."*

Then, he was even more shocked when he found himself responding to Pastor Snow's invitation by getting up to walk to the front of the church. As Kristofferson kneeled at the altar Pastor Snow kneeled with him and asked, *"Are you ready to accept Jesus into your life?"*

Then with the help of a few more words from Pastor Snow, Kristofferson did that and as prayed he said he began to feel a change within him. He began to cry uncontrollably. He says, *"I felt this forgiveness that I didn't know I even needed."* All that inspired what became Kristofferson's biggest hit. Do you remember the lyrics?

*Why me Lord?
What have I ever done
To deserve even one
Of the pleasures I've known?*

*Tell me, Lord
What did I ever do
That was worth lovin' you
Or the kindness you've shown?*

*Lord help me Jesus,
I've wasted it so help me Jesus,
I know what I am,
But now that I know,
that I needed You so help me Jesus,
My souls in your hand*

The lyrics of that song floated through my head this week as I prepared this message because I think if Joseph were to look back over his life, he would ask the same question: *"Why ME Lord? Why did you call ME to this task? Why would I be chosen to have this precious perspective on the birth of Jesus?"*

This morning as we continue our ADVENT series, *"Christmas Through the Eyes,"* I want us to try and answer that question. Why did Joseph get tapped on the shoulder to parent and raise the second person of the Trinity? I mean, was it just the luck of the draw? Was there a lottery system going on in Heaven and Joseph's name was on the ping-pong ball that came up through the tube? Or do you think he was carefully selected for the job that needed to be done? Of course, it's the latter---God doesn't play bingo; in His kingdom there is no such thing as luck---so Joseph was chosen. But why? What made him stand out from all the other guys that were around and available for this aspect of Jesus' coming?

Let's look to God's Word for the answer. Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 1. Stand if able and follow along as I read verses 18-25:

Matthew 1:18-25

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.

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.

20 - But after he had considered this, 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."

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").

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.'

Okay, back to our question--Why did God pick Joseph? The answer is in verse 19 where it says that Joseph was, "**faithful to the law.**" One translation says he was a JUST man. Another calls him RIGHTEOUS. *The Message* refers to him as NOBLE. All these words boil down to say one thing: Joseph was a good man, a Godly man. That's the answer to HIS: "Why me Lord?" Joseph was called to this job because he was the kind of man to do it; he had the character traits required for this important task. This morning, as we look at Joseph's perspective on Christmas, I want to point out a few things about him---that show he was indeed a just man---a righteous man---a noble man---a man of character.

The first thing I want to mention, and this outline comes from an old Bill Hybels sermon, is Joseph's:

1.) WORK ETHIC

The Bible tells us he was a carpenter and I'm not saying that being a carpenter is better than any other job. I'm saying Joseph was no slacker. He worked hard at it and he gained the respect of his peers by the way he worked, such that he was KNOWN as a carpenter. He wouldn't be referred to in this way, unless he was known to do this job well. And throughout the Bible we see that God puts a very high value on diligent conscientious, human labor. It's one of the first directives given to Adam and Eve in the garden.

In Genesis 2:15 it says, "**God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it.**" After the Hebrew people left Egypt, God gave them this command: "**Six days shall you work.**" (Exodus 20:19) The book of Proverbs is filled with passages that extol the virtue of hard work, diligent labor, doing your best in the field where God has called you to serve. The Apostle Paul says, in Colossians 3:23: "**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, knowing that it's for the Lord that you work, since you will receive an inheritance from the Lord and a reward.**"

Second Thessalonians 3:10 goes so far as to say if a person is unwilling to engage in human labor, if they are unwilling to work hard at their job and earn money and support their family, the church shouldn't let them eat from their food pantry. If someone is stubborn and rebellious and says, "*I just am not going to work. I'm not going to develop the capacities God gave me. I'm not going to become a wage earner---someone else is going to have to feed me and my family.*" The Bible says no, no. You confront that kind of behavior because it's a good thing for human beings to work.

Work develops our competencies. It keeps our brains sharp and active, PLUS when we work, "**with all our hearts, knowing that it's for the Lord that we work**" people notice. Our hard work---HONEST labors---give credibility to our faith. When we work hard, people listen as we tell them about Jesus; but when we don't, well...

This week I came across the story of a police officer named, James A. Dolittle. He served as the K-9 handler for the West Linn, Oregon police department. Sadly, he lived up to his name---DO LITTLE---because during the entirety of 2012 and 2013, he responded to exactly one police call.

Doolittle was paid \$8,000 in premium pay on top of his regular salary, and during that time he was also allowed to use an official police cruiser, with gas and insurance paid for by taxpayer funds. Doolittle claimed he was attending training exercises twice a month, developing his capacity as a dog handler those two labor-less years. But the people who knew him could not corroborate any of that and investigators weren't able to do that either.

Well, Joseph was not like Officer DO LITTLE. No, he was a diligent worker. He was a DO-A LOT carpenter. And I think that's part of the reason God tapped him on the shoulder. Our Heavenly Father knew that because Joseph was a hard worker, he would be able to provide food and shelter and clothing and education to the Christ child that was coming soon.

A second indication that Joseph was a godly man is seen in two words.

2.) LIFELONG COMMITMENT

He loved Mary such---loved God such---that he was willing to make a lifelong commitment as a husband and father. Matthew 1:18 says that before Jesus was born, Joseph was pledged to be married or betrothed to Mary. So, Joseph had entered into a covenant with a young woman, saying to her, *"I am prepared to devote all of my attention and all of my affection your way for the rest of my life. I will not pursue or get involved with any other woman between now and the grave. I'll have an exclusive, loving relationship with you and you alone."*

Only good men---only men of character---make that kind of commitment, and Joseph was such a man. Sadly, these days too many men and women don't do that, which is why the divorce rate, even among Christians, is so high. As God's children, we need to proclaim the truth in word and practice that the Inventor of marriage designed it to be a life-long commitment.

Husbands and wives plan to stand together all of their lives, no matter what challenges come their way.

This week I read about an unusual musical named, *Side Show*. It's based on the true story of the Hilton twins. They were Siamese twins who rose from exploited poverty as a sideshow attraction to become a singing and dancing vaudeville act in the 1930s and, later, stars of a couple of B-grade films. One unusual element of this play is that the two lead actresses have to play their parts *"joined at the hip."* It doesn't matter how good their individual talents are if they can't work together, and if they can't do it convincingly. In fact, the success of this Broadway show depends on the success of their partnership. If one of them decides to go solo, the show is over! They're only in business as long as they stick together.

That is a good picture of marriage. Once the commitment is made, husband and wife are, as it were, *"joined at the hip."* They succeed or fail together. Wherever life's drama takes them, their success lies in doing it together.

And I don't want to make it sound like a punishment, because it's anything but. You see, only in a life-long commitment "no matter what comes our way," does REAL love take root. Only those who commit to stay together 'til death do their part, experience the kind of deep lasting love we all yearn for in marriage.

Joseph understood this; he knew that this is how God designed marriage. So he made the lifelong commitment to be Mary's husband.

That leads to a third example of Joseph's character:

3.) SEXUAL PURITY

He honored God with his obedience to His loving law; that sex is for marriage and only marriage between a man and a woman. That's God's line. If we cross that line in any way, we are embracing sin. Matthew 1:18 says that prior to their wedding Joseph and Mary had not come together yet. They had pledged themselves to sexual purity before God. Joseph and Mary had said, *"When it comes to sexual involvement, we're going to wait. We're going to honor God."*

Sadly, these days most couples don't make this pledge; increasingly sex is something to enjoy with anyone anytime. Sex has become "CASUAL." The old song lyric isn't true in our culture anymore: "Love and marriage, love and marriage" no longer "go together like a horse and carriage."

Even Christian couples usually live together BEFORE they are wed. In a recent study conducted by ChristianMingle.com, Christian singles between the ages of 18 to 59 were asked, "Would you have sex before marriage?" The response? Sixty-three percent of the single Christian respondents indicated yes.

After looking at the results of this survey, Kenny Luck wrote: "In my 30 years of youth and adult ministry experience, this is as unfiltered, direct and honest as a question and answer can be. In practice, [Christian young adults have become] sexual atheists. In other words, God has nothing to say to them on that subject of any consequence or, at least, anything meaningful enough to dissuade them from following their own course of conduct. It is the ultimate oxymoron. A person who at once believes in a wise, sovereign and loving God Who created them and all things, can also believe simultaneously--He should not, cannot or will not inform their thinking or living sexually."

That grieves me and I know it grieves God.

We see Joseph's goodness---his righteousness---in that he made a commitment to God and Mary NOT to come together before marriage and he kept that commitment.

Here's a fourth indication of Joseph's Godly character. And I'm referring to Joseph's:

4.) GRACE

When Mary broke his heart by announcing her pregnancy, he treated her graciously. Look at verse 19 again: "**Because Joseph was a good man, a righteous man, and did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace, he had in mind to break off the engagement.**" In those days, breaking an engagement was like our divorce and Joseph decided to do this quietly for Mary's sake. In spite of her supposed indiscretion, Joseph responded with grace.

Remember. Joseph had made a commitment to have an exclusive relationship with Mary. He voluntarily turned away from all other women and expected that Mary would be doing the same from all men. Joseph was such a good man that he decided to honor God with his sexuality and he was trusting of course, that Mary would do the same. But then, all of a sudden, out of the blue, Mary says she is expecting and to him that is proof positive that she has not returned his honor. It's very apparent to him that she defines relational exclusivity differently and more broadly than he does and that the sexual purity agreement that they had with each other and God didn't hold for her. She had obviously been with another man. There was no other explanation.

Can you imagine Joseph's disappointment---his hurt---his feelings of betrayal? Well unlike other spurned lovers, after Joseph absorbs the shock, he decides not to return hurt for hurt.

Joseph is a good man---he embraces God's loving laws---so he believes he has to end the relationship for integrity purposes. He knows there's more than one way he can end this relationship. He can publicly disgrace Mary and humiliate her. He can spread junk about her all over the community, or he can kind of end this thing quietly and try to do as little damage to her as is possible. And that's the decision he makes. Is that a good man or what? He's got a very good heart, a grace-filled heart.

A fifth sign of just HOW good a man Joseph is in his commitment to God to:

5.) HEAR AND OBEY

After Joseph had decided to end the engagement verses 20-21 say: "**An angel appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what is 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 people from their sin.'**"

Joseph listens. He hears. And as he does he gets two clear, straightforward instructions from above. Both of them---especially the first instruction---violates all of his male instincts.

a. The first instruction is don't break off the engagement.

Move ahead and get married to this pregnant woman. And again, for a guy who's been as deeply hurt as he has, who is suspicious as he is, I'm sure he thought, "What?" But the instructions were clear. "Do as I say. Marry her."

b. The second instruction says that when the baby is born---this miracle child---Joseph was to: "Make sure His name is Jesus because this is the One the world has been waiting for, and He really will save people from their sin."

So, it's decision time for Joseph. He's heard. Is he going to obey? Is he going to say "yes" to instructions from above or is he going to go with his own instincts? Good men and women---Godly people---live with an ear open to Heaven all the time. They listen, and if God speaks to them, even if what God asks them to do will stretch their faith to its limits, they say "yes."

That's Joseph. Like Mary, he was CONSCIENTIOUS. He was always listening for God to speak and when he heard, he obeyed. He went ahead with the marriage. I'm sure that was hard for Joseph at first but God had spoken. And when the child was born, he named Him JESUS---as instructed.

Have you ever seen the old Ingrid Bergman film, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*? It's based on a true story, the story of a missionary to China during and after WW2 named Gladys Aylward. In his book, *Character Forged from Conflict*, Gary Preston writes about Gladys. He says: "Gladys' ministry in China chronicled how she suffered terribly during her journey across the mountains of China in order to bring a hundred orphans to safety in Sian in Shensi. Ranging in age from four, to fifteen-years-old, these children were saved because of Gladys' faithful obedience to God. But it was not without cost. When Gladys arrived in Sian with the children, she was gravely ill and almost delirious. She suffered internal injuries from a beating by the Japanese invaders in the mission compound at Tsechow. In addition, she suffered from relapsing fever, typhus, pneumonia, malnutrition, shock, and fatigue. Through her ordeal Gladys learned more about obedience to Christ. She learned to choose Christ over anything else life had to offer---so much so that when the man she loved, Colonel Linnan, came to visit her in Sian as she was recovering---and asked her to marry him, she declined. In her heart she knew she could not marry him and continue the work God had for her among the children of China. Out of her obedience to God, she said good-bye to Linnan at the train station, and they never met again. Gladys continued serving God faithfully in China and England until her death in 1970."

Gladys was like Joseph, she listened to God and obeyed Him no matter how difficult it was to do so.

Allow me to mention just one more indication of how good a guy Joseph was. Joseph was a:

6.) FULLY-ENGAGED PARENT

The Scripture tells us that he was present during Mary's delivery there in the stable. Then a few days later he was with Mary as they took Jesus to the temple for His dedication. Joseph was not like too many dads who are there for the birth of their child, but when it comes to faith they leave that to the wife. No, I believe Joseph was the kind of father who continued to encourage his children's faith.

Not too many days later there was a king, a deranged King named Herod. Remember him?

When the wise men came looking for Jesus and Herod learned He had been born in Bethlehem, he gave the order to slaughter every male infant in that village to protect his throne. Matthew 2 tells us that an angel warned Joseph about this so he courageously planned a middle-of-the-night getaway. He successfully transported Mary and Jesus all the way to Egypt where he then protected and provided for them as refugees until it was safe to return to Judea. Scripture tells us that when Jesus was 12 years old Mary and Joseph took him to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. Luke 2:41 says that both of them---Mary and Joseph---did that with Jesus every year.

All these little passages indicate that Joseph was not a passive, distant, detached father to Jesus. He was a fully-engaged father committed to do his level best to raise the child of God and the other children that God entrusted to him with Mary. Luke 2:52 sums up the effects of this kind of fathering and parenting. It says, ***“And Jesus grew up. He grew up in wisdom and in stature. He grew up and He had favor with God and man.”*** I think one of the main reasons God chose Joseph is because He knew he was the kind of man to help make that happen in Jesus’ life. He was a fully-engaged co-worker with God in raising His only Son.

I came across a letter written to a dad by his daughter two years after his death:

“Dear Dad, two years have passed. It’s hard to believe. My heart still aches when I take the time to grieve. Your death has left a void in my soul. No one else seems to make it whole. You blessed my life way beyond measure. Having a dad like you was a priceless treasure. God blessed me with the very best dad and gave us precious memories. I’m so glad. On this day, I remember you. I celebrate your life. I honor you too. The depth of my gratitude could fill the sea. You were God’s greatest gift to me. Your daughter, Kim”

Kim had a great dad, didn’t she?!

After the time when Jesus gets left behind in the temple when he was 12 we hear nothing about Joseph. Mary is the only parent named from then on. That has led many to believe that Joseph died as a young father and that Mary was a single parent for some years. Of course, the truth is, we don’t precisely know because the text doesn’t tell us when Joseph died. That’s one of those things we’ find out when we get to Heaven. But what we do know is during the time that Joseph was involved in the assignment that he had received from above, he showed that he was the right man for the job. And for that he goes down in history as one of the great heroes of the Christian faith.

As we close, let’s apply what we’ve learned about Joseph to ourselves. I mean, God still looks for good men and women. Second Chronicles 16:19 says, ***“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”*** Would God focus His eyes on you and see the kind of person who would be receptive to His calling, His empowering? I mean are you a righteous, just, noble individual like Joseph? Do you take your job seriously? Do see it as your calling---your mission field? Do you work in a way that shows you take your faith in Jesus seriously? You know, in the old days, we used to sing a closing song in worship that was entitled *“NOW the Service Begins.”* I liked that song because it reminds us that we worship God with our daily lives---we worship God with our jobs.

Do you keep your commitments---to your spouse---your kids---your church? What about your sexuality? Do you obey 1 Corinthians 6:18 and ***“Flee immorality”*** even when our culture urges you to run toward it? How do you handle heartbreak or betrayal? Do you God to God in those times listening for His guidance---ready and willing to do His will? Are you a fully devoted parent? Are you the kind of mom or dad that encourages your children to accept Jesus and then grow in Him?

Even if the answer to these questions is an honest, *“NO,”* we can start over. Relying on God’s grace---His forgiveness---His faithfulness to give us second and third and fourth chances...we can be like Joseph.

The lyrics to Kris Kristofferson’s song come to mind again. In the second verse he sings:

*Try me, Lord
If You think there’s a way
I can try to repay
All I’ve taken from You*

*Maybe, Lord
I can show someone else
What I’ve been through myself
On my way back to You*

Are you willing to say those words, *“TRY ME LORD---HELP ME---help me to be the kind of person You can use to show others Your great love and grace.”*

Let’s pray.