

# A Great Father

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the qualities of Joseph as a father and the lessons we can learn from his faith and mercy during the Christmas story.*

**Duration:** 21:18

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:15, Matthew 5:7, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:1

**Topics:** "Character Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of holding on to what God has shown us, even in the face of adversity and doubt. He uses the example of Joseph, who believed in the miraculous conception of Mary and stood by her despite ridicule and mockery. The speaker highlights the mercy and faith of Joseph, both as a father to Jesus and as a follower of God. He encourages the audience to have hearts full of mercy, faith, and obedience, and to spread the good news of Christ to others. The sermon concludes with a prayer for safety and guidance in evangelism.

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## Transcript

I wonder how many of you had a good dad growing up. I know my friend Sylvia Glover, her testimony, which I wanted to give here in the beginning of the new coming year, the Lord willing. She didn't have a father who gave her protection, identity, encouragement.

She didn't have that, so she was quite young and looking older than her age, she went to the street, the clubs. My dad was a mixed bag because he was a good dad, dragged me to church when I was little, was a deacon in the church, but then drink got a hold of him, and for 22 years he was an alcoholic. So my childhood is really scarred and marred by the crazy, the total craziness going on in my house.

If you could pick a father for someone you love, or if you could go through it again and pick out a father, like, who do I know that I would love to be my father if I was little again? Pastor Brian does great teaching and is a great father, I've noticed, I'm very proud of him with my grandchildren, and my other son-in-law, Pastor Toledo also. But I wonder who you would pick to be your father if you could pick. But we can't pick, we're just born into this world, but there is one person who picked a father, and that was God when he picked a father for Jesus.

And I just want to touch on this passage that the Lord has kind of been stirring in my heart for the last three or four days. Mary, as we know, much is made of her, and you wouldn't think it would be that too

much could be made of her, but sure enough, too much is made of her in the sense of the Roman Catholic Church raising her to the level of just about co-equal with God, Mary the mother of God. Prayers are said to her which are not found in Scripture.

And when people hear the word immaculate conception, they might think that that's referring to Jesus and his birth through a virgin, but it's not. The doctrine that was decided upon by one of the popes a couple hundred years ago was the immaculate conception of Mary, that Mary was born without sin. How could she be the mother of God and the mother of our Lord if she was tainted by sin? So it is taught that Mary had no sin.

And thus they teach that Mary had no children with Joseph after the birth of Jesus because that would, they think, humanize her too much. But of course that's a problem because if Mary had an immaculate conception and was born her mother didn't know a man and she was born, then how about her mother? How was her mother born? And then it goes back and back and back and back. So who would God pick to be the mother of the mother of Jesus? But Mary, what a great young woman.

Some of the commentators believe she could have been as young as 15, 16. Some say 14, 17, 18. Most don't think she was 20, a virgin, young woman, and became the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But not too many people think about Joseph because Joseph passes it seems from the scene. When Jesus is crucified on the cross, he commits his mother into the keeping of his youngest disciple, John. Mother behold thy son, son behold thy mother.

It's like he gave his mother over to the care of one of his disciples. Why would he do that if his father was alive? So many people believe, we don't know, scripture's not clear on it so we just try to surmise but don't make it a big dogmatic point, that possibly Joseph passed away somewhere as Jesus was growing up so that he's not mentioned as Jesus is going about and teaching and preaching. Your mother and your brother and your brothers and sisters are outside looking for you.

Today it dawned on me as I was meditating on this and we were praying together at 12 noon, it just dawned on me what an incredible father he was with qualities that Jesus grew up around. Now remember Jesus, although he was the son of God, he wasn't Superman. He didn't, you know, the comic books that I used to read, Superboy, that even as a child, you know, Superman was flipping things around, trucks and whatnot.

Jesus was not like that. Jesus so emptied himself and became like a man, a human, that all his miracles were done by independence on the Holy Spirit. He never used his son of God power that he had in heaven to perform what he did.

He identified with us to the point that he depended on the father for direction. He depended on the power of God. If I cast out evil spirits by the spirit of God, he said.

So he didn't come across as a Superman. And he was influenced, like all children are, by their parents. And that's why who God chose as his parents is very, very, very interesting.

Because just like you and I have been mostly influenced by our parents, our formative years, we're influenced by our parents. God was careful what home he put him in, just like he was with John the Baptist, the forerunner, who had a great elderly set of parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth. So just look at

this briefly, a little Christmas homily.

This is Vespers. We're gonna do a little homily here on Christmas. This is how Jesus the Messiah was born.

His mother Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiance, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly.

So he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. Joseph, son of David, the angel said, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.

For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet.

Look, from Isaiah, the virgin will conceive a child. She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God is with us. And when Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born and Joseph named him Jesus. So I just want us to leave home asking God for three little presents extra. We've been asking God for more and more.

Thank you, my friends, for praying so hard for me. I need it. So let's see what we can learn from Joseph.

The name Jesus, by the way, is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. Jesus' name, Yeshua, Joshua means deliverer. And his name shall be called Jesus.

Joseph, name him Jesus. Mother couldn't name the children. The father had to name the children.

Name him Jesus, because he'll save his people from their sins. That's the greatest need for all of us, is to get our sins washed away as far as the east is from the west. How many are happy all your sins are gone tonight that you ever committed, you ever did, you ever thought, you ever said? Yesterday, 10 years ago, 50 years ago, it doesn't matter, they're all gone.

So Joseph, we learn this about him. And I want you to know, unfortunately, this is hard for us psychologically, because we live on the other side of the Christmas story. So we know how it ends.

But I want you to psychologically put yourself in Joseph's place here, to understand how great he was in God. So Joseph is engaged to Mary. Engagement back in then was not like an engagement now.

You get engaged, you break the engagement. It didn't work out. Give the ring back and they go on, right? Engagement was as sacred as marriage back then.

If you broke your engagement, you needed a divorce. You were betrothed, as the King James has it. You were engaged.

It was not consummated physically until you had the marriage ceremony. But once you entered into the relationship of being engaged, you were married, you were committed. So Joseph was committed to Mary,

Mary was committed to Joseph.

We don't know how he found out, if someone came and told him, or God forbid that he noticed it himself, but they came to him with the story. Mary cheated on you, and she's pregnant. Anybody in this room, anyone who ever lived and walked on the face of this earth, if you were engaged to someone and they became pregnant, there was only one thought.

They fell into sin, they had sexual intercourse with someone, and now they're pregnant. No one in the history of the world faced what Joseph faced. No one in the world has ever been told, marry her because she's pregnant, but it's the Holy Spirit that conceived that child.

No one has ever had that happen before or since. Joseph's the only human being that had this dilemma. So the Bible tells us an interesting thing about that.

He found out Mary was pregnant. Maybe the word got to him through some friends. What to do? Well, by then, stoning was out of style, although Mary in the Old Testament could have been stoned.

But they had lessened their attitudes toward that kind of capital punishment for adultery or immorality, so that it became a grounds for divorce. Even as it's one of the two grounds for Christian divorce, for a Christian, which frees them to marry someone else, adultery or desertion from the marriage bonds, desertion by someone of the believer. And they're an innocent party which is investigated and approved by spiritual leadership, so that it's a true story.

But that's a separate issue. So now, by the time Joseph was around, people were not stoning someone like that, they were divorcing them. So Joseph was a divorcer.

Now, how you divorce someone back then was interesting. You went to a river, you brought four or five people, or if you wanted to make a real point, you brought 50 or 100 people. And you hauled Mary out there, and you said, y'all, I don't have to say much, just look, look at the baby bump, look at the pregnancy, she did me dirty.

And I'm divorcing her now in front of you, Mordecai, in front of you, this one, that one, here's the witnesses, and you wrote a bill of divorce. And everyone said, good riddance, and she deserves it. Because if you cheat on your husband while you're engaged, you deserve at least to be divorced.

But the Bible says Joseph wasn't like that. He felt compassion for her. All he knew was that she had sinned, that's all he knew.

Come on, put yourself back there. All he knew was she slept with someone. Although engaged to him, she slept with someone.

She fell into temptation, and now she's pregnant. But the Bible says, being a righteous man, he wanted to do it privately. He didn't want it to be a spectacle.

He could have made it a spectacle. Like when some of us, we get sinned against, someone does something wrong, we're gonna let them know it in spades, and we're gonna tell 50 other people. You don't know what I know about that person.

Isn't that the way people are, even in church sometime? Not Joseph. Joseph was merciful. Joseph was gentle.

Joseph said, no, I'm gonna do it private. I don't want her pulled into human criticism. I don't want people to look at her and mock her.

Okay, she made a mistake. Always remember, there but for the grace of God goes you and me. Am I correct? No matter what you see in life, it's hard for us to remember because we're self-righteous by nature.

There but for the grace of God goes you and me. So he wanted to do it privately, like spare her. I know, but she did you dirty, Joseph.

Don't you know he had some friends who were like, yo, Joseph, she's playing you. Don't you know what she did? And you're gonna do this all private? What's wrong with you? Are you stupid or something? You show her up for who she is. No, I don't want anyone to know what she did.

It's enough that she did it. Wouldn't it be great if we were all that merciful? How many want more mercy in your life from now on? This Christmas story is about mercy. Obviously, Jesus was gonna show mercy to all the people, and he grew up around a father who we know one thing about.

However long he lived, he was merciful. Instead of making a production, he wanted to do it privately. While he was sleeping at night, and this is important, an angel did not appear to him like it did to Mary.

Or like the angel appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. No, no, it happened in a dream. Why does that make it important? An angel appeared to him in a dream, but how do you prove a dream? Maybe you have the dream because you had some bad food or something.

And the angel said to him in the dream, Joseph, don't be afraid to marry her. Now this is so ridiculous. The baby she carries is not from a man, it's from God.

I mean, are you kidding me? No one's ever been told that. Now trust me, don't put her away, and don't be afraid to marry her. And when the baby is born, name him Jesus.

He's gonna save his people from their sins. Here's the amazing thing about Joseph. He believed that, and he held onto it, and it wasn't written in any scripture.

We have a hard time obeying just the plain verses in scripture. Don't lie, don't steal, don't kill, right, and all of that. He had to believe a word that he got in a dream.

How many times do you think the devil came to him and said, Joseph, what are you, stupid? You're sure that was a dream? You're sure that was an angel? How did you know it was an angel since it was a dream? Are all dreams real? Do all dreams come from God? You are now gonna marry someone who cheated on you because you said you had a dream, and in the dream an angel spoke to you. Yeah, I know that angel spoke to me, that was from God. I'm to marry her because the baby she has is not, oh, come on, Joseph.

Joseph, don't be totally stupid. Can you imagine what his friends said? All his homies were walking with him and saying, you're gonna marry her? Yeah. She's pregnant.

I know, but it's not like you think. Oh, it's not like I think. Tell me how it is then, Joseph.

No, this child comes from God. Oh, yeah, Joseph, that's just great. No one ever had to say that in the history of the world.

Joseph held on and said, no, I'm not gonna shame her, and now I know what God did. God said it, I believe it, I'm gonna hold on to it. So when they got married, this just came to me today.

When they got married, what did that look like? Because they did get married. So how big was she by then? How awkward was that wedding? And come on, everybody, let's give it up for the groom, and here comes Joseph. Let's give it up for the bride, and here she comes out there like, oh, this is just beautiful.

The shame, listen, the shame, because you know what? People are mean, people are very mean. People haven't changed, human nature hasn't changed, so Joseph had to endure all the looks, all the side glances, and poor Mary, what did she endure? We don't think about that. How many looks did she get? Like, you cheating woman, what in the world did he marry you for? Because they weren't going around and saying, oh, the baby in me is the son of God.

No, they never said that. They had to endure all of that. He held on in faith, and I want to encourage all of you, if God has spoken to you something, remember, tears are for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

Can we say amen to that? You hold on to what God has given you. You hold on to what God has given you. I'm seeing God give me some joy in the morning on something that I've had some tears in the night for just now, that's developing, mucho tears.

But remember, you hang on to what God has shown you. Hang on no matter how it looks, no matter who says what. You hang on to that, because Joseph was hanging on.

You and I can't believe the promises of God, and yet he believes something that has never happened in the history of the world, that a woman got pregnant without knowing a man. He believed that and held on to it and stuck with her. What a great father Jesus had, huh? Not just this heavenly father who's perfect, but what a father, merciful, didn't want to shame her, and number two, he was full of faith.

And then finally, just this little note, which always happens when you're full of faith, he was obedient. So when the baby was born, he named him. Why did he name him Jesus? Because God told him to name him Jesus through a dream with an angel in it.

And he obeyed God in that little thing, which was a big thing. Did he ever know when he said, they came to him, you know, that's what they did in the birth process there, the birthing of the child, they would go to the father and say, name the child. And he said, his name will become Jesus.

Did he ever think that 2,000 years later on Smith Street, we would be singing praises to that name that he gave that baby, amen? Come on, let's thank God for his incredible grace, power. What a dad, what a dad, what a dad Jesus had. Had a heavenly father who's perfect, but his, what do you call him? His seeming father, who wasn't his father, was full of mercy and grace.

Oh God, help us this Christmas season not to be mean to people, and judgmental, and holding grudges, and I'll never, you know, I'll forgive you, but I'll never forget. I don't want that in my spirit. How many want to be free from all of that? And some of us, unfortunately, have grown up in homes where that's what we heard growing up.

I know that from counseling a lot of people. I was blessed, I didn't hear that ever around the dinner table. My mother was never a talker, neither my father.

My mother was really merciful. But some of us grow up, and then we copy our parents. Don't copy your parents, copy Jesus.

Copy Joseph, copy the Bible. Don't copy your parents. Some of us had good parents, some of us not so good parents.

It is what it is. We love our parents, we honor them, but we want to be like Jesus. God, make us full of faith, let's pray.

God, fill us with faith this night. Help us have a faith-filled Christmas. Not just trees and presents, but faith that what you have spoken will come to pass.

Help us to hold on those prophetic intimations that you've given us, prophetic promptings, words spoken to us in a dream, or in the stillness of our heart as we wait in your presence, or a verse jumps off the page and you speak something to our heart. Help us to be like Joseph and have faith, not just faith, but faith that obeys. Help us to do what you tell us.

And he named, he took Mary as his wife, according to the word of the Lord, and he named the baby Jesus. And he didn't care how people mocked, sneered, and laughed, and said nasty things, nasty things. He looked like a fool, but he held on to you, Lord.

So give us that heart of mercy, a heart full of faith, and the obedience of a child that will go where you want us to go and do what you want us to do. Lord, as we leave the building tonight, get us home safely, and I pray that what's waiting for us out there in the lobby, we will take these tickets and cards, lead me tomorrow as I'm walking around, lead me to the right people who are open, Lord, to invite and speak about you. Even, I don't have to just invite them, give me an opening to tell them, Lord, about you, Jesus.

Help us all to be evangelists, spreading the good news of Christ. Thank you for this meeting. Thank you that we can have this one last prayer meeting tonight.

Help us now in the days to come as we tell people about you. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. And everyone said? Let's clap our hands one last time.

Stand up, everybody, and wish somebody that you haven't seen a Merry Christmas.

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