

Our theme for today: Righteousness.

Joseph found himself in the midst of turmoil. Perhaps, you've found yourself in turmoil, too? Such situations bring more questions than answers. For Joseph, there were questions about Mary, questions about her going to Judea, questions about her becoming pregnant, questions about the marriage. Did Joseph turn to Scripture for guidance? Did he go to his Rabbi? Did he speak with friends, with family? Did he isolate himself? Did he bury himself in work hoping it would all go away? Where do you turn in times like this? How do you respond?

We have some insights into the heart and mind of Joseph in the midst of all this turmoil. Let's look again at what the Scripture says, and keep in mind all the context we can muster as we attempt to find some clarity regarding his situation; giving us the benefits of seeing how others go through difficulties; giving us the insight of seeing more of this man Joseph.

Scripture

¹⁹ *Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.*

Matthew 1:19

Thought provokers

- The outcome: We can see that Joseph has come to a conclusion; namely, that he is going to dismiss Mary – or, put another way, he is going to divorce her.
 - How do you think Joseph came to the decision to divorce Mary? Was it on his own or was it with the advice of others – did some kind of counsel sway him?
 - To whom or where do you turn for advice? How do you come to conclusions?
- The situation: Next, we note two things. First that Joseph was a righteous man. Second, (if you recall) he was a man who came from the line of David, and from Abraham – pillars in the faith of Israel. Joseph was a man who was brought up in the traditions of Israel. He would have been brought up learning the commandments of God. So, to call him a righteous man, it says something very specific about him. It's saying that as a righteous man, he was someone who believed in the God of Israel (other faiths didn't use such language). Joseph was a man who knew what it meant to be a follower of God.
 - Can you see the tension that exists in those words of Matthew 1:19... *"he was a righteous man... [about] ... to divorce"*. Given all the issues, and especially that Joseph didn't even see this situation coming, what pain do you think Joseph was going through? How easy do you think it was for him to contemplate divorce?

Reflections

If you've been through a relationship break up, perhaps you can identify, even in part, how torn on the inside Joseph must have felt. His life had changed dramatically. Hopes and dreams were shattered. What was promised in betrothal had seemingly gone. Anguish and deep dilemma flooded his heart and mind. Painful decisions had to be made. The one he loved was to be put away. The smear of scandal stained his forward steps. Was there any future at all? How long would this pain take? This was the cruel circumstance he was in. He felt betrayed. And, in all of this, what Mary was telling him probably made absolutely no sense at all.

If the story ended there, we would have a poor devotion to share. But, because Joseph is a righteous man, there is apparent in his life (a characteristic of his life), a deep self-control over his emotions and over his actions. There is no evidence of an ugly scene, no story of lashing out, no acrimonious mess. No, Joseph is a righteous man. There is absolutely no suggestion that Joseph says to God, *"let me put my righteousness aside for 5 minutes, and let me just vent my anger, my rage, my hurt."* No, not at all! In all of this disarray, Joseph has an allegiance to God and to God's Word. And so, while there is an internal battle going on in Joseph's life, the text, in a very matter of fact way, simply states that Joseph didn't want to expose Mary publicly.

There are two things we can add to our understanding. First, even today, if you go to certain cultures, women are shunned, women are thrown into jail, women are even stoned in such situations. But Joseph is a righteous man. Mary could have been shunned, Mary could have been thrown into jail, Mary could have been stoned. And so, while the law of Moses was given to preserve this people so that there would be a sense of true community; while the law was given so that this people would be different from all other peoples who did not know God; while the law was given so that there would be a purity about everything they did, which was to filter down into all of their relationships, Joseph, a righteous man extends grace.

Second, in the culture of the time, a dowry was a very important aspect of a marriage. There were two parts to a dowry. The husband would have to give a dowry to the father for the daughter, and, at the wedding, the father would give a dowry to the daughter (see Judges 1:15; 1 Kings 9:16). But, if there was a public divorce, the woman could get nothing. So, instead of retribution, instead of public shame, instead of throwing her into judgment, instead of depriving her, he thought about divorcing her quietly. Hurt at his core, Joseph does not take the road that would make things worse. Joseph is a righteous man who follows after God – He gives grace. And, as we soon shall see, God extends amazing grace to both Joseph and Mary.

Prayer and Song

Take time to pray and sing this beautiful carol, attributed to Piotrowi Skardze.

Infant holy, infant lowly,
Infant holy, infant lowly,
for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing, little knowing
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Swift are winging angels singing,
noels ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

*Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
vigil 'til the morning new
saw the glory, heard the story,
tidings of a gospel true.*

*Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you.
Christ the babe was born for you.*