

Time of Grace Ministry
Heroes of Christmas: Joseph
Matthew 1:18-25
November 26, 2017

Pastor Jon Enter

Welcome to Time of Grace; I'm Pastor Jon Enter. Back in 2013, an angered step-father wrote out his story of woe and his story of betrayal online, posted it for everyone to see, and thousands and thousands and thousands of people have commented on it. A lot of people in support for this step-dad with the hurt that he was feeling; others feeling the other way. It's on website after website after website and it's this amazing story. This step-dad poured a lot of love into his step-daughter for 10 years; raising her up, doing everything for her. Paying and providing all that she needed. He payed for her college education; \$40,000 went into her education and he was okay with that. He loved her. He cared about her. Bought her a car when she needed a car, everything she needed he poured into her. And then she's getting married so once again, he's on the hook financially in order to pay for this wedding. And all he asked was 20 of his friends. Of the guest list of 250 people - that's a pretty big wedding - he only wanted about 20 of his buddies, his friends, that he could celebrate with, people that saw his step-daughter grow up with him and all he heard was excuse after excuse after excuse on why she couldn't possibly do that; give 20 spots away to his friends. This is her day. And he thought he had figured out; he thought that she was finally going to invite his friends that were there. But then he was out golfing with one of his buddies that he thought was invited to the wedding and all his buddy got was a wedding announcement card, not an invitation.

And so, he went to his step-daughter hurt and broken saying, "I have done and I have loved and I've poured so much into you. Why? Why won't you just do this small thing and have a few of my friends come?" and she refused to do it. Well, shortly after that, there was a dinner, a dinner party, and all of a sudden his step-daughter stands up at this dinner party and announces with great joy that her biological father, her "real" dad, is going to be there for the wedding. Then she said something that hurt her step-father's heart so deeply. She said, "And I'm going to have my real dad walk me down the aisle." At that moment, he was crushed and absolutely broken. He decided to stand up, make an announcement, dinged on his glass, and said, "I want to thank the bride and the groom. They have brought something to my attention that I obviously did not know. I thought my position in this family was one of a godfather, one of a patriarch. But instead, I'm nothing more than an ATM. I'm nothing more than a stream of money. So I give over all my responsibilities to real dad and he can pay for the wedding. I'm not going to be there. My money's not going to be there." And with that, he walked out.

Wow! The reactions on this online have been huge in regard to the amount of people that have written in. There's a lot of brokenness with the families that are out there and a lot of people can relate. Joseph was Jesus' earthly step-dad and he didn't ask for that role; he didn't ask for that responsibility. But suddenly, it was thrust upon him and Joseph had to pay for Joseph's upbringing. Joseph had to flee down to Egypt and figure out how that would all work. And who gets the glory? Is it Joseph? We barely talk about him. The real dad. Jesus' real dad, the Father

in heaven, gets all the glory. What a difficult position Joseph was put in! Man, he is a hero. A huge hero of Christmas.

Pastor Mark Jeske is going to dig deeper into Joseph and show to you how he lived in love, pouring love into the life of Jesus, supporting him even in a difficult - incredibly difficult - situation. Now there's a little bit of unknown - the story I just told you - if it's true or not. It's not been proven false, it's not been proven true, but yet, it's an amazing story. This story though, the story of Joseph, is a true story. A true story that we can learn from; to learn from this great hero of Christmas and learn how to take up our responsibility and live how God wants us to live.

Pastor Mark Jeske

I think I have one guess as to why God might use dreams to reveal something. The last of our Advent heroes that I'd like to talk to you about received his angelic information in a dream. All of the Advent heroes that I've been celebrating with you and trying to learn from and be inspired by this Advent season all got special messengers from God to tell them of their role in what he was going to be doing to unroll the most stupendous miracle the world had ever seen; the incarnation of the Son of God into human flesh. Zechariah was shocked by the angel Gabriel. Elizabeth had a messenger, which turned out to be her deaf and mute husband gesturing in signs and writing notes about the fact that her post-menopausal body was somehow going to have to give birth to a child, which, of course, was unbelievable news that she had to then believe. Mary is surprised by Gabriel – a personal appearance from Gabriel – which shocked her to death: “Don’t be afraid.” The angel always has to say, “Don’t be afraid.” And now the fourth of our Advent heroes, Mary’s fiancé, Joseph. And here is the story as St. Matthew tells it.

“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 with child through the Holy Spirit. Because 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.” So either he had not found out about the angel Gabriel’s message to Mary or if it had been relayed to him in any way, he didn’t believe it. I kind of think that it was the former; that Mary thought there’s no way that he’s going to understand or believe this; I’m just not going to tell him. So in silence, she let her pregnancy speak for itself and this was a devastating blow to Joseph. So he’s going to end their relationship.

“But after he was considering this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream,” which sounds on the face of it, you know, like not a great way to reveal something important because what if he woke up and forgot, like I do usually? Doesn’t that sound a little risky? This time he didn’t forget. And you know, I think I have one guess as to why God might choose that. See, in your dreams, when you’re sleeping, you never stop and say, “You know, this situation I’m in is totally absurd. Like, I’m not even in the same state where I live. Like, hello? Can’t you come up with a little more – can’t you have a dream GPS to actually place me in my right environment? Like, I don’t live in Pittsburgh. Like, for Pete’s sake, what am I doing in Pittsburgh?” You never argue with the bizarre stuff in your dreams when you’re sleeping, do you?

And I think that the news that was going to be dropped on Joseph was so outrageous, God might have thought, “It’s worth the risk. I’m going to lay this on him while he’s asleep so that he doesn’t argue with me. And when he wakes up and he knows this is what happened, he will believe it because it’s all about the faith belief.”

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Joseph, son of David,’” reminding him of his illustrious ancestry. Joseph was descended from David and all the kings. Mary, his fiancée, also was descended from David but by a son other than Solomon, so her line was not the royal line, although she still had the blood of David. Actually, Joseph was the royal heir.

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what’s conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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.” That’s actually what his name means. Jesus – or, that’s how it is in English. In Hebrew, it would be pronounced, Yahushua, or YOSHUA, or Yeshua; a different vowel variance, all of which means the Lord saves. So Jesus is his Savior name; it’s an awesome name. “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet,” – this would be Isaiah – “the virgin will be with child,” like what? This was a sign given seven centuries earlier and they didn’t – nobody had any idea what that possibly could have meant at the time. But God was on record as having said that the world is going to change through a pregnant virgin. Which, as you know, is even more impossible than a post-menopausal pregnancy like Elizabeth’s.

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel,” Hebrew for “God is with us.” What a mighty message for the terrible beat up history of the Israelite people. Made them look so neglected and abused and abandoned by God, that’s the only conclusion: That their tiny, pitiful, little existence no longer was anything special to the world, much less special to God. And this promise is that, no, your size doesn’t matter; it’s not the size of the dog in the fight. It’s the size of the fight in the dog. Your size, O little Israel, is not going to prevent you from giving the world its best and greatest Christmas present ever. Immanuel means God is with us. What words of hope for a hopeless people! What words of importance for a nation that thought that all its best days were in the past! What a statement of dignity and meaning to their lives. You mean we’re still working for you? We’re still chosen? You still love us? There still is a future for us? What we do matters? Heaven is still on the table for us? Yes? Immanuel is God’s answer: Yes.

When Joseph woke up, he forgot everything he heard. No, he didn’t! That’s what I would have done. “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 with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name YOSHUA,” just as the angel had instructed him.

He’s my hero for, at least, seven reasons and I hope I can think of all seven in my head because I’m working without a net here, as you can see. Reason number one why I love this man and I can’t wait to shake his hand; worth waiting in line for. If I’ve got to wait in line for a few years in heaven – who’s going anywhere? As long as I can like cater some food while I’m waiting and talk to people and hang out and get some restrooms breaks, you know, periodically, I’ll wait in line to talk to this guy. He’s way high on my list! And I love him, first of all, because he gives

us a living model of how God sweats us out before he gives us our treats and God needs to do that because we're so dumb and we're so materialistic and so shortsighted. We can't think ahead very easily. It's a learned skill to think ahead; to put up with hardship now for benefits later. And some of you know the struggle of parenting kids like that who maybe never seem to get it; they're always living in the here and now. They don't think, they don't care about tomorrow.

Joseph got squeezed. God didn't tell him right away and let Mary's bump get to be noticeable and let him think about that for a while first. Gee, whiz! That's a risk to wreck the relationship. Second thing – first of all – he patiently endured being sweated like that while God laid some major stress on him; blew up his life.

Second, he acted like such a gentleman. He was not going to shame or humiliate Mary. He just said, "Well, I guess it's over between us," and that maybe is one of the most horrible blows that can be given to any man's heart to think that there's a pregnancy caused by somebody else within a woman that he thought he was in love with. And he's going to let her go but bearing this, he didn't get bitter or get all dramatic with her; he just was going to quietly arrange that they would go their separate ways and try to protect what was left of her reputation and help her, maybe, quietly to have this baby out of the public eye. I call it the "Nazareth Peanut Gallery," that would have been vicious on her because you know in a small town, everybody is always in everybody else's business. But Joseph was going to act like such a gentleman.

Thirdly, when he did get the dream, he believed it. That's a big deal because he was believing something he couldn't see. He had to believe in something that he could not see just as you have to believe in things you cannot see. We put up stuff around us – Christmas is extremely visual, isn't it? There is stuff everywhere. Bells and tinsel and red and green colors everywhere and evergreens and wreaths and presents and ornaments and lights and candles and that's just scratching the surface. But all of those are just visual distractions in a way; they're representations and we cannot yet see the reality of God made flesh. It's something we need to accept by faith. He accepted that what was revealed to him by this angel in the dream actually was the truth. A big deal that he was going to be the stepfather of the Savior of the world who was Immanuel; God is with us.

Next, speaking of stepfathers, he had to be a stepfather. Being a stepparent is no treat, is it? Do you know any stepparents? Talk to them. Ask them how they really enjoy it. It is hard. You always wonder: "Is this person, not from my body, going to accept me?" In fact, what's the usual adjective that goes with stepmother? "Wicked." How many fairytales have wicked stepmothers? And why is the stepmother wicked? Because those aren't her birth children so she favors the ones that are her blood and she's cruel and abusive to the ones that aren't. There are dozens and dozens of fairytales that reenact that. Why do you think that theme is so popular? It's because people had that experience and Joseph, for the rest of his adult life, was going to have to be a stepdad. Jesus, his stepson, and his mother, Mary, had like something special between them that Joseph was an outsider to. And he's going to have to bear with that his whole life; realizing that's not my flesh and blood.

I love the man also because he'd gotten over that! He and Mary had at least six other children; four boys – he named one of them after his dad, Jacob. We, in English, call him James. And in

fact, he did such a spectacular job that these boys – two of them, in particular – became such incredible believers and leaders in the church, God chose them to be writers of his sacred message and his blood sons, James and Jude – or Judah – became authors of books of the New Testament. And he was a key part of shaping their character and the culture of his home made them so particularly useful to the Lord.

He had to personally give up his business and run for cover when they heard of the death threats in Bethlehem when King Herod issued his fatwa that all of the little boy babies were to be killed. He and Mary had to take off and head for Egypt and hide. Do you think they had a chance to notify anyone? There were no cell phones or communication back then. What of their family back in Nazareth – how would they ever know? They couldn't send messages because Herod might have been intercepting them. They had to run; letting their family suffer and shake and tremble in Egypt, waiting for some kind of news to break that it would be safe to go home and they had to wait there until Herod the Great died. Do you think that was fun? Joseph was a carpenter. He had a business. He had customers. What do you think happens when you disappear and you don't fulfill your orders? What do you think happened to his business for the time that they were hiding in Egypt? He wrecked his own business. He gave up, basically, his customer, his client base, in service of his family. What a guy! Makes me love him all the more.

The last – I think we're up to seven – the last of the reasons why I love this man so much is he was a blood descendant of King David and all the lines of kings. That means for Jesus Christ to be called the great king, the Son of David, and in line – properly in line – of all the kings, it was his stepfather that gave him the right to consider himself the last and final king of David's dynasty. Mary was not able to confer that right on him; it has to come through the father. In this case, the stepfather.

So what? What does this leave us? I think there just are a couple of things here to celebrate this Advent time. First of all, as he was squeezed and allowed to kind of twist in the wind for God sort of emptied him before he filled him up, you see there a pattern of how God operates. And I invite you, this Advent season, to look at all of the gaps in your life, all of the pains you have, all of the old troubles you're dragging around like a bag of rocks behind you, and realize these are not signs of God's judgment or anger; they are just his way to remind us we're not in heaven yet. Our world is broken and he lets each of us taste fully of that brokenness. The fact that you are broken yourself and dragging broken hearts around does not mean something's wrong with you; it means you're alive and it means you're still on this earth.

Also, look around and you'll see a room full of people who are wounded, as well. We're all the walking wounded and God thinks that's just fine because it keeps us humble, keeps us communicating, reminds us we have not got all the answers and all the strength. Reminds us what sinful fools we can be and how desperately we need a Savior.

Secondly, believe in the promise that Joseph believed; that his baby was Jesus who will save his people from their sins. If you ever stop craving the forgiveness of your sins, you might be spiritually dead. This Advent season, get in touch with your ugly evil self and realize why it is that you needed the Son of God to come in person to be reborn to be like you. It's because you

have screwed it up and without a rescuer, you would be headed straight for damnation when you die.

But believe promise number three: Immanuel is here. He came not to show off or to wag his finger and scold us in person. Immanuel came in person to rescue people whom he loves unconditionally to give value to. Celebrate that. The best present you will get this Christmas, the best present you will ever get, is the unconditional love of the Son of God who became incarnate so that you could be just like him in heaven.

This is good news for God's people. Let everybody say, Amen!

Pastor Jon Enter

Joseph was Jesus' earthly father. It was a role and responsibility that he didn't ask for but it was something that God placed on his heart and Joseph fulfilled the responsibility with dignity, with honor, with respect. What is God asking of you to do? What difficult role and responsibility is suddenly on your heart that you didn't ask for, you didn't want, but you know - you know - this is the direction God wants you to go in your life? It's difficult. It's hard. But God will be there every step of the way to encourage you and to help you.

And now I get it, Joseph had an angel appear to him and tell him this is the plan. You're probably not going to get an angel but you do have God's word; God's word to guide you in paths of righteousness for his namesake. God's word to guide you along every single pathway that God wants you to walk no matter how hard, no matter how difficult that is, the Lord God will be with you. That's the beauty that we just learned by studying Joseph this great hero of Christmas as he had dignity and honor doing the hard thing. May God give you the strength to do the same.

Pastor Jon Enter

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we just looked into the life of Joseph; a man who suddenly had a responsibility that was thrust upon him that he did not ask for, he didn't want. But yet, in that time, he stepped up. Lord, you went to him in an amazing way; sending in an angel to comfort him and to encourage him and to move him to do what is right. Lord, help us - each and every one of us - to do what is right, to follow your word. To know exactly what you command us to do in our lives and not to walk in the gray areas, not to try to manipulate situations that we can get out of responsibilities and have a little bit of an easier life. Help that not to be our focus. Help us, move us, motivate us to do the hard things, the difficult things, the jobs, the conversations that no one else wants to have. Help us, motivate us, to go and talk to others; to encourage them in Jesus'. When someone's hurting and someone's broken, that we go and we go to their house and we speak to them and talk to them and encourage them. When someone's hurting financially, to do our little part because every little bit helps.

Lord God, I don't know all the different things that you are asking upon the hearts of everyone hearing this prayer right now, but I'm certain there's difficult things; things that a trembling soul

with sinfulness and weakness that's inside of each one of us gives fear to move forward. Lord, help us to not follow the fear because that's only going to lead to failure. Help us to give that fear to you, to confess it to you. Say, God, make me stronger. Make me a bold witness of your love. May I shine a light on everyone else who's hurting in this world. Make me strong to do what is difficult and hard and something I think is impossible, but God, in you, everything is possible because of your power, your love, your strength, of who you are. May that filter our lives and fill our lives with confidence in you.

Lord God, help us. And not just help us, put something difficult in front of us. Lord, make us strong in you. Test us and help us to realize then your power and your might will never ever fail us. That is a dangerous prayer but it's a great prayer because it grows us closer to you. It helps us to be a help to others as you call us to be. Guide us, strengthen us, in you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Jon Enter. It all starts now.