

# When Résumés Don't Count

The Gospels

Luke 1; Matthew 1

## Introduction of Mary and Joseph

There is a creeping sentiment among people in the church that we are probably not qualified; that we perhaps, do not have the abilities or skills to do what we may see that God wants us to do. I hope our study today, in Luke chapter 1, and in Matthew chapter 1, will put this thought to rest. The next time you are tempted to say, "I do not have the experience or the ability to do what I think God wants me to do," I hope you will remember the two people that we will study today. Mary and Joseph were totally incapable, unqualified, and inexperienced to do what God wanted them to do.

Across the street from the home that Marsha and I rented for a while when we first moved to this town, was a fellow who was attending North Carolina State University. We were talking one afternoon, and I was amazed that he was earning his second doctoral degree in the well-known field of mosquito research – his second doctorate! I said to him, "I can't believe you're earning your second; your post-doctoral degree."

He replied, "I don't have a chance of ever getting a job in the field – developing the sprays and the pesticides and all of that – without at least two doctorates."

I think this attitude, which we frequently see in our culture, and perhaps rightly so, creeps into the church as well. So often, we throw up our hands and say, "I don't have the degrees. I don't have, what I consider to be, the right qualifications."

It is going to be a great delight to discover together a different side of Mary and Joseph that I hope will put to rest this thought. It is a thought that is from the accuser.

## Two Significant Views about Mary

We will look at Mary first and I want to give two views that are predominant in relation to this woman.

### 1. The first view is to absolutely ignore Mary.

It is a prevalent view to ignore the beauty of Mary's character and her virtue; to ignore the fact that this girl remained a pure teenager growing up in the city of Nazareth – a town known for its vice.

Nazareth was a garrison of the Roman army that was known for its loose living. This young lady was so committed to her God that she kept herself and prepared herself for the husband to whom she was now betrothed.

It is easy because of another prevalent view that we are going to talk about in a moment, to just ignore her; to not deal with her. Certainly we do not like to give her any credit that, I believe, is due her.

Mary was a woman of high character and quality. She was a woman who feared and loved God.

It is interesting that even today, liberals embrace the view that Jesus was the offspring of Mary and a Roman soldier. Among others, this view is even prevalent in the Baptist church. In her day, there was the view that she had a liaison with a Roman soldier, but we know that she was pure. She was a woman of high quality and character.

When we talk about Mary's life today, remember that she was very young – probably a teenager. Joseph was as well, for they were betrothed at a very early age. A year would transpire before they would make their wedding vows.

We tend to perhaps overlook Mary due to the fear of making too much of her. As a result, I think we have not made enough of her.

### 2. The second predominate view is to worship Mary.

This view so distorts the record of scripture that Mary becomes someone to worship; someone who was perfect, if not even sinless. Today, she has the title, "The Queen of Heaven".

## Two Significant Qualities about Mary

What does the Bible tell us about Mary? We are told at least two beautiful things.

Look at Luke 1:26-30.

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth,*

*to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

*And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."*

*But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.*

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God."*

That could be translated, "You have been endued with grace from God. You are the recipient of grace."

Continue to Luke 1:31-33.

*"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.*

*"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;*

*"and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."*

Let me give the first thoughts that occur to me in studying this passage about the character of Mary.

### **1. First, we will discover Mary's quality of submission in spite of great apprehension.**

We cannot understand this moment in time when the angel comes to Mary. This angel had an exciting life, did he not? He was the same one that came to Zacharias and that will come to Joseph. Now he is coming to Mary and making this announcement to her. She would obviously, be filled with tremendous apprehension. In fact, in Luke 1:34,

*Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*

Continue to Luke 1:35.

*The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the*

*power of the Most High will overshadow you . . ."*

The word "overshadow" is the same word used in the Septuagint when talking about God overshadowing the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant. What an awesome thought that God would view Mary's womb as the Holy of Holies for His Son.

Perhaps Mary was startled at this thought and this is the reason the angel will come back and give us the key verse of this entire chapter. Look at Luke 1:37.

***For nothing will be impossible with God.***

I love Mary's response of great submission, in Luke 1:38.

*And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

She was literally saying, "I am the slave of Jehovah. My body; my life is the property of God."

Mary changed that common prayer that we pray today, "Lord, Thy will be changed," to "Lord, Thy will be done."

In spite of incredible apprehension and the inability to understand the sudden, radical change to her world, this young lady says, "I am Your property; be it unto me according to Your will."

### **2. A second quality about Mary is her humility in spite of great privilege.**

We might think it would be easy to step into Mary's shoes and make the response that she made. However, let us look at Luke 1:46 to discover that Mary's response is very unusual.

One of my favorite writers, by the name of Charles Spurgeon, wrote, over one hundred years ago, "A believer today cannot kill a mouse without making a public announcement. Is it any wonder that we do not kill more lions?"

There is this attitude among us, right? As soon as we accomplish something, we make it public, even though it may come in the form of, "Praise the Lord!"

Now there is nothing wrong with praising the Lord, but we are so busy announcing the killing of mice that we are distracted from the real battle.

What does Mary do in response to this? She says, first of all, in Luke 1:46,

*. . . "My soul exalts the Lord,"*

In other words, “I place my God in His proper position. I exalt Him. I give Him the rightful place.”

The view that worships Mary, by the way, is easily understood as we discover this passage.

Let me give four thoughts on this.

- The first thought is that Mary recognized her need of a Savior.

Look at Mary’s words in Luke 1:47.

***And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.***

Underline the little word “my”. Mary was saying, “I rejoice in God *my* Savior.”

In other words, “I recognize that I have a need of a Savior.”

What is Mary saying? She is saying, “I am a sinner in need of saving.”

The same is true for you and for me.

- Secondly, Mary was a recipient, not a dispenser, of grace.

Look at Luke 1:48.

***For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.***

In other words, “All generations will consider me as one endowed with grace; one that has been given grace.”

In fact, the phrase of the angel who comes to her is rather interesting. He says, in Luke 1:28,

... ***“Hail, favored one! . . .”***

This can be literally translated, “thou who has found favor.”

This is a tremendous statement of theology. You have found favor – you have not earned it; you do not deserve it – you have discovered that it has been given to you. What a tremendous thought.

- Thirdly, Mary was a worshiper, not one who was worshiped.

Look at Luke 1:49.

***For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.***

The mother/son religion began as far back as Nimrod. In fact, we know from history that Nimrod began the first of these cults. His wife, Semiramis, was considered the high priestess of this pagan

religion. It is fascinating to see the parallels between the scriptural account and this heretical belief. It was supposed that Semiramis conceived by a sunbeam. Her son was named Tammuz. Tammuz was killed, as an older boy, but was raised to life after the mother fasted for forty days. It is from this view that we get the ideas of lent, the Immaculate Conception, and the perpetual virginity of Mary.

It is interesting to note in history that when Babylon fell, the high priest of this cult fled. He first went to Pergamum, which the book of Revelation refers to as the seat of Satan (Revelation 2:12-13). From there, he went to Rome, and by the fourth century, these ideas were part of the established religious system.

Let me make this statement – Jesus Christ is worshiped by the mother/son religious system in one of two ways. He is either a baby in the arms of His mother or He is dying on a cross.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ is no longer a baby in the arms of His mother, nor is He on the cross. Jesus Christ is the hope of our salvation because He is resurrected from the dead and He is ascended to heaven where He now sits at the right hand of God’s power. And, by the way, He will share His crown and His throne with no one. There is not a co-mediator; there is not a co-redeemer. Jesus Christ alone is sovereign, and this passage makes it very clear.

- The fourth thought is that Mary marveled at God’s sovereignty.

Mary never manipulated God’s sovereignty. Look at Luke 1:51-54 and underline the word “He”.

***He has done mighty deeds . . .***

***He has scattered those who were proud . . .***

***He has brought down rulers . . .***

***He has filled the hungry . . .***

***He has given help to Israel . . .***

The focus of Mary was the sovereignty of God. In fact, in the early life of Jesus Christ and into His ministry, we know from scripture that on four occasions Mary will try to influence Him. All four times, she fails. So how could she now, manipulate Him, the ascended sovereign King? She absolutely could not!

Now I know it is hard to understand how God would inhabit a normal sinner, saved by grace. How could God come incarnate, and take residence in the

womb of a person who is like you and me; a person who needs a Savior? It is mind-boggling, but this is grace.

The response of Mary is humility. What an example she is to the believers today who have experienced grace.

## Three Characteristics of Joseph

Now turn to Matthew chapter 1. We will look at a fellow who is usually ignored in this story. In the plays and the cantatas, he is the one who leads the donkey and that is about all he does. Yet, after studying this man's life, I have discovered that he has three fantastic qualities as well.

Joseph and Mary were sinners saved by grace, but these two people were unusual – they had character. The more I have studied them, the more impressed with their lives I have become.

### 1. **The first characteristic that struck me about Joseph is that his discretion overpowered his emotions.**

Look at Matthew 1:18.

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.*

It is helpful, at this point, to understand the steps of a Jewish marriage. After the two fathers got together and decided who would marry whom, which would be really exciting, there were two parts to a Jewish marriage. The first part is known as the betrothal period, or the “kiddushim”. The second part is the marriage ceremony, which is called the “huppah”. These two parts were essential to a Jewish marriage.

The betrothal was a period of time in which the couple would state vows to each other before witnesses. The priest would bless a cup of wine and they would each take a sip of the wine, declaring their vows were now settled.

The betrothal period was considered, by that world, as a marriage. It would then be a year before it was consummated – when the woman would take up residence in the man's home. In fact, the law of that day considered that if the man died during the period of betrothal, the woman was a widow. The betrothal period could not be broken without a legal divorce.

Now we know, by some things I will reveal in a moment, that Joseph and Mary were very poor. Therefore, their ceremony was very simple.

The wealthy in that day, would end the betrothal vows with a sumptuous feast. Everyone around would be invited and the dowry would be given in a great public show.

This evidently poor couple probably had a very simple betrothal ceremony in which they shared their vows and drank the wine and were then considered husband and wife. It is during this period of time – during the year of probation or waiting – that Mary conceives by the Holy Spirit.

Continue to Matthew 1:19.

*And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.*

Now Joseph could accuse Mary publicly or privately. The law declared, in Deuteronomy, that she could be stoned. Undoubtedly, by this time, they were not following this law, but at least, as Numbers tells us, she should be put to trial and publicly exposed. She would be castigated by the people and ostracized by the temple.

Joseph could do this. He was a righteous man and knew what was right. Mary had evidently sinned and Joseph had the facts. By the time he discovered it, she was three months pregnant, having just returned from spending time with Elizabeth for three months. Joseph was undoubtedly, pierced; crushed.

Later rabbinic writings revealed that a divorce during the betrothal period could take place in front of two witnesses for reasons less serious than this. Evidently, Joseph was going to divorce Mary without making a formal charge. He would keep this a secret.

I thought a long time about what to call this quality of character. I think “discretion” is the best word for this. Webster defines “discretion” as, “knowing when to keep silent”.

The way we respond when we are wrong is a great test of our character. Do we admit it? Do we defend ourselves?

However, the way we respond when we are right is a greater test of our character. How do you respond when you are right?

I see a visual lesson of this nearly every day, with my two incredibly competitive boys. I recently heard

them arguing about what two plus two equals. They were upstairs and were getting louder.

“No, it’s four,” one would say.

“No it’s not, it’s five.”

“No, it’s four.”

Sooner or later, the call comes, “Dad, what’s two plus two?”

I know the moment I say, “Four,” one of the boys is going to grow fangs, hair on his knuckles, and is going to pounce because he is right! So I said, “Ask your mother,” and stayed out of it!

They have this thing going on now, and I do not know whether it is a Sunday school teacher or a children’s church worker who has been giving cookies when they get the right answers, but they tell each other, “I get all the cookies.”

I can hear it now, “Four!”

Pounce, “I get all the cookies.”

Joseph was right. He did not buy the angel story. He figured that Mary had adopted the attitude of her culture and had had a liaison and had betrayed him. He was a righteous man. The Bible tells us, however, that he decided to show discretion; that is, he knew when to be quiet.

## **2. The second characteristic that struck me about Joseph is that his obedience overpowered his instincts.**

Look at Matthew 1:20.

*But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”*

In other words, “Don’t be afraid to pass through the ‘huppah’.”

Continue to Matthew 1:21-25.

*“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

*Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call*

*His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”*

*And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife,*

*but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son . . .*

We know from scripture that they had several boys and several girls following the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:55-56). Joseph’s obedience overpowered his instinct.

Joseph was a righteous man. What happened to his reputation? It was gone. In fact, we know that on one occasion, one of the accusations that the Pharisees sneered and hissed at Jesus was,

*. . . “We were not born in fornication . . .” (John 8:41)*

Mary and Joseph would live with the accusation that they had *sinned*. Joseph’s instinct must have been to defend that which Solomon said was worth more than silver and gold – a good name (Proverbs 22:1). By marrying Mary, Joseph was throwing his good name away. His obedience overpowered his instinct.

Another thought occurred to me that I will mention briefly. I wonder how Joseph must have felt being a stepparent. Did he ever wonder if Jesus would grow up and one day, say to him, “You’re not My father.”? I have talked to people who have been involved in the difficult scenario of step parenting and desperately love the child, yet have had the child break their heart. Joseph was risking this. He did not really know if this would happen.

## **3. The third characteristic that struck me about Joseph is that his persistence outlasted his complications.**

Turn to Luke chapter 2, and we will look at scripture that shows that Joseph’s persistence outlasted his complications. Let me give three complications that Joseph met and conquered.

- First, Joseph had the complication of poverty. Look at Luke 2:24. Mary and Joseph went, . . . *to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”*

This was the offering of the poorest people before God. If they could not afford a lamb, they sacrificed two turtledoves or two pigeons. Imagine Mary and

Joseph's presentation of the Lamb of God. Unable to afford a lamb, they brought two pigeons. They were very poor people.

We also know from history that all the Jewish males were enjoined by the law to go to Jerusalem three times a year during the three major festival periods. Luke 2:41 tells us, however, that Joseph was only capable of affording one trip a year. They went during Passover. This is another clue that these people lived on a shoestring.

Finally, Mark 6:3 lets us in on the fact that he was a carpenter – he worked with his hands. It was a noble duty, yet one that made a bare subsistence for a family; especially for a family with five or six children. We would think that, if God would come incarnate, He would at least give the father the pot of gold. However, we have no indication that this situation ever changed.

- Secondly, Joseph had the complication of change.

We know that Joseph had four dreams in which the angel came to him and gave revelation and direction concerning his stepson and his family as to what to do. Four times Joseph made changes.

Three times Joseph relocated. He set up a new home and reestablished his trade three times that we know of, in three years. That is quite a complication, especially for someone who is poor. (Matthew 2:13-23)

We know that the first two years of Jesus' life, this family was running for their lives. Uprooting his family must have been tiring, risky, and expensive, and yet, Joseph was willing.

- Thirdly, Joseph had the complication of imperfections.

I personally believe that Joseph lived with a great sense of inadequacy. I cannot prove this, but I really think so.

Joseph was a man who lived an obscure, humble life, never in front of people. He was now going to be the father of a boy who, when He grew up, would speak to thousands of people at one time. Joseph must have known that.

The Jewish customs related to education were clear, as well. We know that from the time a baby boy was three years old until he was twelve, his education was the responsibility of his father. For nine years the father would work tirelessly. He would

come home from the field or the shop, sit his son down, and teach him the laws, the statutes, and the commandments of God. By the time the boy turned twelve, he was supposedly equipped; he knew the law.

Evidently, Joseph did a great job of educating because, at the age of twelve, Jesus was in the temple confounding the Pharisees and the scribes (Luke 2:46-47). So this man, a carpenter who probably knew very little of the law, must have burned the midnight oil preparing his lessons and preparing to teach his son with a great sense that someone else could probably do a better job.

The Bible tells us,

*. . . Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature . . . (Luke 2:52)*

Do not get the idea that Jesus was zapped as a three year old and suddenly knew everything. As He grew, He grew in His knowledge of His mission and of who He was. By the time He was thirty, He was prepared for His public ministry.

This is a very difficult issue to comprehend in our minds. However, we know that Joseph had a grave responsibility to teach the One, the living Word, the word of God. He had to explain the prophecies to this boy, who was the One who was the fulfillment of the prophecies. Talk about intimidation!

Joseph was also responsible to teach his son the family trade. Now tell me, dads, how much enthusiasm would you have in teaching your boy a trade, knowing he would walk away from it? You probably would not have much.

I have tried to imagine God coming to me in a dream and telling me that one of my sons was going to be the world's greatest mathematician. I hate math, by the way. In my book, it ranks right up there with lima beans, and green peas, and squash. I flunked algebra in high school. I had to take it in summer school in order to graduate. I went to college on probation and had to take beginner math. I came within two points of flunking that. I hate it. So God telling me, "You're going to teach the world's greatest mathematician," would not make sense, would it?

God telling Joseph, "You're going to teach the world's greatest Teacher; you're going to expound the law to the One who would fulfill the law," does not make sense either. Talk about a complication!

However, Joseph was a man who, unlearned in the rabbinical sense, would teach his son with such diligence that when Jesus reached the age of twelve,

like all Jewish fathers, he would symbolically take his hand and wipe it across his brow, as if to wipe the sweat away and say, "I have done my duty."

Why did God not choose Joseph of Arimathea to teach Jesus? Why did He choose Joseph of Nazareth? Joseph of Arimathea lived at the same time and was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Bible calls him,

*. . . a good and righteous man (Luke 23:50)*

It goes on to say that he was,

*. . . waiting for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:51)*

Did the names get switched in the text somewhere? Joseph of Nazareth is close.

I cannot help but believe that during the night, this man must have woken up and thought, "God, why in the world *me*?"

Yet, Joseph's persistence would outlast his fears and his complications.

## Application

Let me apply our study today with a couple of thoughts for us.

### 1. First, God's criterion for servants is still willingness over convenience.

For Joseph and Mary, the incarnation would shatter their world. Do not miss the fact that the coming of Jesus Christ would destroy the harmony of their home.

We know from scripture that until Jesus rose from the dead, even his brothers and sisters thought He was a lunatic. They came at one point, to take Him away because they thought He had lost His mind. (Mark 3:21)

What kind of harmony was in the home? There was probably very little. Jesus was the main topic of conversation and the sides were drawn. Mary's heart was broken and so was Joseph's.

However, ladies and gentlemen, let me say that even as it was then, so it is today – the will of God is many times, inconvenient. When God comes in with a rush and rearranges the calendar, destroys the daytimer, changes the plans, His will is often inconvenient.

### 2. Secondly, God values faithfulness over experience.

This truth is proven repeatedly in scripture. Moses stuttered when he talked, yet God would say, "Moses, I want you to go into the courtroom of Pharaoh and represent the nation Israel."

How much experience did David have fighting giants before fighting against Goliath?

I love Amos 7:14-15. Amos says to the king,

*. . . "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.*

*"But the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'"*

Amos is a fruit planter, yet God says, "I want you to be the prophet of the hour."

Who would have ever thought that fishermen would make wonderful apostles who would be committed to the cause of Christ? What did they know about the kingdom? Absolutely nothing.

What stops you and me? Is it inexperience? Is it inability? Is it the thought that, "I'm not really qualified?"

Jesus Christ is still looking for servants who evidence faithfulness. He values it more than experience.

Jesus Christ is still pursuing servants who are willing to be inconvenienced to do His will.

So let us just throw away the résumés and the list of our accomplishments. God is not impressed. These things are not needed in His church.

God desires people who will say, "God, I don't have much to contribute. I'm certainly not as qualified as the next person. However, I will evidence the attitude of Joseph and Mary. I will say, 'My life is the property of Jehovah. May it be done to me according to *Your* will.'"