

## “Early Recognizers of Jesus: Joseph and Mary”

Chuck Williamson

Date: February 4, 2024



The gospels don't tell us much about Jesus in his growing up days. We read about his birth; we read about when Jesus was 12 and was taken to the Temple by his parents. (Mary talked about that last week.) But about the boy Jesus growing up, we don't know much. I've wondered what his home life was like. What was it like to grow up in a household with Joseph and Mary as your parents?

Let's start with Joseph. The passage we read from Matthew reveals a lot about him. So Joseph and Mary were in the middle of the multi-stage, complicated process of Jewish marriage. They were engaged, but not yet living together. But being engaged meant that they were in a committed relationship.

So when Mary turned up pregnant.... Can't you just imagine the chatter at the Nazareth Beauty Salon: "Have you heard about Mary?" Mary was all the gossip. "Have you heard...?"

Well, Joseph heard. So what is he going to do? Joseph was a good Jew, raised up in the tradition of Abraham and Moses. He had gone to Hebrew school and learned the ways of the faith. He had studied the Torah, the law, and he know what it said. So what is Joseph to do?

I'm sure there were some people who said something like, "Just do what the Bible says; you can't go wrong if you do what the Bible says." Well, the Bible is clear about what Joseph is to do: In Deuteronomy 22 we read that a woman in Mary's condition is to be taken out and stoned to death." That's what the Bible says.

I know people who say that the Bible is their guide—whatever the Bible says, that's what they are going to do. But I'm not so sure about that. The Bible says that if a child is disrespectful to his or her parents, the child should be put to death. That's what the Bible says. It's in Leviticus 20:9; you can look it up. If my parents had followed that teaching of the Bible, I wouldn't be here. Or in Exodus 31 it says that if a person works on the Sabbath, that person should be put to death.

Just do what the Bible says they say, but I'm not so sure about that...and neither was Joseph.

Should he take Mary out and have her stoned to death? Joseph decided otherwise. It says here in Matthew that Joseph was a righteous man. So in spite of what the Bible said, Joseph chose to do otherwise; he chose a more compassionate path. It says that he "resolved to put her away quietly."

But then the unimaginable happened. One night is a dream, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said, "Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."

Can't you imagine Joseph's reaction? What? Marry her? The child she is carrying is from God? He will be the savior of the world?" That was a lot for him to take in. The angel was asking Joseph to do something he could never have imagined. And, amazingly, Joseph does that.

All through this story, Joseph never utters a word, but by his actions and the way he lived his life, he spoke volumes. When the angel gave Joseph this new commandment and called him to live according to a higher righteousness, that's what he does. No longer is Joseph a righteous man in the traditional sense, but now he is following a higher righteousness.

That's the person that Jesus knew as his earthly father. So shouldn't be surprised that as an adult, when Jesus speaks about God's law, he says, "You have heard that it was said..., but I say to you...." "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' But I say to you, do not take revenge." You have heard it said, "Thou shalt not kill," but I say to you do not even have hate in your heart for another person." In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls his followers—us—to live by a higher righteousness.

Might he have learned that from his earthly father?

That's Joseph.

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And then there's Mary, who when the angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her that she was going to have a child by the Holy Spirit, she said, "Let it be with me according to your word."

I don't think it was an accident that God chose Mary and Joseph to be Jesus's earthly parents. The more I think about it, the more I have come to believe that Joseph and Mary were a strong influence in shaping the kind of person Jesus was. And I think that for those of us who seek to follow God's will, Joseph and Mary are prototypes of what it means to live the Christian life. For Joseph the higher law of God was a law built on grace, mercy and love. And Mary, who willingly submitted to God's word even though she was unsure where it might lead her, her mantra was, "Let it be with me according to your word."

So with all that in mind, I would like for us to do something a little out of the ordinary. I would like for us to spend the next few minutes listening for God's word for us. I would like for us to spend this time of reflection, contemplation, meditation, focusing on God's word to us. You may already have a favorite "go to" passage that you turn to for inspiration. If so, feel free to spend your time immersing yourself in that word. If you don't have a particular passage in mind, I've given you several samples for you to meditate on. Pick one and live with it for the next few minutes. Read it slowly. Pray it. Concentrate on each word. Is there one word that strikes you as important? Is there some way you hear God calling you to live according to Jesus's higher righteousness? Spend some time with God's word.

John 3:17: "God did not send His son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior."

John 6:68: "Lord, You have the words of eternal life."

Isaiah 43:1: "Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name. You are mine."

Jeremiah 31:34: "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

Matthew 22:37: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 25:40: "As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me."

Micah 6:8: "Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."