

I don't know about your home, but things are pretty well in the throes of the Christmas rush at the Rodgers' household – the decorations are up, the girls are home from college, and the parties/cards are stacking up.

It reminds of the story of the little girl who got lost in the Christmas shuffle at her house. It seems mom/dad were so consumed w/ parties/presents they kept telling the girl to stay out of their way. One night at bedtime the girl prayed, “*Our Father who art in heaven, forgive us our Christmases and we forgive those who Christmas against us.*”

Whenever I think of the Christmas rush, I'm reminded of the person most likely to be overlooked in the Christmas story but who was most likely feeling the rush of that 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas – and that of course is Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.

I have to wonder what was going thru his mind when he first heard Mary was pregnant and he knew he wasn't the father. I wonder what he thought when the angel first appeared to him? Or what when the innkeeper announced there was no room in the inn but only a stable/cave in the back?

And then after Jesus birth, what was he like as a dad?

Did he ever read Jesus a bedtime story? Did he pray over God as he tucked him into bed at night? Did he ever have to spank or put the Savior in *time out*? Did he ever wrestle w/ Creator on the living room floor or tickle Him just for fun? And what advice did he offer the Sovereign Creator about life?

As a dad, we're supposed to know about everything. We're supposed to be the rock in the family – tough, reliable, and quick on our feet. (like the boy in my fav. Christmas story)

A children's min. was putting on a Christmas play where one particular boy was distraught when he learned his nemesis and rival got the role of Joseph and he was stuck being the inn keeper. As rehearsals began, all he could think about was how he could sabotage his rival. As the play began and Mary and Joseph came across the stage to the inn, the boy opened the door and asked what they needed. Joseph replied, "We'd like a room for the night." Suddenly the innkeeper threw open the door and said, "Great, come on in. You can have the best room in the house!" Stunned, little Joseph froze for a second stunned; but being quick on his feet, he poked his head into the room and said, "No wife of mine is going to stay in a dump like this. Come on Mary, let's go to the barn!"

Did you know the Bible never records a single word spoken by the earthly father of Jesus? In fact, little is known about this carpenter from Nazareth, yet there's much we can gather from the Bible about him. (read **Matthew 1:18-25**)

In all the Christmas Pageants ever performed, Joseph seldom receives a prominent role, yet his part is so vital. God gave Joseph the task of watching over/providing for Mary/Jesus – and b/c of who he was, he was the perfect man for the job.

## I A RIGHTEOUS /RESPECTFUL Heart Mt. 1:18-19

*This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be w/ child through the H.S. B/c Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

**pledged to be married** – Marriages at this time were pre-arranged by parents – meaning Joseph/Mary's parents contractually agreed to uniting their families together thru the union of their children. The (3) stages to this covenant:

- Parental Agreement
- Pledge Period – Engaged but not living together
- Wedding Feast – Ceremony and consummation

As we pick up the story, Joseph/Mary were in the *pledge* phase of the process meaning Joseph was prepared to take Mary to be his wife and build a life together in Nazareth – that is, until he discovers that she's pregnant.

Now the Bible doesn't tell us how Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant – whether Mary told him her story or if he came to his own conclusion based on the changes in her life; **but in either case he had to make a decision.**

I believe there was one key element to helping him in making the right decision. Notice again the text– *B/c Joseph was a righteous man...*

**righteous** – means he was a man after God's heart – while God hadn't spoken in 400 yrs., Joseph believed, trusted, and sought the Lord living in obedience to His Word/will.

There's a great lesson about *followership* here. There are times when we don't sense/feel God, or know God's personal will for us in a given situation, yet we can still honor Him and walk in a righteous manner b/c we've determined to love Him w/ all of our hearts, mind, soul, and strength. **We can be obedient to what we know and honoring to who we know God to be.**

As a result of being a righteous man w/ a desire to please God, we also discover that Joseph was a gracious man desiring to honor others. And in this case – Mary.

*Joseph ...didn't want to expose her to public disgrace...*

B/c Joseph was a righteous man, he was a respectful/gentle man. But it wasn't his personality or circumstances that drove his behavior, but his conviction/pursuit of God. Joseph was a man surrendered/determined to follow God and it played out in his attitude/actions – **his faith produced his works.**

- Joseph was prepared to extend grace (no vengeance)
- Joseph was prepared to walk away quietly

He didn't want to hurt Mary or expose her to publicly disgrace – her wanted to protect/honor her. While the law allowed him to end the marriage or even to have Mary stoned (although unpopular in the 1<sup>st</sup> century); a public divorce would've preserved his family name and pinned Mary w/ the scarlet letter leaving her and Jesus alone/poverty stricken for life.

So why didn't he do this? Why did he extend grace instead of vengeance? Two reasons based on this text: (1) B/c he loved God; and (2) b/c he loved Mary and thought of her as Godly.

In either case, Joseph didn't exact vengeance or seek to elevate himself above Mary to protect himself or justify his actions. He was prepared to take the HIGH road rather than deal in the dirt.

**THIS IS WHAT RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE DO!** Even when wronged, the righteous do what is right.

*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, b/c what is conceived in her is from the H.S. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, b/c he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be w/ child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” – which means, “God w/ us.” When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union w/ her until she gave birth to a son. He gave him the name Jesus.*

Now that’s a dream! You go to sleep burdened/broken by news capable of destroying your plans/dreams, only to wake to a new plan you can hardly fathom given to you by God. Yeah... Sure... Everyone is going to believe you!

Even while Joseph was a man seeking after God, this is quite the ask! What do you do when God asks you to take a pregnant wife so you can be the earthly father of the Messiah? Just a bit overwhelming when you think about it. What do you do when God interrupts your plans for His plan and offers you potential pain/shame/ridicule in exchange for His favor?

Personally, I love the fact that Joseph's character/walk w/ God was revealed prior to the angel of the Lord coming to him. Meaning, b/c he walked w/ God, he was a man receptive to God. ***This is true for all people who truly walk w/ God.*** While we might not understand or can even comprehend what God is asking of us – our default is set to 'yes' no matter the cost.

I was reminded of this truth as I stumbled on a quote yesterday by George Mueller. Mueller was a boy born w/ a silver spoon in his mouth who found himself in jail b/c of his shenanigans. Later he would come to faith in Christ after reading the Bible and abandoned himself to God's call to minister to the orphans of England. His life story is packed w/ one miraculous account after another as he sought the will of God above his own.

There was a day when I died; died to self, my opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God. *George Muller*

I believe this is what happened to Joseph in that moment. His trust in God and the weight of the call on his life won over the alternative. He trusted the plan of God more than he trust the plans of men.

**What about you/me? Who's plans do we trust more?**

Obedience is always a faith step w/ God. Joseph didn't know how his future would turn out, yet he chose to respond to God w/ simple obedience/trust relying on God to make clear the decisions of the future.

This past year Meg and I had the chance to redo our wills. Of course, one of the key aspects in a will concerns the custody of one's children – who are all still dependent on us. Selecting who should become the guardians to our kids has never been an easy task b/c like most parents, we want the best situation for our children and for whoever might have to care for them.

When I think of Joseph, it's amazing to think that God had a similar choice when He sent Jesus to be born on earth. Who was the right man to be earthly father of Jesus.

I would've chosen a devout, rich, rabbi in Jerusalem:

- Someone to teach Him about religion
- Someone w/ influence in the religious center
- Someone respected/experienced in raising children

But God didn't ask for my advice. Instead, He chose Joseph:

- Who wasn't a rabbi or priest
- Who wasn't rich but likely poor/unknown
- Who didn't live in Jerusalem but Nazareth

God chose Joseph b/c he was a man after His own heart, abandoned to faith, of the line of David – willing to trust Him.