

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verses: Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-15; 2:19-23

Lessons from Joseph

Good morning! We missed you last Sunday. It's nice to be back. As you know, my wife and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary and it's kind of special and different because we had chaperones, our three little children. We didn't plan it that way but, in the end, we said, "Well, it'll be nice to enjoy the day with the whole family." And so we did. If you saw the pictures on Facebook, we were on a beach in New Jersey called "Wildwood". About 10 minutes north of Cape May. It's one of the beautiful beaches there. My former church in Jersey City used to have our church outings there. We had a blast.

Last month, on Mother's Day, I gave a message entitled "Lessons from Mary". It was about what we can learn as mothers and individuals from the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is undoubtedly a true model of motherhood. Now, on this Father's Day, what could be more appropriate than talking about lessons we can learn from her husband, Joseph. I believe he also is a good model of fatherhood. But we don't hear much sermons about him, do we? Except perhaps on Christmas day. Let's add Father's Day then. So, today I want to speak to you about a man - a FATHER - who is very often overlooked. In some quarters he is overshadowed by the prominence given to his wife.

If you think about it, mothers usually are truly honored and celebrated on their special day. So, we hear messages that extol the virtues of a godly mother, messages that put her on a pedestal and given accolades and all that jazz. When it comes to fathers, we diss them.

ABCnews.com posted a story one time about this phenomenon: It said,

“Fathers sleep a lot, and they snore loudly. When they’re awake, they like to fish or golf, but they’re comically bad at both...they’re complete couch potatoes, always watching television and hogging the remote. At least, that’s the less-than-favorable image of Dad on Father’s Day greeting cards. It’s a striking contrast to the poetic praise often expressed at Mother’s Day. Many men say they are tired of the ‘put-down’ cards and would like some affirmation for a change...”

So, in our message this morning I want to affirm our fathers who do their best to give their best to their wife and children. I know of many devoted dads in this church who play and pray with their kids. We want to celebrate those dads who love their families. One thing is sure. You have been chosen by God to lead your family and thank you for playing that role. Just like when God chose Joseph to be the adopted father of God’s son Jesus. I believe he played his role very well.

I remember a made-for-TV movie that was shown several years ago. It’s called “WHO WILL LOVE MY CHILDREN?” The story tells of a poor family - hard-working parents with a large number of children, ten in all - where the woman discovers that she has an incurable illness and will die within a year. Her husband is a good man, but obviously incapable of looking after the large number of children alone - particularly in those days when there was no government assistance or social security. And so the heartbreaking tale is of this mother who goes out searching for loving parents who will care for all of her children; she wants to have them all placed before she is taken. Now, if you ever intend to watch this movie, be warned - it’s definitely a king-size Kleenex movie!

But as I recall this film, it leads me to thinking about the birth of Jesus. Just like that woman who loved her children so much that she wanted to personally

choose parents for them, and not leave it to chance, Father God in the same way went looking for parents to raise His beloved, only-begotten Son.

He searched the earth, and He found a young girl - a teenager engaged to be married - of whom the Bible says: she “found favour with God”. She was a choice young lady. A God-fearing young lady.

But NOTE: God also went looking for a father. He called Mary AND JOSEPH as a couple. And here is the point of it - GOD CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES FOR US THAT THE ROLE OF THE FATHER IS A MOST IMPORTANT ONE. Fathers are not only needed for the physical act of CONCEIVING a child; they are also needed for the spiritual act of RAISING a child. The child was conceived in the womb of Mary “by the Holy Spirit” - a miracle took place so there was no need for a man to be involved in the conception. But a man WAS still needed to fill the role of father in Jesus’ childhood. HAVING SAID THAT - let me say a word to single parents here today. Please don’t despair that your children are beyond hope because their father is gone, or their mother is gone - that is not the case. God is SO gracious. The Psalmist says, “*Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.*” (Psalm 27:10 NLT)

So, Joseph was chosen. And just as God had looked for a godly young woman to bring forth the child, so He looked for a godly man to be the father. And what an inspiring model of fatherhood Joseph was. God made a good choice! Let’s look together, for a few minutes, at some things the Bible tells us about this man Joseph.

Firstly, Joseph was:

1. A LOVING MAN.

The Scriptures draw the picture for us of a wonderfully caring and affectionate man. And we can see this, firstly, in his relationship

a.) TOWARD MARY.

Look at MATTHEW 1:19 for example. *“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.”*

Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant. He hasn't had any great revelation yet. What is he to think? What would YOU think guys? You've fallen in love with this pretty young girl. You do all the right things. You pursue her in the proper customary way. In stolen moments you've talked with her about dreams for a future together. A cottage with a white picket fence. A family. A business. And then out of the blue you learn that this sweet girl, you thought you knew so well, is pregnant. NEWLY pregnant. And you don't know who the father is - but there is one person you know you can rule out! How does it make you feel? Angry? Betrayed?

The penalty for adultery in the Old Testament was death by stoning. And this penalty applied to infidelity during the engagement period as well as marriage. Joseph knew this fully well. Upon discovery that Mary was pregnant, Joseph would have been obliged to divorce her, and this would expose Mary to public shame and humiliation and eventual death by stoning.

BUT, even before God spoke to Joseph - Joseph didn't have any vengeance or bitterness in his heart. The Bible says: he “he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” You see, there were ways in which a divorce could be enacted very quietly, without the involvement of a judge, and Joseph was already considering the best way to do this.

Joseph was kind. He LOVED Mary. Forget the “MILLS AND BOON” romance novels - this here is a fair-dinkum love story. It's based on a real commitment. And husbands, the Bible says to US today that WE must love our wives with all that we have. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”* (Ephesians 5:25)

I know our married men here love their wives. Amen? Who said “I love you” to your wife today? I did. Because I prepared this message. But if you didn’t say it yet, why don’t you say it now? And say it with feelings.

Seriously, dear mothers, please gloss over your husband’s imperfections. He may not be Superman, but I’m sure he’ll be some kind of a hero for you. Like, perhaps, giving up his favorite show to accompany you to the grocery store. Or throwing out the trash. Or washing the dishes. Or driving you to the doctor when you’re sick or listening to you when you’re in a rage. Like this guy who notices another guy inside a telephone booth. He says, “Excuse me, you are holding the phone for over 20 minutes and you haven’t spoken a word.” The other guy says, “I’m talking to my wife.” That’s the kind of sacrifice a loving man does.

Joseph was a loving man toward Mary. But we also see that Joseph was a loving man in his relationship

b.) TOWARD JESUS.

When the child came along - the child he had not conceived - there was no attitude in Joseph like “THIS BOY ISN’T MY FLESH AND BLOOD”. There was no resentment or indifference toward Him; no lack of love at all. JOSEPH ADOPTED JESUS AS HIS OWN. He protected Him from the hatred of Herod. He nurtured Him and cared for Him. He put his very own life on the line for someone who was not his own son. Then, he also taught Jesus his own trade of carpentry. In short, HE ADOPTED THE ONE THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD WOULD REJECT.

TODAY, by contrast, we see men who are prepared to abdicate their role even toward their own children. Men are opting out of the father role because of its costs. Do you know what the Bible says? *“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever!”* (1 Tim. 5:8)

Statistics say that in 1960, 17% of children in the United States were raised apart from their biological fathers. By 1990, that number had risen to 36%. Today, nearly half of all the children in the U.S. are raised without a father in their home. And the worse thing is, some dads are physically present but their hearts are not. Because they're not involved in their children's lives.

Dads, we can't leave the rearing and raising of our children to the television or the daycare teacher or even to mom alone. It's our responsibility too. We need to be actively involved in our children's lives. We need to take responsibility, especially in their formative years. I once heard a psychologist say that whatever you plan on teaching your children like values, morals, etc. must be taught within the first five years—after that, it's just reinforcement. Do you know what an awesome responsibility that it!?

Bo Jackson, former professional baseball and football player, once said, "Having grown up virtually fatherless, I know firsthand how much it means to a child to have a caring, loving, involved dad. That's why it's so important to me to really be there for my kids. I want to build self-confidence in my children and make them aware that they have choices. I don't want my kids to follow in my footsteps, but make their own."

I'm glad our fathers here are not abandoning their children. I'm glad to see, in fact, that many fathers here are so patiently looking after their children and despite a hectic day at work, will drive them to their soccer game or go watch a movie with them or have a date with their children or play a video game with them.

Joseph was a LOVING man. That's the first thing that is clear.

SECONDLY: Joseph was

2. A DEVOUT MAN.

Being a devout man

a.) He was a man who OBEYED God.

He explicitly followed the Lord's leading and direction. He didn't follow his own marked-out plan for life - he wanted God's plan for his life.

So when God spoke to him in a dream and told him to marry Mary (even though she was pregnant) HE OBEYED.

Then when God spoke and said: "Take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt for safety" - he immediately obeyed. He closed up his business and left.

Then when God said: "It's O.K. now, head back to Israel". again he did as he was directed. He was a man of obedience. He did not dilly-dally. He did not ask questions.

For another thing:

b.) He was a man of FAITH.

It takes FAITH to pack your bags and head off to a foreign country with no prospects and no planning; simply on the basis that God said so. He had faith and obeyed the dream. He could have made excuses to stay where the prospects looked good, but NO - he was a man of faith.

FATHERS here this morning, your faith will speak to your children! Raise them in an environment of faith toward God.

I read the story of a farmer who had toiled over a bumper crop of grain - a badly needed crop of grain - a badly needed crop that was going to pay off many creditors and secure the family for another year. But just a few days before it was due to be harvested a freak wind and hail storm ravaged the property, and the harvest was lost. The man stood with his little boy looking over the fields of destroyed grain. The boy expected to hear his father cursing in despair. But instead his Dad began to softly sing: "Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." Years later that boy, grown into manhood, said: "That was the greatest sermon I ever heard!" His father had shown him FAITH where the rubber meets the road!

Joseph was leaning on God. He was a man of FAITH. And one more thing:
c.) He was a man who was FAITHFUL IN SPIRITUAL DUTY.

He set an example for his family - going to the Temple; attending the feasts. In Luke 2:41, for example, it says *“Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.”* He was regular in going to God’s house.

Here in this church, I see a lot of fathers come to church regularly. Even with cranky little children you come. And that’s a good thing. You’re setting an example to your children. They may not appreciate it in the beginning, wondering why they need to be dragged out of bed early in the morning but I know in the years to come they will appreciate you leading them to church. And I know many kids who have grown up to be godly and serving the Lord just because of the example set by their dads.

I have a pastor-friend in New Jersey. His father was a pastor, too. His memories of church, however, when he was young were not pretty because his father was treated shabbily by the church members. In fact, he recalls certain incidents when his dad was scolded and shouted at by some members in church meetings. This discouraged my friend greatly that he vowed not to enter ministry. But he became a pastor, anyway. And he attributes this to his father’s great faith and trust in God. His dad never gave up serving the Lord and this encouraged him to do the same.

So, dads, our kids are watching our faithfulness. If you are faithful to God, having godly and faithful children will be your reward.

So, let’s just re-cap for a moment. Joseph was a LOVING man. (Toward his wife. Toward his son. Toward his whole family.) Secondly, he was a DEVOUT man. (A man of obedience and faith, and being faithful in spiritual duty.)

Finally, he was also:

3. A WISE MAN.

Now listen to me carefully here. Joseph was wise because he lived as one who REDEEMED THE TIME.

By all accounts it seems that Joseph had a SHORTENED LIFE. We don't read of him after Jesus' childhood, and at the Cross Jesus charged John with the care of His mother - so it seems that Joseph was taken from them prematurely. But JOSEPH HAD USED WHAT TIME HE HAD BEEN GIVEN HONORABLY - WISELY! He had provided for his family. He had set an example for them that they would remember. He had raised them in a godly fashion.

Now, Jesus was not the only child he had; he raised other boys for the Lord also, and possibly daughters as well. He had other sons - TWO OF THEM (at least) WERE GREATLY USED BY GOD. They wrote books of the Bible (James and Jude). James was leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Joseph raised his children in the ways of the Lord, and He left behind him a legacy after his lifetime.

Fathers! None of us know just how much time we have left with our children; with our families. You may only have a year. Two years. Five years. Who knows? Only God!

ARE WE REDEEMING THE TIME AS JOSEPH DID? Encouraging our families at every opportunity; setting an example; providing for their needs. Are we being wise as we go about our daily lives? Ultimately, are we preparing our children to be faithful servants of God? Not necessarily serving full time in ministry but just becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus wherever they may or whatever station in life they may be in.

So, it all starts with us fathers. And we can learn lessons from Joseph. And to all of the loving, devout, and wise dads here today—thank you. Thank you for showing us what it means to be a good man.

Thank you for always being there when we needed you. Thank you for your love for God and for making us want to do the same.

Let us pray...