

## **Joseph – A Man with an eternal purpose**

As we approach Christmas I want to focus on Joseph. We all have a purpose in our lives. There is a reason you were created. God has gifted and called you to be a unique person. Oftentimes, we don't know what our purpose is in this life. Sometimes we have to discover it. Other times, we stumble upon it. Every once in a while, we're faced with a situation that reveals our purpose. Joseph found himself in a situation that God would use to reveal His purpose for Joseph's life.

The Gospel of Matthew open by explaining Jesus' genealogy. Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph, back to Abraham. In verse 18 of this first chapter we see that Joseph found himself in an unplanned situation. Verse 18 says this: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."

Now that's quite a predicament. Joseph and Mary were betrothed to be married. It was more formal than simply being engaged. Matthew tells us that they had not had sex with each other, but Mary was pregnant. We're not told how Joseph reacted to this news, but you could imagine what he thought. He thought she had been unfaithful to him.

Matthew then tells us what Joseph was planning to do. He was going to divorce her, quietly. It would be a formal end to their betrothal. He could have publicly humiliated her because of her apparent unfaithfulness. That would have brought shame on Mary but it would allow Joseph to save face in the community. Everyone would feel sorry for Joseph and they would treat Mary horribly for the remainder of her life. Joseph was a good man, so he decided to divorce her in private.

In Luke 1:26-38 we have the story of the angel visiting Mary and telling her she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Christ child. At this point in Matthew, Joseph doesn't know that part of the story. All he knows is that his soon-to-be wife is pregnant and he isn't the father!

So, how does he respond? How would you? How does Joseph discover God's purpose in his life? Joseph did 3 things that allowed him to discover and fulfill God's purpose for his life.

First, Joseph listened to the Lord. Verses 21-23 tell us, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)."

An angel of the Lord was sent to Joseph to tell him what was going on. This angel appeared in a dream and spoke to him. He let him know that this was all part of God's promised plan to bring the Messiah into the world. This plan will fulfill the promise in Isaiah 7:14.

Now, Joseph has a decision to make. Does he listen to the Lord and follow through with this plan. He has to decide to listen and trust the Lord. If he stays with this plan, Mary needs to be a

virgin when she gives birth. God's purpose for Joseph's life was to be the earthly father of Jesus. In order to carry that out, he had to not divorce Mary and instead listen to the Lord and trust Him.

The second thing Joseph did was to love his wife. We already saw that he was not willing to shame her but was going to divorce her privately. It's no doubt that Joseph loved Mary. He cared deeply for her. Her put her well-being before his own. He loved his wife, as the Bible calls us to love our wives.

Joseph sacrificed for her as well. Not only his willingness to marry her, but also be sure she was still a virgin when Jesus was born. He was not selfish. He could have had sex with her, but instead he honored her.

Joseph was willing to be ashamed along with his wife. People in the first century were just like people today. Everyone in town knew this unmarried couple was expecting a baby. Everyone knew she was pregnant. There is no indication in Scripture that they shared with anyone how she got pregnant. If they did, no one believed them.

In fact, during Jesus' ministry the religious leaders mocked him by saying "we were not born of sexual immorality" (John 8:41). Clearly the word around town was that Mary got pregnant by Joseph prior to marriage, or by some other man. Joseph endured much to stay with Mary. If people asked him about her pregnancy, even if he told them the truth, would anyone actually believe that?

The third thing we see from Joseph is his willingness to obey God. Joseph had to trust the Lord to find resolution in this unplanned situation. The situation was one no one had ever heard about. Yet Joseph had to trust and obey God. If Joseph were not obedient, he would have not fulfilled his God-given purpose in this life.

In order for us to live out God's purpose in our lives, we must be obedient to the Father. Even when being obedient doesn't make sense to us. Even if being obedient makes us feel like we're standing out from the crowd. We have to hear His voice and follow Him.

When we do this, we are able to be men who live out our purpose. If you won't listen to the Lord, love others as we are called to love them, and walk in obedience, you could miss God's purpose for your life.

God never promises that living out His purpose will be easy. He doesn't promise that it won't take large amounts of faith. But, He does promise to walk with us in the midst of it all!

Merry Christmas!