**MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM**

**PART VI**

**THE ESSENCE OF MASCULINITY: A CHRISTMAS PERSPECTIVE**

**Matthew 1:19**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Matthew 1. We are currently in a sermon series called “Male and Female He Created Them”, in which we look at what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality. Last week, we looked at biblical femininity through the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus. We saw that the essence of femininity, according to the Bible, is thoughtful surrender. To be a woman is to be willing to surrender to the will of God, content to be in the background so long as she is doing his will. It’s a willingness to receive what he would give and no more. It’s not a blind leap of faith, but rather a thoughtful surrender that carefully considers God’s call on one’s life. While there will be times that this surrender is given with questions still unanswered, there will also be time when this surrender erupts into joyful praise to God for the great things that he has done.

Today, we’re going to look at Joseph, Mary’s husband, to see what this little snapshot of his life in Matthew 1 can teach us about biblical masculinity. As a mirror image of last week’s sermon, I have titled this message: “**The Essence of Masculinity: A Christmas Perspective**.”

One of the most interesting things you can do this week is google the term “masculinity”. The first thing you will encounter is a definition that says, “possession of the qualities traditionally associated with men.” That’s not very helpful. It’s a circular definition: to be a man is to be a man. But right underneath it, you will find this quotation: “handsome, muscled, and driven, he’s a prime example of masculinity.”

Scroll down a little and you’ll find a TIME Magazine article called “Young Men are Facing a Masculinity Crisis.” In that article, the author provocatively writes, “The future of men is women.” What he means is that true men embrace equality with women. That’s also not very helpful. It doesn’t tell us what men should *be*. It only proposes what men should *believe*.

Scroll down a little more and you’ll find a website called www.artofmanliness.com. In this most helpful of websites you’ll find articles on how to roll up your shirt sleeves, how to trim your beard, and how to be combat ready. I can tell you right now in the interests of full disclosure that, if a man is defined as a stylish, bearded warrior, then I am not much of a man.

Two trends are clear from just a quick perusal of popular culture’s take on masculinity: (1) most people don’t know what masculinity is; and (2) those who believe they know what masculinity is have massively over-simplified at best, and massively missed the mark at worst.

Thankfully, the Bible says *much* about what it means to be a man. One has to look no further than the life of Jesus to get a clear, perfect picture of biblical manhood. Jesus was “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). He was a man “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15). Surely, many sermons could be spent looking at what Jesus teaches us about masculinity, and we would all be deeply enriched. But what we’re going to do today is look at Joseph, Jesus’ adoptive father. He was a simple carpenter, not impressive by our standards or his own. And yet, he has *much* to teach us about what it means to be a man.

Our focus today will be on verse 19: “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” But for context, we will look at 1:18-25, and then 2:13-15.

We have three points today about Joseph and his example to us of a godly man:

1. Joseph the Just
2. Joseph the Protector
3. Joseph the Leader

 (1) **JOSEPH THE JUST (“And her husband Joseph, being a just man…”)**

Our text begins in verse 18 with Matthew’s introduction of the topic he’s about to address: “the birth of Jesus Christ.” Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, and his main goal in writing this book is to prove to the Jews that Jesus is God’s promised Messiah. That’s why he begins the book of Matthew the way he does, with a genealogy, in verse 1. For the Jews, your family history was more important in determining your identity than your personality, your career, or your talents. Jews wanted to know whose son you were, which tribe you came from, and which town you were born in. Jesus was no exception. Knowing Jesus’ family tree was like knowing his credentials.

And so Matthew meticulously shows that Jesus is not only a descendant of Abraham (and therefore an Israelite), but a descendant of David as well. It was common knowledge among Jews that the Messiah, the one God promised would free his people from oppression and restore them to the Promised Land, would be one of David’s heirs.

Matthew’s goal is no different as we come to our text. He turns his attention away from Jesus’ distant relatives and now looks to his immediate family, with the goal of showing his Jewish readers that Jesus’ parents were *righteous* people; that Jesus comes from good stock. This was especially important given that the pre-marriage conception of Jesus was no doubt common knowledge at the time.

People knew that Jesus was conceived before Mary and Joseph were married. They were betrothed, yes, which conferred legal status to their relationship that could only be severed by divorce, but they weren’t married yet and therefore were not yet permitted to be physically intimate. And so the fact that Mary was pregnant would have led to one of two conclusions: either Mary cheated on Joseph, or Mary and Joseph slept together before marriage. Either way, Jesus was conceived in sin. The question for many Jews, then, would be, “How could he be the Messiah if he was the child of sexual immorality? And how could he be sinless if his parents were such sinners?”

These two questions – the apparent sin of Jesus’ conception, and the apparent sin of Jesus’ parents – are what Matthew is responding to. He begins by answering the first in verse 18: “before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” Matthew was saying, “Yes, it was a pre-marriage conception, but not in the way you might think.” Jesus was conceived before Joseph and Mary were married, but not as the result of fornication or adultery. His conception was the result of the Holy Spirit’s activity. And so, rather than being a *stain* on Jesus’ identity, his pre-marriage conception was actually a *confirmation* of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God.

Matthew then answers the second question in verse 19, which is our key verse for today: “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” Joseph was a *just* man. Other translations render this as “righteous man”. It means that he was righteous according to the law of God, that his life reflected God’s moral commands in Scripture. He wasn’t perfect. He was still a sinner like all of us. But overall, his life reflected a genuine desire to follow God’s law and a relatively consistent pattern in doing so. Matthew is telling his Jewish audience that Joseph’s life was characterized by righteousness, not sin, and therefore they can have confidence that Jesus came from a good family.

This is also why we can have confidence that what Matthew has written about Joseph is worthy of imitation. Biblical figures are not always meant to be followed. The Bible often tells us stories about people not so that we will do what they did, but so that we will *not* do what they did. That’s not the case here, because Matthew isn’t writing about Joseph’s sins. He’s writing about Joseph’s righteousness. That’s why we can look to Joseph as an example to follow.

And this quality of Joseph’s *justice* is certainly worthy of imitation. It tells us that Joseph knewthe Scriptures and lived them out. He studied them, applied them, memorized them, consulted them, trusted them. The Bible was the ultimate authority in his life, and he showed that by the careful attention that he gave to it.

Brothers, does that describe you? I know you’re all busy. You have so much to do at work, many of you have families to care for, and you just don’t seem to have the energy or the motivation to read your Bible. I can relate to that. Right now it’s easy for me to read the Bible a lot because it’s my job. I have hours and hours every day to read, study, and meditate on the truths of the Scriptures. But it wasn’t so long ago that I was in the same routine you find yourself in. I was up early, working hard at my office downtown, home late, always tired. When I had some free time, I didn’t want to pick up my Bible and read. I wanted to do something mindless, something entertaining, something easy. Reading the Bible can be hard. Watching TV isn’t.

And yet, a godly man is characterized first and foremost by his love of the Bible. If we don’t read the Bible, know the Bible, believe the Bible, apply the Bible, then we’re missing a huge part of what it means to be a man. The measure of a man is not the length of his beard or the tone of his muscles. A true man is a man of the word.

One of the biggest reasons why we tend to neglect the Bible is that we don’t understand what’s at stake. We tend to have the attitude, “I know it would be good to read the Bible, but if I don’t, I’ll get by just fine.” But will you? Will you really get by just fine? God *changes us* through his word. He reforms us, transforms us, reorients us both to *think* differently and to *live* differently. God accomplishes his will through his word. “Let there be light!” and there was light. “Let the waters swarm with living creatures”, and the waters swarmed with living creatures. He creates by his divine speech, and he recreates us by his divine speech. As Moses said in his farewell sermon which we now know as the book of Deuteronomy:

“For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.” (Deut. 32:47).

The Scriptures are the foundation for any man to become a godly man. They don’t just convey knowledge to you. They convey power to you. They don’t just tell you what it means to be a godly man. They are part of how God *makes* you a godly man. We must start with the Scriptures.

(2) **JOSEPH THE PROTECTOR (“…unwilling to put her to shame…”)**

It is the Scriptures that enable Joseph to respond the way he does to the realization that Mary is pregnant with a child not his own. It was his *just* character, shaped by conformity to the Scriptures, which made him have the attitude that we see in the next part of verse 19: he was “unwilling to put her to shame”. This leads to the next point: Joseph the Protector.

When Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant, he has no idea that this baby she’s carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That’s why the angel in verse 20 has to tell him, “that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” So before the angelic dream, he can really only come to one conclusion: that she slept with another man.

With this revelation, divorce was inevitable. Some might say, “well, he could have forgiven her and they could have stayed together.” But that’s reading our current mindset into a very different culture. In his commentary on Matthew, Craig Keener writes the following:

“In contrast to most of modern Western culture, Joseph lived in a society where he had no option of giving Mary a second chance, even if he wanted to…Jewish, Greek, and Roman law all demanded that a man divorce his wife if she were guilty of adultery.”

Divorce was not only permitted. It was expected. The only question was how the divorce would be handled.

Most people would have expected Joseph to react with anger. They would have expected him to loudly announce that Mary, his betrothed, had been unfaithful. They would have expected him to maximize the publicity of her infidelity in order to maximize her shame. It would be his way of seeking revenge. “You hurt me, so now I’m going to hurt you!”

But Joseph had other reasons to make the divorce public other than revenge. Making it public would have guarded his honour. It would have left no doubt in the minds of his family and his community that he was the blameless one, and she was the blameworthy one. He needed to distance himself as far away from her sin as possible, and the best way to do that was to let everyone know that she was at fault, not him.

Making it public would also have protected Joseph’s financial interests. When they were betrothed, Joseph had to pay a substantial bride price to Mary’s family in recognition that her family had raised her and protected her. But if the betrothal was broken off because of her wrongdoing, he could have demanded that the bride price be returned to him. We need to remember that Joseph wasn’t a rich man. He was a tradesman, a carpenter, a blue-collar worker, not a social elite. He also would have been young, likely between 18-20 years old. He would have saved for years to pay for that bride price. If he didn’t get it back, he would have essentially lost his life savings, and if he ever wanted to marry another woman, he would have to start from scratch to save for another.

In short, Joseph had all the reason in the world to make Mary’s apparent infidelity as public as possible. That would certainly have been the smart thing to do if he were looking after his own interests. But he wasn’t looking after his own interests. He was looking after hers.

Even after it seemed like she had cheated on him, embarrassed him, dishonoured him, and hurt him through her apparent infidelity – even after all of that, he put her needs before his own. Verse 19 says that he was “unwilling to put her to shame”. Could he have faced shame? Absolutely. A quiet, private divorce would give rise to many questions about his own honour. Rumours would spread as people began to speculate about the reasons for the divorce. Was it her? Or was it him? Did she cheat on him, or did he cheat on her? He could be put to shame. But shame was something he was willing to face. He was willing to face the shame, because he was unwilling to put her to shame. His desire was to protect her, not shame her.

Do you see what this is? It’s a picture of the gospel. Joseph took Mary’s shame just as Jesus, his adopted son, would take his shame, our shame, and the shame of all who would trust in him. The gospel is the good news that Jesus took the shame of our sin upon himself, a shame that he didn’t deserve but that he bore nonetheless, so that we wouldn’t have to bear it. He carried our shame to the cross, dying in our place, so that we could receive his free gift of righteousness. Our shame for his righteousness.

This is what we call *grace*. To give *grace* to someone is to give *favour* to them that is unmerited and undeserved. It is serving another, protecting another, loving another, when the other has done nothing to deserve it and everything to not deserve it. Joseph was a man well acquainted with *grace*, and he was well acquainted with grace because he was well acquainted withthe Scriptures – not just the rules, not just the prohibitions and the regulations. He was acquainted with the *essence* of the Scriptures – the unmerited, undeserved grace of God for his sinful people. Joseph understood that the God of Israel never dealt with his people according to their sins. Instead, he knew the God of Israel to be merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, a God of grace and a God of love.

This is why Joseph the Protector must be Joseph the Just first. It was his immersion in the Scriptures that gave him the grace, the patience, the gentleness to be “unwilling to put her to shame”.

Brothers, are you a *gracious* person, to your friends, to your family, to your children, to your wife? When others wrong you, are you more concerned about your reputation or about their reputation? There may come a day when you must reveal the sins of others, but it must be for *their* good, not your own.

Many men understand their responsibility to protect their families from physical harm. But not many men understand their responsibility to protect *like this*. This is a protection that goes way beyond physical harm. It protects others from *shame*.

But rather than protect from shame, we are often the ones eager to heap shame on others. When someone wrongs us, we want them to know *exactly* how they hurt us. They hurt us, and now we want to hurt them. We tell others about how we’ve been wronged. We call it “venting”, but it’s really just shaming. We refuse to talk to the person who has wronged us. We call it “space”, but our real goal is to make them feel shame.

This is not protecting. It’s not what a man should do. Joseph shows us that a man protects others by putting their interests before his own, even when it causes him harm. That’s what Jesus did for us. He protected us, not just from physical harm, but from the harm of sin’s shame. And it cost him his very life. If he did this for us, then we ought to do this for others.

This is so counter cultural. We live in a time when men are told that true men stand up for themselves. They fight back when they’re challenged. They don’t back down. They watch their own backs because no one else will. Those who treat them well, they return the favour. Those who treat them poorly, they pay them in kind. That’s not what Joseph did, it’s not what Jesus did, and it’s not what true men should do. True men give themselves up for the good of others, even when the others don’t deserve it. True men protect others, even if it means they won’t be protected.

(3) **JOSEPH THE LEADER (“resolved to divorce her quietly”)**

We see this same outward-looking, servant heart in the way that Joseph led. This leads to our third point: Joseph the Leader. Joseph’s leadership is first displayed at the end of verse 19: he “resolved to divorce her quietly.” The word “resolved” implies a settled decision after careful deliberation. Joseph didn’t just think about his options and ponder what he should do. He made a decision.

That’s what leaders do: they make decisions. If you enter a room full of people all doing the same thing, it’s impossible to determine who the leader is. But as soon as a decision is called for, you immediately know who the leader is by looking at who makes the decision.

But there are leaders, and there are leaders. The difference between a leader and a good leader is that a good leader makes good decisions. And the difference between a good leader and a godly leader is that a godly leader doesn’t just make good decisions. He makes biblical decisions. That’s what Joseph did. He didn’t come up with a course of action off the top of his head. He made his decision based on what the Bible said he should do.

They key here, however, is not just that Joseph made decisions, or even that he made biblical decisions. The key here is the kind of leader he saw himself to be. He saw himself as a leader who is being led. We see that in how he responded to the angel’s revelation to him in verse 20 that Mary’s child was not conceived out of adultery. He was conceived from the Holy Spirit. And not only that, but this child would be the one who would save God’s people from their sins. The angel then gives Joseph two instructions: he was to take Mary as his wife, and he was to name the baby Jesus.

What does Joseph do? He *obeys*. He doesn’t just stick with his original plan, saying “I’m the leader here, I’ve made a decision, and that decision is final!” No. As verses 24-25 tell us, he “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” Joseph the leader *submits* himself to *his* leader, God, whose word was brought to Joseph through the angel.

Joseph obeys again when his narrative picks up again in 2:13. The angel appears to Joseph for the second time and tells him to flee to Egypt, for King Herod was searching for baby Jesus in order to kill him. What does he do? Does he display the combat ready skills that artofmanliness.com says he needs in order to be truly masculine? No! He doesn’t fight. He *runs*. And he runs because God told him to run. The fact that he ran doesn’t subtract from his masculinity. It *adds* to it. And the reason it adds to it is that he ran out of *obedience*. Obedience is never un-masculine. Obedience is part of the essence of masculinity.

Obedience and leadership aren’t at odds with one another. They don’t conflict. Joseph still *led* as he obeyed the angel’s directions. 2:14 tells us that he rose and took the child and his mother. He never stops leading his family. But he leads with the authority of a man who knows that he also is under authority.

Brothers, this is infinitely more difficult than mere leading. Most people can make decisions. Many can make good decisions. But it is much rarer to find a man who can make decisions knowing that many of his decisions will be made for him. It is much harder to lead *under* authority than to lead as the *only* authority.

Joseph’s example shows us just how hard this is. He was the leader, but he had to give up any honour he could have preserved through a quiet divorce by taking Mary as his wife instead. He was the leader, but he had to give up his right to name the child he would raise as his own. He was the leader, but he had to give up his right to consummate his marriage after taking Mary as his wife, so that the prophecy that “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son” would be fulfilled.

Don’t miss this little but significant part of the story. In 1:23 Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, which says that the virgin shall conceive *and bear* a son. She wasn’t just to conceive the Messiah as a virgin. She was also to give birth to the Messiah as a virgin. That’s why Matthew tells us in verse 25 that Joseph “knew her not until she had given birth to a son.”

This is true masculinity. A man must lead while being led, exercising authority as one who is under authority, often giving up his own rights to fulfill his responsibilities. This has vast implications for how a man will lead, but the main implication is this: he will never lead for his own good. He will lead for the good of those he leads, and he will lead for the good of the one who leads him.

True masculinity isn’t afraid to make decisions. It isn’t afraid to lead. But the kind of leadership it exercises is never inward focused. It’s never “me-centered”. It’s always outward focused. It leads to care for others, to protect others, to teach others, to build others up. And ultimately, a true man leads to make much of the perfect man, Jesus Christ, to do all for his glory and for his fame. Follow Joseph’s example. Joseph left his hometown, moved to a foreign country, lived in fear of assassins, surrendered his rights – he did all these things to serve Jesus, for he knew that Jesus would be the one to save his people from their sins.

**CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt that men today face a masculinity crisis. The question that follows is, “where do we turn for answers?” Do we turn to cultural depictions of the “handsome, muscled, and driven” man? The bearded, warrior-like, stylish man? I have no desire to be like that man. But I long with all my heart to be a man like Joseph. I want to be a man of the word, a man who loves the Bible. I want to be a man who protects others, not just from physical harm, but from the harm of shame. And I want to be a man who leads like one led, a leader who pursues the good of others and not his own, who desires most of all to see Jesus glorified and his message of salvation shared with all people.

That’s what it means to be a man, and if men would embrace this call to be this kind of man, there would no longer be a masculinity crisis. If men would embrace this call to be this kind of man, our children would grow up knowing that men don’t lead to serve themselves but to serve others, our wives would follow us more willingly knowing that we use our authority under God’s authority, and our culture would begin to see both the beauty and the power of the gospel. For that is what true, biblical masculinity does: it displays the love of the little baby boy who would one day give up his own life for sinners like you and me, the blameless one taking our blame on himself, that we would be saved from our sins.