

12-17-23

Sermon- The Angels Brought Peace

Scripture- Matthew 1:18-25, CTW Reading 159

Hymns- 168, 174, 175

Theme- The story of Joseph and all that he had to deal with. He was in torment...imagine all he had to deal with...the woman he was betrothed to was pregnant and had an incredible story to go along with the situation...he had resolved to divorce her quietly...until the angel appeared and gave him peace!

I. The Angel Introduces Us to an important character in the Christmas Play:

There is no greater Christmas classic than Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, and there is no greater Christmas character than poor George Bailey. He's even referred to several times throughout the film as "poor George." You're probably familiar with the story.

George Bailey is introduced to us as a young man who saves his brother, Harry, and has big dreams of his own dreams to travel the world, go to college, and build things. But life happens to George, and poor George's plans are always getting put on hold because someone else's need always seems to be greater at the moment.

George is always sacrificing for others, and though George is integral to the story, he's almost forgotten by those in the community, and if not forgotten, then certainly they've taken advantage of his kindness.

A. It reminds me a lot of the almost forgotten character of the Christmas story—Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. Maybe he's not so much forgotten, but he's certainly silent. Did you know there's not a single quote attributed to Joseph in the entire Bible? Not one. From Joseph, we get nothing. No, "Why me, God?" Not even a, "How can this be?" This is the man chosen to be the earthly father of Jesus, and all we know about him is he was a carpenter.

Well, we know a few other things, too. We know he has royal blood running through his veins. Matthew tells us Joseph's genealogy runs through King David. We know also that his marriage was arranged. That's just how it was in those days.

Today I want to talk about three other things I learn about Joseph, and I don't learn them from words spoken by him in the Bible. We learn them from actions he took.

B. We might say his message to us is more walked than talked, and that's as it should be. Remember what James said? Show me your faith by what you do! A life well-lived is worth more than all the sermons in the world.

What do we learn from Joseph? Three things: selflessness, patience and obedience.

II. First, let's look at Joseph's selflessness.

In many ways, Joseph is probably the most put-upon person in the Christmas story. Here's a man who is looking forward to life with his new wife, looking to start a family, to continue to build his carpentry business, and with the announcement of Mary's pregnancy, all that gets put on hold in a big way.

A. This has scandal written all over it, and there are a lot of ways Joseph can choose to handle this situation The extreme option would be to have her stoned.

There were two counts. First, adultery. That's a no-brainer. Second is blasphemy. Seriously, God told you this? This is God's baby? I'm thinking not! Another serious, though less extreme option would be to issue a certificate of divorce to Mary, but that would be an embarrassment not only to her, but to her family, as well.

There must have been something more to Joseph and Mary's relationship than an arrangement. Joseph, even before the angel shows up, "decided to break the engagement quietly," as verse 19 tells us.

It could have been the love that Joseph had for Mary, though you understand love had little to do with arranged marriages. It could have been out of respect for Mary's family. We don't know what it was, but it was selfless on Joseph's part.

B. Matthew tells us Joseph was "a just man." The Greek word for "just" was first used of those persons who were "right" in their duties toward the gods and toward men, and also in reference to matters that were in accordance with that which was "right."

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel gives us a more Jewish understanding: "If he has walked in my statutes and kept my judgments faithfully—he is just; He shall surely live! Says the Lord God" (**Ez. 18:9**). So, Joseph was a man who wanted to do the right thing, and be one who followed God's laws and sought to keep them.

Joseph could have demanded justice. That would have been justifiable, but what is just and what is justifiable are not always the same thing. "Justice" in Mary's case could have been oh, so bitter.

However, Joseph thought of Mary, or of Mary's family, and considered, before the angel appeared, that the right thing, the just thing, was to put her away privately.

A just person doesn't seek the disgrace of any person. A just person works to build up and not tear down. Joseph knew his choice had the possibility of relegating Mary to the trash heap of society, and that, for him, was simply not right.

Joseph's selfless action gives us a wonderful example of the grace of God working through Jesus Christ to save us.

Wow! Joseph was being Christian even before Jesus came!

Weren't we deserving of death for our sin? Didn't the justice of all eternity call for God to leave to us suffer with the consequences of our actions? Yes! And yet God, in His mercy, moved to redeem us and take us as His own children by sending that dear child to us on that first Christmas morning.

It was grace that went beyond the bitter demand of justice, and it is grace that redeemed. Joseph, in his selflessness, demonstrated grace. And he wasn't even a Christian!

III. A second thing We learn about Joseph is that he was patient.

Verse 20 tells us, "As he considered" his options. The New King James Version says, "While he thought about these things," and the Message says, "While he was trying to figure a way out." Any way we say it, it boils down to the fact that Joseph didn't react irrationally.

A. He didn't make rash judgments. He wasn't impulsive. We humans don't always think rationally in emotionally charged situations. How many divorces have happened because spouses said things in the heat of an argument that couldn't be taken back?

Our law even makes an allowance for a “crime of passion.” The crime of manslaughter is a lesser crime than murder because manslaughter is considered a crime done in the heat of passion, or the heat of the moment.

Joseph was patient. He thought before he acted. Joseph’s patience led to an encounter **with** and an understanding **of** the will of God. Hasty decisions precipitated by drastic circumstances often close the door to the Holy Spirit.

I am reminded of what the Psalmist said in **Psalms 27:14**:

Wait on the Lord;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord!

B. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. We are called to live patiently.

How many horns have we blown because we failed to be patient? In the interest of full disclosure, I’ve stopped praying for patience. Not because I’m patient, but because I’ve learned God doesn’t give us patience, but rather He gives us **opportunities to learn patience**.

Those times of learning are painful, but they are the times that God works greatest in our lives. Those are the times that the greatest growth comes. Those are the times that put us right where God wants us to be. When life throws us the curve, we have the strength to swing, even if we miss.

IV. Finally, from Joseph We learn obedience. Joseph heard God’s call as the angel spoke, “Go ahead, take Mary as your wife.”

A. “It will be okay. As a matter of fact, it will save the world.”

Here’s what Joseph’s obedience got him. Scorn from his family, embarrassment in the community, laughs and the loss of friends, a hard journey with a pregnant wife from Nazareth to Bethlehem, exile to a foreign country fleeing a mad man who wanted to kill his infant son, and obscurity in history.

No famous quotes, no lasting impressions, no earth-shattering accomplishments. Just simple obedience.

B. The reality we live with is that the call of God on our lives to follow him demands our obedience. I think it also incumbent upon me to mention the fact that being in the will of God is often not the most comfortable, convenient, or care-free place to be.

I really do struggle with some Christians, particularly Christian pastors, who proclaim a gospel of wealth, health and happiness in following Christ. They

proclaim our obedience will result in material abundance and physical prosperity.

And...If not, it's because we don't have enough faith.

Apparently, they haven't read the same Bible as me. Apparently, they don't remember Joseph, or Paul, or Stephen, or Peter, or John, or Martin Luther, or William Tyndale, or any of the countless others who followed Christ even unto death, and are still willing to do so...

But they were all obedient, and they were all blessed. There again, see, as with justice, our understanding of blessing and God's gift of blessings are not always the same.

V. In Conclusion, The Angel Not Only Delivered a Message of Peace...He GAVE Joseph Peace...Peace enough to Exhibit selflessness, patience and obedience, and it changed the world.

A. Sometimes we wonder if God chose Mary, not because of her, but because she was betrothed to Joseph. God wanted His Son raised in Joseph's home. There he would learn from his earthly father...all he needed to fulfill his ultimate calling. There he would learn obedience and selflessness.

I also wonder if the character of poor George Bailey is not modeled after Joseph. George's selflessness, patience and obedience changed not only his life, but the life of an entire community.

The Angel would tell us that's the impact our lives can have, too.

B. Joseph had a much more difficult task than we do. He was told, "the child conceived is of the Holy Spirit," and that child came to live and die so that the Holy Spirit might live in us.

We realize that this baby that caused Joseph to encounter God also causes US to encounter God. We must know that this One whom we worship and adore, only through Him will we know selflessness, patience and obedience.

He is our example. He is our strength. He is our guide. He who was born in a manger, desires to take up eternal residence in us! In our pre-Christmas preparation this thought must be first and foremost in our minds and in our hearts.

Amen? Let us Pray!