

12-20-20 'Tis The Season

Matthew 1:18-24

You all know the Christmas song, "Deck the Halls."

Let's sing it together!

Today's song could be, 'Tis the season to be crazy! Christmas time each year seems to be crazier and crazier each year, add 2020 to it and Craziest on steroids.

2020 seems like the year of crises, one crisis to another. Name some of the crisis' we had in 2020: Covid-19, fires in California, hurricane Laura hit Texas and Louisiana, hurricane Sally two weeks later, violence, rioting, and election issues.

American Psychological Association published a story about how the crises' in 2020 have affected us.

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-october>

Crisis don't stop at Christmas. The hospitals don't empty out at Christmas. The funeral homes don't close. Marriage problems don't magically go away. Rebellious children don't always come to their senses. Dreams still get shattered. People still get hurt.

So, where can we go with all these crises? Counselors and therapists are busier than ever, alcohol and drugs don't fix anything. They just kick the can down the road and could lead to a new crisis, addiction.

We can go to God and His word. There is nothing new under the sun, and many, if not all the characters dealt with crises in their lives. God's word records all of them for our benefit.

Since Christmas is this week, let's look at how Joseph handled his crises, the first Christmas crisis.

Matthew 1:18-24

Verse 18 tells us that '**Mary was betrothed to Joseph.**' That meant a whole lot more than being engaged today. Hebrew marriages had two stages. In the first stage called 'betrothal,' the couple was considered to be legally married, even though they did not live together as man and wife.

This period of being separate, but legally married could last as long as a year, and it was far more binding than modern engagements. Only divorce could break it apart. And if they had been unfaithful to each other, it would have been counted as adultery punishable by death under Old Testament law.

Joseph and Mary had been joyfully making plans for a wedding. But then Mary gave him the shocking news that she was pregnant. Talk about a crisis for Joseph! With those unbelievable words from Mary, Joseph's world began to fall apart, so "the first time we see him in the Bible, Joseph was planning a divorce."

When Crisis comes, we must decide, freak out and lose all control, or scream and run around the house, or any other ways you may handle crisis, or we can run to God.

Let's see what Joseph did and what we can learn from it.

I. Lean into God.

- We must make the conscience decision to pursue God’s plan for our lives.
- In the moments of the Crisis, often we can’t see what’s going on, and need a point of reference to gather ourselves.
- **Verse 18** shows us the Lord's unique plan for Joseph and Mary.
- Think about the plan Joseph had for his life. I'm sure he was planning for a good life. But he probably thought he would have a simple life: Build up his carpentry business, marry Mary, have lots of children, follow the Lord, strive to be a good and righteous man.
- Joseph probably planned for a simple life, but God had other plans. Joseph could have never imagined the mission that God had planned for his life: "Me the stepfather of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the promised Messiah? My life story in God's Word? No way!"
- Joseph thought he would have a simple life. But God had a different plan. And in today's Scripture, Joseph got to the point where he was open to God's plan. Joseph fully embraced God's plan, even though it took him to difficult places in life, and that's what God wants us to do.
- God has plans for our lives that are far greater than we can imagine. His plan for your life stretches out for millions of years into all eternity. And we can't begin to see it all, but He wants us to start looking in that direction.
- Jesus told the Laodicean church that they were blind. And Jesus said:

Revelation 3:17-18, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’— and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

- "I counsel you to anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see." This Scripture reminds me that so often in life we are looking at this thing we've got to do, or this thing we need, or this thing we want, or this thing we enjoy. But God wants us to look beyond the earthly things of life and see the eternal things.

That's why in **Jeremiah 33:3**, the Lord says: ‘**Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.**’

Ephesians 3:20, Paul tells Christians that God, “**Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,**”

II. Keep Going, Stay Pliable

- Staying after God and remaining pliable will result in growing in His goodness.
- Joseph is a great example for us today. What a good and godly man he was! And we can see this truth in **vs. 18-20**. Again, God's Word says:

- Notice that Joseph was morally pure. That's why he was so concerned when he found out that Mary was going to have a baby. But Jesus was born though a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Joseph and Mary had both kept God's standards of moral purity.
- Many people today have been deceived into thinking that this is not important. But they're wrong. Anything that's important to God ought to be important to us. And Joseph was morally pure.
- But also notice in **vs. 19** that he was a **"just man."** Of course, Joseph wasn't perfect, but he was **"a just man."** That means he was strongly devoted to God's Word and God's ways. That's the way God wants us to be.
- Joseph was a just man, and he was a compassionate man. Joseph overflowed with godly, Christlike compassion. That's why in **vs. 19** Joseph didn't want to put Mary through public shame and punishment. Instead, he wanted to end the marriage privately. Joseph was righteous, but he wasn't self-righteous. He had a heart like the Savior's heart: Merciful, compassionate, and kind.
- It helps us to think how difficult this situation was for Joseph. He didn't know who the father was, but he knew it wasn't him. And terrible things would have happened to Mary if Joseph had put her away publicly, so he didn't want to make a public spectacle of Mary. He was merciful, compassionate, and kind, and that's the way God wants us to be.
- Joseph was a just man, a compassionate man, and a patient man. **Verse 20** tells us that **"he thought about (on) these things."** Joseph could have flown into a rage, but he didn't act in anger or haste. He was thoughtful. He took the time to think things through.
- In all these ways, Joseph was a good and godly man, and God wants us to be like him, especially in times of crisis. We must be growing in God's goodness.
- Joseph didn't seek revenge, social media shaming, he didn't overreact, or have a knee jerk reaction. He thought, pondered, meditated on the crisis that was unfolding.

We can't accomplish the next points without doing the first two. When the crisis comes, lean into God, Keep going, following God, be careful not to sin and stay pliable, willing to learn, see the goodness of God. Then we can do number 3, 4, and 5.

III. Trust God to Guide Us

- We can trust Him to guide us in every situation!
- Joseph found this out, while pondering in the second part of **verse 20: "behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."**
- God spoke to Joseph through a dream, and Joseph listened. He didn't brush it off, or rebel against the guidance of God. Sometimes God does speak through dreams. We see this in both the Old Testament and the New. For example, in **Matthew 2**, when the wise men went to see Jesus, God warned them in a dream that they should not return to King Herod in Jerusalem.

- Of course, most of our dreams are not to be taken as guidance from God. That dream you had last night is probably not the Lord speaking to you. It may be a mixed-up rehash of something you watched on TV or a something you ate.
- God speaks to us through His perfect Word. And you may never get a dream from the Lord, but you can always look into His Word, and find just the message you need to hear.
- Today's Scripture reminds us that we can always trust God to keep His Word.
- **Read verses 22-23**
- Over 700 years had gone by since God made that prophecy in **Isaiah 7:13-14**. But God kept His Word, and He always will. The question is: Will we listen to God like that Joseph listened?
- God wants to guide us, so keep trusting God to guide you, especially in times of crisis.

IV. Trust Christ to Take Care of Us

- WE CAN TRUST JESUS, BECAUSE HE CAME TO SAVE US!
- **Read verse 21**
- The angel told Joseph the most important news the world will ever hear: **“she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”**
- Jesus is the Greek form of the familiar Jewish name Joshua. It literally means 'Jehovah is salvation,' and Jesus' very name highlights the most important mission of His life: To save us from our sins and reconcile us to a holy God.
- The angel listed only one task at the top of Jesus' job description: **“He will save His people from their sins.”** Jesus was the only baby in history born for the purpose of dying. Across his manger fell the shadow of the cross.
- Why did He have to die? A big part of the answer can be seen in this letter a little girl wrote to Santa. I can relate to what she said. "Dear Santa, I tried to be good this year, but it just didn't work out."
- You know it never will. No matter how hard you try, you just can't be good enough. That's because we are all born with a terrible, spiritual disease called sin. And it is deadly. "the worst virus, and it infects 100% of humanity.
- The symptoms of the virus are everywhere: Drug and alcohol addiction, child neglect, lying, stealing, family friction, selfishness, and even murder. Unless the sin virus is cured, it will increasingly wreck our lives in this world, and put us in hell forever.
- The good news is that a cure has been found for the sin virus. God sent it through His Son, born as a baby in a Bethlehem manger.
- But what a cost for this cure! -- God's Son leaving Heaven to live in our fallen world. God's Son dying on the cross to take our suffering and death, then rising again to give us His eternal life.

- But how do you get the cure? Turn to God in faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put your trust in Him and receive Him as your Lord and Savior.
- We can trust Jesus to take care of us because he came to save us, and he came to stay with us!
- **Read verses 22-23 again**
- Church: The only way that God could fully be "**Immanuel, God with us,**" was to become one of us, and that is what Jesus did when He became a man.

Hebrews 2:14 explains it this way: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,"

Hebrews 2:17 says, "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

- Jesus was like us. He experienced loneliness, illness, and anger. He laughed, played, swam, caught fish, built tables, and attended parties.
- In **Matthew 4:1**, Jesus was "**tempted by the devil.**" In **Matthew 4:2**, He "**was hungry.**" **Mark 6:3** tells us that Jesus was a carpenter. In **John 4:6-7** Jesus was weary and thirsty. And in **John 11:35** Jesus wept with sympathy for His friends.
- Jesus really was and is "**Immanuel, God with us.**" God the Son humbled Himself to become like us in all ways but one: The perfect Son of God never sinned even once in thought, word or deed. **Hebrews 4:15 says, "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."**
- The only man who never sinned died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. Now by His Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ is Immanuel, the God who came to be with us and stay with us. That's why in **Matthew 28:20** Jesus said, "**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.**"
- What a difference that makes! Joseph trusted God to take Him through his troubles, and we can trust Him too! Most of all, we can trust Jesus to save us from our sins, so put your trust in the Lord today! And keep trusting Jesus, even when you are going through a crisis.

V. We Need to Do What God Wants Us to Do

- **Read verses 24-25**
- Joseph was totally committed to do everything God asked Him to do. He obeyed God. He took great care of Mary and little Jesus. Where would Mary and Jesus have been without Joseph? He stood in the gap to provide for them and protect them.
- He took a very pregnant Mary to Bethlehem for the census. He took Jesus to the temple to be circumcised (**Luke 2**). Joseph took his family to the temple every week, celebrated the feasts. The last time we see Joseph in scripture it was at the Passover.

- Joseph **DID** what God wanted him to, and the whole world was changed. He did what God told him to do, even in the crisis. And that is surely what God wants us to do too.

Conclusion

We all will have to face crises in life, so what should we do?

Live like Joseph. Have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Keep pursuing God's plan for your life. Keep growing in God's goodness. Trust God to guide you forward. Trust Christ to take care of you. And do what God wants you to do.