

UNSUNG HEROES

Part 1

“JOSEPH: The Earthly Father of Jesus Christ”

ENGAGING the Audience

The dictionary defines a hero as:

a: a person who, in the face of danger and adversity or from a position of weakness, displays courage and the will for self-sacrifice for some greater good.

Hall of Fame tennis player and AIDS activist Arthur Ashe once said...

“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

Christopher Reeve, famous for playing Clark Kent in the 80’s Superman movies before he was tragically paralyzed once said...

“A hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming odds.”

Felix Adler, a famous Jewish lecturer and social reformer once said...

“A hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men to see by.”

Making the CONNECTION

When we think of heroes, whether sporting, military, political, or biblical heroes, we think of men and women who meet these definitions. Words like courage, sacrifice, selflessness, and perseverance immediately come to mind.

We think of men and women who have achieved extraordinary feats in the face of overwhelming odds. We think of men and women who willingly and quietly sacrificed their lives for the sake of others. We think of men and women who persevered through the unimaginable when the average person who have given-up. We think of men and women whose lives were blazing torches in the face of oppression, prejudice, tyranny, and evil.

The Bible is chalked full of these kinds of heroes - some more popular than others. When reflecting on biblical heroes, most Christians are inclined to quickly mention names like Abraham, Noah, Moses, Ruth, David, Mary, Peter, and Paul.

We love and admire these larger-than-life biblical heroes. We admire Abraham’s faith. We admire Noah’s vision. We admire Ruth’s loyalty. We admire David’s courage. We admire Mary’s purity. We admire Peter’s boldness. We admire Paul’s perseverance.

These men and women are the great heroes of the Christian faith.

Yet, there are many other great heroes in the Bible that fit more in line with what Arthur Ashe described as “undramatic.” These stories don’t involve child sacrifice, massive boats, killing giants, virgin births, walking on water, or surviving shipwrecks.

These are the unsung heroes of the faith. These are the ordinary people whose stories go largely unnoticed, yet their lives displayed extraordinary heroism for the glory of God.

Exploring the SCRIPTURE

For the next seven weeks, we are going to look at seven unsung heroes of the Christian faith. Now, to be sure, these seven personalities are not the only unsung heroes of the Bible. But, they are heroes we can learn a lot from.

Today, as we all know, is Father’s Day. One of the most significant unsung heroes of the Bible was the earthly father of Jesus - Joseph.

Let’s face it, when it comes to the birth, childhood, and even the ministry of Jesus, Mary gets all the ink. Virtually nothing is said about the strategic role Joseph played as Jesus’ earthly father.

Joseph is definitely an unsung hero.

On this Father’s Day, I want us to explore the life of Joseph and consider why he should be a hero for every father, grandfather, and future father.

“RIGHTEOUS LIVING”

Men, let me ask you a question - “If God was going to describe your life in one sentence, and one sentence only, what would you want Him to write?”

In Matthew 1:19, this is exactly what God does with Joseph. Outside of this one sentence, we know almost nothing about Joseph. We know that he was a Jewish carpenter by trade. We know that he was betrothed to marry Mary. That’s it! Nothing else is said that describes Joseph as a man or as a father.

God simply said,

“Joseph, being a just man...”

Other Bible translations read,

“Joseph, being a righteous man...”

That’s Joseph’s one sentence. That’s all the ink he got. God used only word to describe why He chose Joseph to be the earthly father of His only Son Jesus - ***just/righteous***.

Joseph wasn’t royalty. He wasn’t educated. He wasn’t wealthy by society’s standards. He had no parenting experience or skills. From a human perspective, Joseph appears to be an illogical choice. One might assume that God would have chosen someone more “qualified” to father His Son earth - a king, a wealthy and highly educated businessman or religious leader, or a man who had already raised two or three kids.

Yet, Joseph had the one character quality that found favor in the eyes of God - righteousness. He may not have been royalty, wealthy, educated, or experienced; but Joseph was a holy man of God.

Joseph was a man of principle and integrity. Joseph was a man who desired to live wholeheartedly in submission to God's will. Joseph was a man who was committed to living a life of purity and holiness before God. This is what it means to be "righteous."

It's was Joseph's righteousness, coupled with God's sovereign calling, that qualified Joseph to be the earthly father of God in flesh.

When it came to finding a man to father His only begotten Son, God didn't look for prestige, social standing, wealth, intellect, royalty, or experience - He looked for righteousness.

- God wanted His Son Jesus to be fathered by a righteous man who loved Him - not the world.
- God wanted His Son Jesus to be fathered by a man who stood in awe of Him - not man.
- God wanted His Son Jesus to be fathered by a man whose character, integrity, and purity had not been compromised by the culture he lived in.

This is precisely why Joseph is an UNSUNG HERO! And...this is precisely why Joseph should be a hero for every Christian father.

Fathers, Joseph reminds us that **heroic living is righteous living**. Let me say that again...

HEROIC LIVING IS RIGHTEOUS LIVING!

If, one day in the future, you long for your son and/or daughter to look you in the eyes and say - "**Dad, you're my hero!**" - then live a righteous and holy life that stands in awe of God and His glory.

Lest we not forget, we have been commanded to live lives of righteousness!

God says...

*"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might become the **righteousness of God.**" (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

*"So flee youthful passions and pursue **righteousness...**" (2 Timothy 2:22)*

*"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to **righteousness.** By His wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)*

Did you catch that?

God made Jesus to be sin so that you could be considered righteous in His eyes. Jesus bore all of your sins - past, present, and future - and healed you by His wounds so that you would live a life of righteousness. You have been chosen for a life of righteousness.

Men, our children don't need fathers with money, higher education, and elite social standing. Our children need fathers who live righteous lives for the glory of God and the honor of Jesus Christ.

When describing fatherhood, American author Clarence Budington Kelland said,

“My father didn’t tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it.”

Dads, our children need to watch us do it. Children need to consistently see their father’s living righteous lives for the glory of God.

Live a righteous life before your children now and there’s a great chance that one day, they’ll look you in the eyes and say - **“Dad, you’re my hero!”**

“Staying True to God’s Word”

Not only was Joseph a righteous man; he was also a man who stayed true to God’s Word. Joseph was a man who refused to take the easy route.

Men, imagine if you will, being engaged and discovering that your soon-to-be wife - after a trip to see her cousin - returns pregnant and you’re not the father. That’s exactly what happened to Joseph. During their betrothal period, Mary went away to visit her cousin Elizabeth. When Mary returned three months later, she was visibly pregnant.

At this point, Joseph finds himself in a major dilemma. And, it’s precisely at this point, that we see Joseph’s righteousness rise and shine.

Do you remember how the dictionary defined a hero? A hero is **“a person who, in the face of danger and adversity or from a position of weakness, displays courage and the will for self-sacrifice for some greater good.”**

Make no mistake about it; Joseph was staring adversity squarely in the eyes. His decision had the power to influence history for all of eternity.

- Would Joseph take the easy route?
- Would Joseph stay true to God’s way?
- Would Joseph submit to pressure of the world’s way?

To appreciate the magnitude of Joseph’s decision, we must understand the Jewish culture that had influenced Joseph his whole life - especially as it pertains to marriage.

In the Jewish culture, a man would pay the father-of-the-bride what is called a “dowry.” A dowry served two purposes. First, the dowry was used as compensation for the wedding expenses. Second, the dowry was also considered an insurance policy in the case that the bride was discovered not to be a virgin, or committed infidelity during the betrothal period.

Once the dowry was paid, the contract was binding and the bride and groom were considered legally married. This is when the one-year betrothal period began. During the betrothal period, the bride and groom were considered husband and wife; yet, they were not allowed to consummate their marriage.

In Joseph’s case, he had paid Mary’s father the dowry. Thus, by Jewish standards, Mary and Joseph were not simply engaged - they were legally married. And...by all practical appearances, Mary had become an adulteress. In the eyes of everyone but God, Mary had lost her virginity and become pregnant by another man.

Like I said, Joseph was staring adversity squarely in the eyes.

According to Jewish customs and law, Joseph had the legal right to issue Mary a certificate of divorce. Yet, issuing a certificate of divorce would mean that Mary and her family would suffer major consequences. Why?

Well, for one thing, in order to issue a certificate of divorce, Joseph was required by law to make formal accusations against her. These accusations would have produced great public shame and scorn for Mary and her family.

If that wasn't bad enough, according to Jewish law, Moses wrote that if a betrothed virgin committed adultery, she was to be taken outside the city gates and stoned to death (Deut. 22:23-24).

So, the dilemma was this. Either Joseph lived a lie, dishonored His God, and remained quiet about Mary's apparent adultery - choosing to marry her and be the father of an illegitimate child. Or, he could claim his Jewish rights, accuse her of adultery, issue her a certificate of divorce, and watch her be publicly condemned and possibly stoned to death.

Now that's what you call be caught between a rock and a hard place.

In the end, the Bible says that Joseph chose neither. Joseph decided to divorce Mary quietly, not wanting to subject Mary or her family to public shame and possible death.

Then, Joseph had a dream. As God often did, He came to Joseph in his dream and revealed His will for the future. In the dream, God explained what had happened to Mary.

“But as Joseph considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until after she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” (Matthew 1:20-25)

Listen carefully!

Joseph could have taken the easy route and he would have been perfectly justified in doing it. Not a single Jewish person or religious leader would have thought any less of Joseph if he had claimed his legal rights and divorced Mary. There would have been no sin if Joseph had done what Jewish culture permitted him to do. It was his Jewish right.

Yet, the righteousness of Joseph prevailed and he chose God's way instead of the Jewish way.

This is precisely why Joseph is an **UNSUNG HERO!** And...this is precisely why Joseph should be a hero for every Christian father.

Joseph refused to take the easy route. Joseph refused the Jewish way and embraced God's way. Under enormous pressure, and in the face of heart-breaking adversity, Joseph chose to stay true to God's Word. Joseph chose to do what God said to do, not what his heritage said to do.

Can you imagine the looks and the gossip that ensued? Remember, Jewish law did not permit sexual relations during the betrothal period. From an outsider's perspective, Joseph and Mary had rejected Jewish law - they had rejected their Jewish heritage. They were immoral people in the eyes of their peers. As a result, more than likely, they were shunned and castigated.

Yet, when it comes to Joseph, the Bible simply says...

“...he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...”

Men, let me say it again. Our children don't need fathers with money, higher education, and elite social standing. What our children need are fathers who exhibit an unwavering and unflinching commitment to God's way and God's Word. Our children need fathers who refuse to cower in the face of cultural pressure. Our children need fathers who refuse to take the easy route.

Our children need fathers who stay true to God's way.

Live a life before your children that displays an unwavering commitment to God's way at all costs and there's a great chance that one day, they'll look you in the eyes and say - **“Dad, you're my hero!”**

Wrapping It Up

When it comes to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, God only said two simple things about him:

- He was a righteous man
- He did as the Lord commanded him

Could it be that these two things alone are what caused Joseph to find such extraordinary favor in the eyes of God? Could it be that Joseph's righteousness and unwavering obedience to God's way is what qualified Him to have the high honor of fathering God in flesh?

This is literally all we know about Jesus' earthly father. He was a Jewish carpenter, full of righteousness, and dedicated to God's way at all costs.

In the shadow of his more popular wife, we find an **UNSUNG HERO** in the person of Joseph. Without his righteousness and obedience, who knows what would have happened.

Casting VISION

This year, I will turn 40 years old. I am a husband of thirteen years, a father of four, and a pastor of a growing church - all by the amazing grace of God.

I can tell you this, my hero is not a famous athlete. My hero is not a world-renown political leader. My hero is not a business icon. My hero is not a social activist. Outside of Jesus Christ, my hero is not a biblical personality.

To my knowledge, my hero is not a millionaire. He's not famous. He's not royalty. He does not have a graduate degree.

BUT...

He is without question a righteous and holy man of God. His life is marked with integrity, character, and purity. He is a man who stands in awe of God, not man.

He is without question a man who possesses an unwavering commitment to God's way and God's Word. His life is branded by God's Word. He is man who displays an unwavering commitment to God's way, even when it's hard and lonely.

My hero is my dad!

Fathers, would you like for your grown children to one-day say, **"Dad, you're my hero!"**?

Then live out a life of righteousness before your children. Live out a life of unwavering commitment to God's Word. Reject the easy way and embrace God's Way.

Do those two things and, in time, you will be your child's hero.

Be a hero for the glory of God!