

The Manger II: Joseph- “Not What I Expected”- Obedience

We’re currently in our second message of our Christmas series called The Manger. Last week John spoke about Mary and her perspective and what we can learn from that.

This week we will be looking at the Christmas story from the perspective of Joseph specifically written in the account of Matthew.9

The Gospel Matthew and the story of the birth of Jesus in this gospel really focus on the obedience of Mary and Joseph, and 11that’s really where were going to be focusing efforts this morning. Even though it’s only a few verses we’re going to be looking at Joseph, his obedience, what we can learn from it, and what it tells us about the gospel.

Obedience is a bit of tough subject for us because inherent within obedience is submission. If you’re honest with yourself, if I’m honest with myself, we don’t like to submit.

I mean I have been able to see this in my kids this from about the time they were able to disobey and not submit to me. I remember my firstborn son was 8 months old, and him shaking his head at me because he wanted something different than what I was giving him.

As a new parent at that time it hit me that this little boy who I love so much and would even die for was just like me and the rest of us, he had a problem with submission.

So as we talk and wrestle with the text today, I want to ask you and encourage you to focus on your heart in these issues of obedience and submission.

I think it’s really easy for us when we read scripture and hear sermons on obedience to be like oh man so-and-so needs to hear that, but I just want to challenge you as we look at the life of Joseph in radical obedience that we’re also going to talk about some hard things in our own lives and I want you to be open to that.

Open your Bibles up to Matthew 1:18, and we’re going to read till verse 24, then we’re going to pick the story up again in Matthew chapter 2:13-23:

The Birth of Jesus Christ

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. **20** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to

him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

[The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 1:18–25.

The Flight to Egypt

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Herod Kills the Children

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. **17** Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no
more.”

The Return to Nazareth

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, **20** saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” **21** And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he

was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. **23** And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

[The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 2:13-23.

This is really Joseph's 15 minutes of Biblical Fame as it were. We don't hear much about Joseph in Scripture except here, and as Jesus becomes a tween.

Our first point for today's message comes from the beginning versus in this story. In verses 18 and 19 it says:

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

So to put in simple terms Joseph and Mary come together they're betrothed to each other...which means basically they're married and it comes out that she's pregnant.

Now Joseph doesn't know how she's pregnant, but we the audience know it's from the Holy Spirit because the text tells us. Joseph doesn't know it's the spirit until the Angel reveals it to him.

But the text tells us something interesting about Joseph. It says that he was a just a man, or the word in Greek here also means a righteous man, meaning that he was someone who worshiped God and followed God's Commandments.

And then the story tells us that he didn't want to put Mary to shame, so he resolved to divorce her quietly.

Now I know for some of you hearing this and reading this you think yourself, "Well he should've just stuck with Mary because he loved her."

But what you have to understand is that Joseph followed and loved God and obeyed God and obeyed God's word and God's word told him that if the woman he was betrothed to had sex with somebody else, that he was to separate from that Woman, and in some cases have her stoned.

Deutornomy 22:23 says:

23 "If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, **24** then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that

city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

[The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 22:22-24.

But Joseph didn't want Mary to be put to shame and Mary to be killed over this, so he resolved to divorce her quietly.

And that's where the first point of our message comes from:

1. Joseph obeyed God from a heart of love for God and love for others.

See Joseph would've been well within the rights of God's law to have Mary stoned, but he didn't. He loved God and wanted to obey God and so he was doing what he needed to do, but he also loved Mary and he didn't want to hurt Mary, so he resolved to do it quietly.

Do you see Joseph's heart here? He loves God, and wants to obey God, and he also loves people, and his obedience is coming from that place of love for the Lord.

I think that for you and I so often when we obey God we often obey him halfheartedly.

I often see this as I work with students and young adults but if I'm honest I see this on a spectrum from kids all the way through adults which is, how close can I get to sin without sinning. That's half-hearted obedience, and obedience for the sake of checking a box, rather than obeying out of a heart of love.

Like so often for you and I we are so concerned with how close can we get the line without stepping over it that we miss the point.

Our obedience to the Lord is really rooted in a religious checklist, and halfhearted attempts, rather, than being rooted in a deep love for God and for others.

Like what if we obeyed God, not out of a heart that said, how close can I get to this sin or that sin, but what if we obeyed out of a heart of love that said, "God how can I be obedience in this situation or that situation and glorify your name."

Like what if your obedience was rooted in, "Lord, I love you, let me obey you."

Do you hear the difference there.

Joseph so clearly models obedience out of a heart of love for God and for others in probably one of the hardest situations I can imagine a person being thrust into.

Our second point for today is:

2. Joseph obeyed God even though it was hard.

After the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, what does it tell him to do in verses 13-14?

“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt

Once in Egypt, what happens again? Verse 20 of Chapter 2:

“Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”

So an Angel tells Joseph to flee for their lives, 300 miles away from where they were. Understand they didn’t hop on a train or the nearest greyhound. They traveled by foot. When’s the last time you walked 300 miles because God told you to do it. When the last time you walked 300 miles. Oh right. Never.

And then after they get there and get settled down, then what happens... an angel appears again, and tells them to go back!

If that were you, wouldn’t you feel a little jerked around. And yet, Joseph obeyed, even though it was hard.

And I think that’s that’s where you and I differ from Joseph, because I think for a lot of us we’re the exact opposite...we only obey when it’s easy.

And that’s a problem because there are things in our lives that God calls us to be obedient in but you and I don’t obey in those things because it’s hard, and it’s just easier not to.

You see Holiness and obedience to God is hard work, and if we’re honest, many of us just don’t want to work hard. We think obedience to the Lord and living lives that are set apart and holy should just come to us, should just happen...like we should just trip into it or something.

That is so opposite of what we see here in Joseph's life, and the patterns we see in scripture. Obedience to the Lord, living lives that are holy and set apart, it's hard, and it work and we have to press into that.

Kevin DeYoung, a Pastor/Author/Professor says this:

Then theres the reality that holiness is plain hard work, and we're often lazy. We like our sins, and dying to them is painful. Almost everything is easier than growing in Godliness. So we try and fail, try and fail, and then give up.

Philippians 2:12 says..."continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,"

Working out our salvation with fear and trembling is hard work. It doesn't just happen.

Here's a question for you to answer, and I'd like for you to think about and jot down on your note-page, or a communication card, and it's this:

What is an area of your life that you are being disobedient to God in, and you know God is specifically calling you to change?

What is an area of your life that you are being disobedient to God in, and you know God is specifically calling you to change?

For some of us, it is media related...whether it be what we read, or what we view on the computer, or how much time we spend engaging with media, and God is calling us to change that.

For some here it's gunna be what we're putting in our bodies, and God is calling us to change that.

For many here, it's gunna revolve around that fact that we are divisive, unloving, unforgiving, critical people, and God is calling us to change that.

Stop being disobedient to the Lord just because what he calls you to is hard.

And that leads us to final point. And this final point is similar to the second point, but it flows out of the second point, and it is this:

3. Joseph Obeyed God no matter the cost.

You have to understand this: By God calling Joseph to stay with Mary, and be her husband, he was asking Joseph to make a decision that would have repercussions on the rest of their lives.

It's not like once Jesus was born everyone in their lives would have amnesia about Mary and what happened. It's not like anyone would really understand

and or believe that Jesus was born of a virgin. Mary and Joseph new. But everyone would have just assumed that something else happened and Mary slept around.

This reputation followed Joseph, Mary, and Jesus for their whole lives.

We know this, because as Jesus is ministering as an adult, the Pharisees, the people Jesus primarily fought against, brought this up. In John 8:41b it says:

They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."

[The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 8:41.

The implication there is a tongue in cheek reference to the birth of Jesus.

Do you understand, that Joseph saying yes to God and obeying him, meant the rest of his and his families life would be different.

Joseph obeyed God, no matter the cost.

And that presents a problem for you and I, because often we obey when it costs very little, but when it costs a lot, or not even a lot, just a little, you and I are so quick to come up with justifications on why we can't obey, or why we shouldn't obey.

Have you ever been there?

Have you ever been at a point where you are being called to obedience, and you know it's going to cost something, but rather than accept that and obey, you start the excuse and justification factory up in your head, and within seconds, the conveyor belt is moving providing excuse after excuse after excuse after excuse.

I read an email recently from someone that was a literal 3 page dissertation on all the reasons why this person was justified in not being obedient. It was nuts!

When's the last time you were obedient and it cost you PRIDE?

When's the last time you were obedient and it cost you COMFORT?

When's the last time you were obedient and it cost you A FRIENDSHIP?

When's the last time you were obedient and it cost you FINANCIAL GAIN?

When's the last time you were obedient and it cost you ANYTHING?

The heart of the matter for us as we look to the example of Joseph in the Christmas Story, is:

1. Do we obey God from a heart of love for Him and others?
2. Do we Obey God even when it is hard?
3. Do we obey God no matter the cost?

Three weeks ago, a young man by the name of John Chau set out for the isolated North Sentinel Island in the Andaman Sea east of India that is home to one of the most isolated tribes of people in the world. This tribe, called the Sentinelese, have a long history of isolating themselves from the outside world, and killing anyone who tries to come into contact with them.

From the time he first learned of the Sentinelese as a teenager, John oriented himself toward being an ambassador of Jesus to them. He studied sports medicine and exercise science and trained as an emergency medical technician to be able to serve them.

He also pursued linguistics at Oral Roberts University and wilderness training, taking part in missions trips to challenging parts of the world to better prepare himself.

John took the call to bring Jesus to All Nations seriously.

For years John prepared through study, and partnering with the right people to reach out to the Sentinelese People.

Before 1st contact, he even quarantined himself, out of concern for the tribes health and not spreading anything to them.

John's intent was to live among the North Sentinelese, learn their language, attend to their physical needs and then seek to share his faith with them.

John never got that chance though. Not long after his arrival to the shores of the Island and with some interaction with the Islanders, John was killed, two weeks ago, by the tribe.

The day before he died, he wrote this in his Journal:

"You guys might think I'm crazy in all this but I think it's worthwhile to declare Jesus to these people,"...

"Please do not be angry at them or at God if I get killed -- rather please live your lives in obedience to whatever He has called you to and I will see you again when you pass through the veil."

You know what John wrote in his journal that's really interesting?

He wrote: "God, I don't want to die."

John wasn't some super christian, who wasn't afraid to die and walked on water.

No, he was just like you and I, he wanted to live, and he wanted to reach people for Jesus, and when he got the call from God to go, he obeyed, even though it was hard, even though it could cost everything, and he obeyed out of love God and for others.

What is God calling you to obey in?

And as we close, I want to make a connection here with the Gospel.

Something hit me this week Birthed out of Joseph and Mary's obedience, in hard, life changing circumstances, God brought us Jesus.

The obedience of Joseph and Mary paved the way for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Like think about that. Through the radical obedience of Joseph, God paved the way for Jesus to come and for you and I to be saved.

Through obedience.

For some of you here today you don't really know Jesus cottage call you for the first time Jesus, I just want to implore you, if that's you and you're sitting here, come to Jesus.

I think for a lot of us here today, we've been ignoring that still small voice lord in our lives that's saying to us, "Daughter, son, i wan't your obedience here."

Maybe that obedience centers around certain lifestyle choices you're making right now.

Maybe that obedience centers around interpersonal relationship stuff with people.

Maybe that obedience has to do with the authority the goddess placed in your life whether it's work or church or family, for years you've that authority, and you have your reasons for, but if you quiet down your heart and just listen, you Know that God is calling you something else.

My hope as you go home today and this week and wrestle with what you've heard, is that you would

1. Obey God from a heart of love for Him and others?
2. Obey God even when it is hard?
3. Obey God no matter the cost?

Let's pray