

Broken Dreams?

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[0 : 00] Okay, so I said as we're going back to look at this account of the birth of Jesus and you know, one or two bits following on from it in the next couple of weeks.

And I just wonder what it is, what is it that you expect from God? What did you expect from God by coming here today? Or what are you looking for from God in your life?

What kind of things do you want Him to do in your life and in your living? What is it? Is He there to fulfill your dreams and my dreams?

Do we want our faith to be just a convenient, comfortable thing, something that can slip in to our everyday life plans, something that's neat and happy and quite tidy?

Or are you possibly struggling with counting the cost of being a Christian and all that's involved in that? Or potentially the nature of your own faith and my own faith and the significance of your concerns sometimes that you have no influence whatsoever on anyone in the life that you live.

[1 : 14] Don't feel particularly strong or victorious. You look around and you think everyone else is strong and victorious in their faith. But it may be that we struggle sometimes because our faith doesn't seem very real.

We come here, but it doesn't really accord with our touch the rest of the life that we're living for the rest of the week. And life is particularly difficult and there's a lot of knocks.

And we wonder what good is our faith to us or what good am I to God or to anyone else in my life. And these are a lot of questions that I'm sure that sometimes we have, if not at the moment, there will be times in the past maybe or there might be times in the future when we've had these thoughts.

I want to look at the story of the birth of Jesus for a little while from the standpoint of Joseph, okay, because that is central to the passage we read.

And I'm going to look at his story because the birth account that we're giving in Matthew is from Joseph's perspective. The other account that we're giving in Luke is from Mary's perspective.

[2 : 30] And that account is much longer, but I'm not saying anything about that. So Luke's account is really from Mary's point of view and has her genealogy.

And Matthew's account is from Joseph's point of view and it tells us his genealogy and where he came from. And he is called in this chapter in verse 20, he is called Joseph, by the angel he's called Joseph, the son of David.

And that's very unusual and it's very important because that terminology is usually used about Jesus himself, Jesus, the Son of God or the Son of David.

And it's important here because in this early passage that we have, we find that Jesus, the gospel writers are stating the legal status of Jesus himself through his, as it were, his father, even though it's not a father of natural birth.

But legally Joseph was the father and legally Joseph is a descendant of David, as also was Mary and that fits in with all the prophecies about the Messiah King being the great King who was a descendant of King David.

[3 : 51] But I think it also, when it talks about Joseph as the Son of David, I think it's saying more than his background and his genealogy and Jesus' genealogy as a result of that.

But speaking of him as a true child of God, a believer, and he was the earthly father of Jesus. He wasn't the genetic father but he was the earthly father of Jesus.

Legally he would have been known and seen as the father of Jesus and Mary later on in the gospel speak about Joseph being Jesus' father. And we know that that would have been the case.

Joseph, his dreams were shattered. Dreams were shattered in one dreadful conversation.

Joseph, I'm pregnant. His dreams were shattered. Joseph, I'm pregnant but it's okay.

[4 : 50] It's a miracle. I haven't slept with another man. I haven't broken faithfulness. It's from God. Can you imagine that particular conversation?

That his dreams were shattered. That his hopes of marrying this young woman that in all probability had been arranged for him but he'd come to agree and she'd agreed with the marriage.

That she'd been either unfaithful or she was just deluded in what she's saying. Now just to explain at this point, just for us because marriage and betrothal and engagement in the Middle Near East is very different from what it is today.

So usually the process would be that parents would arrange an engagement between a daughter and a son that would come together.

And that would be arranged by the parents and that would be the engagement. But the betrothal period was the next stage and that was when the individuals, in this case Mary and Joseph themselves agreed to betrothal and to a future together.

[6 : 04] And that betrothal was much more significant than engagement. It had legal standing and a dowry would have been paid by this stage by the parents of the bride.

And so in order to come out of that relationship there would need to be a divorce because at legal status. That's why you may be wondering, what, they weren't married? Why did Joseph need to divorce her?

Because that was the situation. The third stage would be full marriage itself. And in that betrothal stage, the bride still stayed with her parents. There was no sexual intercourse, there was no sexual involvement.

They didn't live together. She lived with the parents and then they came together for full marriage and union at the point of marriage.

So Joseph was in turmoil because of this. And as a righteous man he sought to just divorce her quietly because she could have actually been stoned or killed for what was presumed had happened.

[7 : 08] He sought to protect her. But the life that he'd hoped for was gone. His dreams were gone. You know, he was going to maybe take over his father's carpentry business and carry it on through the generations.

But that would all be gone. His dreams were gone. He didn't know what to do. He wasn't going to get married. He wasn't going to have the wife. His dreams, everything that he wanted. His dreams were shattered in that moment, in that conversation.

And then he receives himself another dream where an angel speaks to him. Verse 20, 21 speaks about that. An angel of the Lord appeared to him, he said, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take marriage your wife for that which is conceived in us from the Holy Spirit.

A voice from heaven confirming what Mary herself had experienced. Giving this child that was to be born a name, and that was very unusual.

That was something that they themselves would have authority and significance for doing rather than being given a name. And in prophetic fulfillment, both of something that was spoken of in the Old Testament and in obedience to the angel, Joseph moved forward and took Mary to be his wife.

[8 : 23] And yet they remained in that situation where she lived presumably with the parents until after Jesus was born.

So many questions. You know, we look at a passage like that, we've read it a hundred times. We hear it every year. I think it's nice and warm and cuddly and cotton-woolish. But yeah, it's a tremendously disruptive reality that God brings into Joseph's life.

And I'm sure he had many, many questions moving forward for me. Why me? Or what is this going to mean? My life has changed forever. How are we going to cope with all the gossip?

You know, it was hard enough for him to go ahead with this. But you know, everyone would also go nudge, nudge, you know, oh yeah, Mary's really pulled the eyes over Joseph on this one. And there would have always been cynicism and opposition and sometimes being ostracized in the society potentially as he looked forward.

What would lie ahead? He was a Jewish man that would have been brought up to know the whole prophetic hope of the Messiah. And here he's been told that the child that was his is going to be the Messiah, is going to be the Savior.

[9 : 37] What does that mean for them? How can I deal with being the father of the Messiah who's going to redeem his people, whatever he understood and whatever he thought about that, that he

and Mary were going to be the parents of his Savior, of the one who would save his people?

So his life was turned upside down and we often forget that. And what was, I'm going to move a little bit forward and go beyond this passage and just think for a moment about his calling in life. What was his calling from this point on? Well, the reality is for him and that's why I want to focus on this. The reality for Joseph being called by God and being involved in this amazing, remarkable and privileged way was to hardship.

His calling was to a life of hardship. From the moment that Jesus was born, he knew great danger and great difficulty and great opposition and he knew insecurity.

He had to move from his hometown and he had to flee to Egypt and in his ears would he been ringing the wailing and the crying of all the mothers who lost their firstborn sons to the brutal King Herod and his destructive tendencies.

[10:50] He would have left the family business. He was an immigrant into Egypt with no home and no finances, no support. And he was there and then had to eventually come back and settle in another town in a different place and try and begin a business.

And then with all the unanswered questions, what might have been and then this fatherly duties because there was, you know, other children, other brothers, sisters of Jesus that were born. hardship was his lot and then he died. He probably died pretty young. He certainly, it seems from the record of scripture, died before Jesus began his public ministry and Jesus was 30, around 30. So he probably died quite a relatively young man. His calling was to hardship. His calling was also to unrecorded influence.

It's easy, isn't it? We easily forget Joseph when we look at the Bible story and we think of the birth of Jesus. But Joseph would have been the primary teacher of Jesus as he grew up.

[12:04] He would have taught everything Jesus knew about the Old Testament because Jesus we know learned and grew in wisdom and stature. He would have been had that fatherly influence of love and of compassion and of care.

He would have all these conversations with Jesus, the eldest son, maybe as they work together in the carpentry workshop and they discuss different things.

Joseph had a great influence on the young Jesus. He had a great influence as a father, as a husband to Mary and providing, even probably though they were very poor, providing for the five or six or maybe seven children that they had.

And he did that and had great influence, unrecorded, unnoticed, unspoken of, unthought of by most of us, as calling was to hardship, to unrecorded influence, but also to eternal life as a son of David, as a true child of God, so that today Joseph knows, now he understands, now he has joy unparalleled and for him, as for all of us, the best is still to come, the best is still to come.

So I wondered about our story and about our lives as we parallel or as we think of ourselves in the light of Joseph. Are we struggling to live our Christian lives maybe with the expectation of obedience to God, with the thought of hardship?

[13:35] Are we tempted to walk away because of our own experiences, because of the cost or the inconvenience or the sacrifice that's expected of following Jesus, is it not the life that you dreamed of that you looked for or expected from God?

Are you hugely disappointed at what you're experiencing of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ? Are you thinking our Christian lives are so unnoticed without influence or significance? Look at the life of Joseph and consider him and what the Spirit might be saying. And if you're not a Christian and you maybe are thinking that I can't become a Christian because the cost is too much, the inconvenience is too much, the opposition might be too much, think again, please think again and consider Joseph.

What makes it all worthwhile then briefly? What makes it all worthwhile for us today as Christians to spend the time to gather and worship, to follow Jesus, to serve Him, to face the cost and the difficulties?

What makes it all worthwhile? Two things. And I finish with this. The first is the child Christ was born of a virgin. The child Christ was born of a virgin. We're going to look at verse 23 really.

[14:53] She will be a son. You shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins. The child Christ was born of a virgin. Christ, the word as John calls Him, who was from the beginning, who was with God and was God we're told, was conceived as a child in the womb in order to save us.

It's a miracle. You know, it's, you know, people kind of throw their hands up and say, oh, the virgin birth, that's ridiculous. As if it was easy for Joseph to accept it when it happened 2000 years ago. I say, well, yeah, a virgin birth, no problem.

It's always been a challenge. It's always had to be miraculous, isn't it? It wasn't a natural birth. It's the work of God, the spirit breaking into humanity, making a new creation through the power of the spirit.

God the eternally pre-existent Son becoming a human being, sinless by descent and character, but umbilically linked to humanity and to you and I forever.

And that's important. And not it's been the Christian, it's been a Christian truth for 2000 years. It's stated here as truth by the Gospel writers, not as myth, not as make believe, not as something just fuzzy and warm or strange.

[16:11] We see that in Mary's response. How can I be a child if not, I've not had a man, if not, I've not slept with him. And Joseph's response, we can see that.

It was unexpected, but it secures Jesus as the Son of God, both as fully human and fully divine so that he doesn't inherit the depravity of his first parent, of the first parent Adam.

You know, 1 Corinthians 15 tells us he's the second Adam, not born by the will of a man, but born from above, born from heaven. So we see that, that he is breaking in, God is breaking into our humanity in this miraculous way.

And he's sanctified in the womb by the Holy Spirit's power. And you and I accuse God of not being interested, not caring, not having any concern for us.

And yet we find this remarkable commitment and sacrifice where God the Son enters the womb of Mary in order to be one of us, in order to redeem us.

[17:20] And we think he doesn't care. And we think he doesn't know what it's like to be one of us. So Mary, a child Christ born of a virgin is a hugely significant truth.

Yeah, I read a lot of people, I read the commentators that Christians that say, well, it doesn't matter too much if it was a virgin birth or not, it's insignificant. God could have done it a different way.

No, if God did it a different way, he would have done it a different way. It's significant and important. And it's stated clearly, because it's a reminder to us who Jesus is and how he came and why he came to us.

The child Christ was born of a virgin and the child Christ had two significant names, Jesus and Emmanuel. Both of the names that are given here, the name by the angel and that also from the word of prophecy from Isaiah.

Jesus he is called or Joshua is the Old Testament name of that, saving his people from their sins. That's what the name means, saving his people from their sins.

[18:31] I hear that less and less in the way we talk about Jesus. I think it's because it's all become so cliched for people to talk about being saved from their sins.

It's, you know, everyone wants sin in the salvation seminar, but no one really wants to talk about what we're being saved from. And yet we find that so significant and so important that God is breaking into our human existence to save us from a path of self-destruction that sin deceives us into thinking is life.

Sin tells us that that's a great way to live. Live in control of your own life. Live without thought about God and without thought about spiritual realities or about depravity or evil or death that lies ahead.

He has come in commitment and love to us to rescue us from his just judgment and his wrath of which we are guilty of falling in front of because of our rebellion and sin.

And he's come to take us to safety, to forgiveness and life. He begins a journey of human existence in the womb through birth, infancy, childhood, adulthood, all that's represented here and through learning and growing and love and loss, sinless, all the way to the rugged cross that we will remember today as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

[20:11] And that's what he destroys, isn't it, for as that's what we remember. It destroys the power of both physical and spiritual death, which is our destiny without him.

Christ breaks our dreams when we trust in Him. He breaks the dreams we have naturally. He destroys them.

He takes them away, but then He remakes them in His image. He remakes them for us. He remakes them in a way that He is center and we follow and serve Him.

And He does that because He's the author of life and He restores and renews us and takes us where He wants us to go. So we can see in that the sacrifice and inconvenience of grace as Christians we have today is a price worth paying, isn't it?

It's a price worth paying to know the kind of future that we have in Christ, the friendship, the protection, the hope, the guidance, the transformation in all the pain and the battle and the struggles and the hope of eternal life.

[21 : 23] Jesus saves His people from His sins. But also Jesus is called in this chapter, Emmanuel, behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and they shall call His name Emmanuel, taken from the Old Testament from Isaiah.

No meaning God with us, we know that, don't we? That is the essence of what Jesus has done come to do, to be with us in our lives and in the brokenness of our lives, driven by His love and by His longing for us.

He promises to be with us. And that's hugely significant, not just for the life we live knowing that He is with us, but also the life that we show to others, that we are with others and that we live and are motivated to live for and among those who also need to meet our Savior Jesus, our friend and our Redeemer.

So when He turns your life and my life upside down, when there is grief and when there is suffering and opposition, He wants us to live our lives in such a way that we point people in the suffering and the difficult, none of which we look for and none of which we want to the Savior who can redeem these realities, who can upend them, not let them defeat us, and that through them we can still share our love for Christ and live for His glory.

And that even in these times, we are not alone. The danger for us is always just to suffer badly, isn't it? To suffer the same way that we might suffer if we were absolutely alone.

[23 : 14] You know, you know, even humanly speaking, and I know how much easier, easier is not the word, how much less difficult suffering can be if we are not alone.

If there are people around us helping, taking us through, they can never go through that suffering but they can stand beside us.

The difference is Christ not only stands beside us but He has gone through that on the cross and He knows and He is redeeming and will take us through even in the mystery of that for us.

He shares Himself with us and for us the best is yet to come as it is still for Joseph. So Grace, knowing the love of Christ, coming to know Jesus Christ, saying to Him, I need You, saying to Him, I want You to be my Redeemer and Savior, give me the faith I need to do that and help me as a Christian of 10, 20, 30, 40 years to be finishing well, to be shining for Christ, to be transformed by Christ.

Allow that love of Christ and that grace of Christ to be continued to be life changing for me.

Dream-shattering, yes. Inconvenient, absolutely. Sacrificial, without doubt.

[24 : 40] But absolutely beautiful. Completely redeeming and incomparably great. And that's my prayer for myself and for each of us that we would understand that today just a little bit more in the light of Joseph's life and the fact that the Holy Spirit of God has given this account for us to consider that we would live in the light of that and that we would love to see others coming to know that light as well, the light and the love of Jesus Christ.

The Savior, God with us. Amen. Lord God, we pray that You would help us, that You would heal us, that today that would be good news.

We know we know it. But help us to find fresh reality in it as we come to this season.

And remember the real people who were involved in the birth and the life of Jesus, ordinary people like ourselves, but very honored people because of God's choice.

And may we know also in our unworthiness that we are not worthless, but we are chosen to follow and serve this great Redeemer, to live by faith, even in the battles and struggles of this life, which undoubtedly there are, to the glory of God.

[26 : 07] Help us so to do we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.