# Do Not Be Afraid

**Do Not Be Afraid (Matthew 1:18-24)**

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today, we’re going to see Joseph, the husband of Mary, struggling with uncomfortable circumstances well beyond his control. As he’s grappling with this situation that he finds himself in, suddenly he gets a message from an angel of the Lord. Now he’s wrestling with doing what’s right, what’s easy, and what people want him to do, versus what God wants him to do. You could just imagine the complexity of the situation as we find Joseph battling with what God has said and the opinions of his family, friends, and neighbors.

Now how many of you would agree that when God decides to do something, he doesn’t look for public approval? And I believe that when God chose Joseph and Mary to bring about this most important event in the history of the world he chose them because of who they were, not because of who people thought they were. He chose them because of their character and not because of their reputation. We can see this time and time again throughout the Bible as God calls people to do something different, something challenging, divisive or maybe even countercultural.

The Bible tells us about Noah who when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. Abram, when called to leave his home and family, obeyed and went even though he didn’t know where God was sending him. Joseph, was faithful in spite of the hatred of his brothers and the temptations of this world. Moses’ parents risked everything, disobeying the Pharaoh’s command, just to protect their son. Moses himself chose to share the oppression of God’s people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. I could go on telling about Rahab, Gideon, Samson, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. Each one, lived each day resisting the sway of public opinion, going against the grain, and following what God had said.

But you know, I wonder how many of us can honestly say that we don’t care what people think about us? And yet, the reality is, most of what people think and say about you is just not true. As a matter of fact, if you’re chasing after God with all of your strength, you most likely will become the subject of gossip, rumor, and speculation, but what people say is not based on facts. We see this happening all the time in the media, with every tragedy there’s a public rush to judgment, everybody forms an opinion, even though they have no way of knowing what really happened. And as we’ve seen so many times, the public and the media are often wrong.

Now getting back to Joseph, he could’ve made everyone’s opinion of himself his top priority, but if he’d done that he would’ve been forced to turn his back on God’s will for his life. That’s why four words spoken by the angel are so important. Today’s message is entitled “Do not be afraid!” And we’re going to see Joseph living for an audience of one.

You see, it takes courage to be obedient to God. You have to be willing to say, “It doesn’t matter to me what anyone else thinks; the only thing that matters is what God wants for my life.” This is the attitude that the apostle Paul had and it’s why he could be so courageous sharing the good news about Jesus, in spite of persecution and hardship. Here’s what he wrote in Galatians chapter 1,

“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

Today, as we look at the story of Joseph in Matthew chapter 1, I want to give you a little bit of context before we begin. Now, Joseph was engaged to be married to a young girl named Mary. It was customary in those days that children would be pledged to one another in marriage by their parents. Arrangements would be made when they were quite young, sometimes for the convenience of families, sometimes for business, but often it was arranged without the couple ever having seen each other. This may have been the case with Mary and Joseph since he was from Bethlehem and she was from Nazareth.

At this time in history, an engagement was a contractual agreement, a lot different than they are today. You know, today if things don’t work out, you just break off the engagement. But not so in these days, if you wanted to break off an engagement you actually had to file for divorce. And so, with that in mind, reading from Matthew chapter 1, at verse 18, Matthew tells us,

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18).

Now, I think we’d all have to agree that this was big news. You know, they weren’t living together, weren’t even in the same village, and yet unexpectedly Mary was found to be with child. This was shocking news and I’m certain that Joseph’s first thought was that he’d been betrayed, that Mary had been unfaithful, and surely, he was heartbroken. And then, to make things even worse, she’d thrown in the God card. You know, “God did it,” she said. “It was through the Holy Spirit.”

And so, you could imagine that Joseph’s mind was spinning a million miles an hour wondering if Mary had lost her mind, if she’d forsaken her purity, become a compulsive liar, or maybe, just maybe, that what she said was true and that he should believe her and bear the consequences of what everybody’s going to say and think.

Now, obviously we don’t know exactly what he’s thinking, but we do know that he’s struggling with this, he’s wrestling with this, and apparently, he determines to bail out on the relationship. Either he doesn’t believe her or he doesn’t want to take the ridicule, but he decides its best to move on. Verse 19 tells us,

“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly” (Matthew 1:19).

Now, he could’ve subjected her to public humiliation, he could’ve called for a lynch mob, because she cheated on him, but instead he determined to divorce her quietly. In other words, Joseph knew that most people would assume that he was the father of Mary’s child and that by divorcing her quietly he would put his reputation at risk instead of Mary’s. And so, we can determine from this text that he really cares for her, but then there’s a twist, because verse 20 tells us,

“After he’d considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what’s conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you’re to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21).

Now, you can just imagine the conflicting emotions he feels as he awakes from this dream. The Bible says that he’s a righteous man meaning that he knows God, he loves God, and therefore he anticipates the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy that a Messiah would come. Verse 22 and 23 says,

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us” (Matthew 1:22-23).

And so, here an angel of the Lord had just told him that he was going to play a role in this greatest event in history of the world. But then reality settled in and he began thinking, “What are the neighbors going to think? What are they going to do to Mary? So, he’s wrestling back and forth with this in his mind, because on one hand, he gets to play an important role in the salvation of the world, but on the other hand, he can only imagine how difficult this might be. You know, “Should I look out for my best interests, should I do what my family wants, or should I do what God wants?” And so, we discover that he’s going to find strength in the Lord, the words of the Angel encouraged him, but he’ll quickly realize that obeying God means disappointing some people. There are going to be people who won’t agree, who don’t understand, and they’ll be disappointed.

## ****1. Disappointing Some People****

This is important, because if you’re a follower of Jesus, you’re going to be confronted by myriads of opportunities to obey God or win the approval of others. The reality is for most of us, we want to please people and without even meaning to we succumb to the pressures and opinions of family, friends, and neighbors. And yet, the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 12,

“Not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2).

And so, we need to have a change of mind when we’re bombarded by the pressure to fit in or to measure up, because when we become more concerned with what people think, we quickly forget what God thinks. Jesus told us in Matthew chapter 7, to choose the less travelled path, to be diligent to “enter through the narrow gate” to live for an audience of one (Matthew 7:13). And so, as we allow our minds to be renewed, we find ourselves seeking to please God in all that we do, and we find ourselves consistently making the right choices.

In other words, if you’re following Jesus you’re not going to please everyone. If you try to please everybody, you’re going to fail at some point and you’re going to disappoint someone. But you can please God, you can live a life where God looks at you and says,

“Well done. My good and faithful servant.” And so, Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it” (Matthew 7:13). We don’t need to be afraid to choose to obey God, to choose the narrow gate, even though it means disappointing family, friends, and neighbors. We choose to worship God even though it might disappoint others. We choose the narrow road that leads to life. We surrender ourselves to living for an audience of one.

That’s what Joseph struggled and wrestled with until he finally determined that he wanted the approval of God over the approval of others. And this was such a monumental decision in his life because he had to choose not to be afraid of disappointing some people. And for you and me, when we’re living for God, not everybody’s going to like it, we’re going to disappoint some people that are important to us.

## ****2. Ignoring Your Critics****

You can’t be afraid of all the voices mocking and criticizing. Joseph and Mary had to ignore their critics. They were publicly disgraced, people were talking about them and whispering behind their backs, because when you obey God you’re going to disappoint some people. And when you put yourself in that position to be used by God you’re going to find that everybody wants to criticize you.

We see this played out in our lives in countless of ways. There’s likely going to be a time when your reading the Word of God and you may hear the voice of God leading you to do something that is culturally unpopular like honoring God by remaining sexually pure. Maybe breaking free from a party lifestyle, or leaving a good paying job to take a job that actually contributes to society, or maybe staying in a high paying job so that you can give radically and generously making a difference in this world. When God calls you, there are going to be people who criticize you and make fun of you for your obedience. The psalmist said it this way in chapter 41,

“All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me… Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:7-9).

And it’s pretty much guaranteed. The more you please God, the more you’re used by God, the more resistance you’ll experience. James says it this way, not if, but “When you face trials” (James 1:2). And so, if you want to make a difference in this world you’re going to face hardship and criticism. And I’ll tell you, every significant thing that I’ve done for Jesus in my personal life or as the church has been met with resistance and criticism.

For example, we have six kids and you wouldn’t believe the resistance and criticism we’ve experienced, and yet God clearly led both Dana and myself to seek more children when we thought we were done. Again, we were led to homeschool our children and they’ve got the best teacher in the county, and yet we’re faced with resistance and criticism. When we started the church people were like, “We don’t need another church” and we were faced with resistance and criticism.

I assure you that every time you’re ready to be used by God, anytime you do something significant for God, you’ll be met with resistance and criticism. But you don’t need to be afraid, because you know number one, pleasing God usually means disappointing some people. Number two if you’re going to be used by God you’re going to have to learn to ignore your critics and number three, you just can’t be afraid of taking a simple act of obedience.

## ****3. An Act of Obedience****

It’s amazing to think that because Joseph and Mary said yes to God in a simple act of obedience, Jesus was born, our Savior came into the world. They didn’t know the details and in the same way we don’t have to understand completely to obey God. We don’t have to see the whole picture to put the first piece in place. We don’t have to have all the directions to take one step in faith. You see, it’s your simple act of obedience that will inspire a great move of God.

For me, I find this to be so inspiring, because we have no idea the great things that we can set into motion with one simple act of obedience toward God. When you simply obey what God puts on your heart, when you simply do what God calls you to do, you have no idea what you might set into motion.

You know, when I was a new believer, there was this guy that was leading a Bible study that I began to attend. After I had been attending for about a year he asked me if I would consider taking over for him once a month when he was away on business. Even though I was young in the faith, even though I didn’t know much about the Bible, my simple act of obedience led to a chain reaction in my life. I began digging into the word of God and next thing you know he moves to another state and I take over the Bible study. I continue studying but now at the college level and become a pastor with the Assemblies of God. You see, it’s just simple acts of obedience that would bring glory to God.

Dana and I, had no idea what we would set into motion when we thought we would do church a different way and began meeting with a couple families in our house 10 years ago. We were criticized, called rebels, and yet what we didn’t realize was that God was using that as a stepping stone to get us here in Emmitsburg. This church was set in motion by a simple act of obedience to God. We set out to do something different, to live out a biblical community as the Scripture records in Acts chapter 2, saying,

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

And we had no idea the great move of God that would be set into motion by that simple act of obedience.

Maybe today, when you obey what God puts on your heart, when you invite someone to the Christmas Eve service tonight, when you feel prompted to serve somewhere in our church, or maybe to start giving a biblical tithe to the church, you have no idea what you set into motion. You don’t know the details, you don’t know how it’s going to happen, you don’t know whose life might be different because of you, but you do know that when you obey what God puts on your heart that simple act of obedience will inspire a great move of God.

You see, Joseph had a choice to make, does he do what’s easy or does he do what’s right? Does he follow the crowd, allowing himself to be swayed by the public opinion, or does he do what God wants him to do? In verse 24, we see Joseph’s response, and I believe that God in this one little verse is going to prompt many of you to do something too. Verse 24 tells us,

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife” (Matthew 1:24).

Because of Joseph’s courageous obedience, Jesus was born into this world, and through his life and death he paid the price for our sins. This morning, God may be saying to you, “Do not be afraid” and when you say, “Yes” to God, not only will your life be changed forever, but it will change the lives of those around you in countless ways. You see, you may have to disappoint some people, you may have to ignore the critics, but when God speaks to you, if you’ll do what he’s prompting you to do, if you’ll obey what he’s put on your heart, there’s no limit to what he can do.

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