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## Joseph's Heart of Compassion

(Lesson #2)

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“That wasn’t very compassionate!” These words were streaming through my mind as I drove away from a fast food establishment one day. It was one of those days when I couldn’t believe my behavior and my mouth that went along with it. I was immediately convicted by the Holy Spirit and it didn’t feel good at all. Let me share the story.

It was a beautiful day. I had just come from teaching a Bible study class where we talked about pride and how it was the root of sin. The class was great. The students were engaged. The Holy Spirit used me to express His message about pride and how it can sneak up on you. When I left I was basking in God’s blessings of a nurturing lesson in my heart and the hearts’ of my students.

I was hungry so I thought I would pull through a drive-thru somewhere. I was taking a different route home and didn’t know what was in the area. So I was glad to see a familiar restaurant. I pulled up to the speaker, ordered and pulled through to the window. The clerk was friendly and gave me my order. I asked for a particular condiment which they usually give free at another location of this same named restaurant. The clerk said there was a charge for the condiment. Now, remember how the Lord said pride would sneak up on you . . . well . . . it did! I couldn’t accept the fact that this location would not give me this condiment for free. I quickly and very curtly replied, “The location across town gives it to me free. I can’t believe you won’t.” The clerk in a calm voice said, “My manager will not allow me to do that.” That is when the anger emotion of pride kicked in because I knew by the way this particular clerk was dressed compared to the others behind him that *he* was the manager. I looked him in the eye and with a look of disgust exclaimed, “Well, I will never come back to this location again!” and drove away.

I would have been happy in my prideful fit if it wasn’t for those windows that reflect like a mirror. Yep, those were the windows they had in that restaurant. As I was driving away I saw the reflection of the “Ladies for Jesus” sign I have on the side of my car. It was a glimpse of my sign that made me realize in my prideful fit I was not being the compassionate Christian I was called to be by Christ. I pulled out of the parking lot of the restaurant with my head hung low and I couldn’t even enjoy my meal. Just that quickly pride had turned my soaring soul from the blessings of God’s teachings to the weight sin placed on me. Did I turn around and tell the clerk I was sorry? No, because as normal prideful fits go, when you are convicted, there is an arguing within yourself that you had some rights to act the way you did. The struggle lingers for a while as your sinful nature tries to hold onto a part of your character. However, I did ask for God to forgive me for disgracing His name by my behavior.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like this? Maybe the scenario is not the same, but you understand the hold pride can have on your life. All of us can relate because we are all born with a sinful nature and sin is rooted in pride. I think that is what attracted me to begin admiring the heart of Joseph when he heard the news about Mary’s pregnancy. His heart was one that immediately responded with compassion and was not driven by pride. A heart that was willing to not disgrace Mary while at the same time knowing her pregnancy could make him look like he was hiding something. He chose to be compassionate and for that I believe the Lord was glorified and Joseph was blessed.

## Deepening the Walk

Begin this study by reading Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23.

Can you imagine the feelings Joseph had as he heard the news that his betrothed was pregnant? Questions probably rapidly fired through his mind. What!?! How could this be? Not my beloved Mary. She would never do such a disgraceful thing as this. While it settled into Joseph's mind, he probably began to wonder how things could have changed so quickly. They were just planning their happy lives together. Everything was going to plan and they were getting closer to being together as one. He probably had just finished working on final plans for their new home and they would begin work soon. This news wasn't part of the plan and definitely hit his pride on a level that was unbearable and would disgrace any man. But Joseph had a heart of compassion that the Scriptures describe first of all as being righteous. Joseph sought to do the right thing even though it meant he must detach from his beloved Mary.

Psalm 106: 3 tells us, "*Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!*" I don't know about you but each time I see that one is blessed for behavior I want to see how I can adapt that behavior in my life. Blessings are an overflow of God's grace from when He is pleased with us and I want to please God. Righteousness is not just something we are requested to do by the Father. It is something He requires of us as our character of being a redeemed saint. Could this Psalm been one that Joseph was thinking of as he pondered his situation? The Scriptures are filled with calls for God's people to be righteous. Let's take a look at some of them.

What does 1 John 2:28-29 reveal to us about the Source of our righteousness?

1 Peter 3:13-16 tells us if we are eager to do good, even if we suffer we are blessed. What does verse 15 of this passage tell us is the beginning of these acts of doing right?

What does 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 tell us is the evidence of God's righteous judgment? Are these prevalent in your life today?

We are unable to be righteous on our own. It is only through the accepting of the blood of Christ that we may obtain Christ's righteousness in our lives. For Joseph's life, he was looking forward to the Messiah to come and his actions for doing so was to follow the law God had given Moses. However, to follow that law Joseph had to make sacrifices as well. We will see that in our next section. Through Christ's righteousness, we can do the right thing in our lives and obtain God's blessings by pleasing Him. A righteous life is one worth seeking even through our suffering for doing so.

### Memory Verses:

*"... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."*

1 Colossians 10b-12 (NIV)

Joseph's heart of compassion is exemplified in the fact that he did not want to disgrace Mary. A heart of compassion takes into consideration how others will be affected by their actions. For us to fully understand Joseph's sacrifice in having this heart of compassion toward Mary, we must understand the traditional Jewish wedding during Biblical times.

There were three stages to a traditional Jewish wedding. The first stage was the "ketubah" contract which was signed by the husband and the bride's father. Once this was signed the couple was 100% married but did not have sex yet. This was the legal binding document of the marriage and three copies were made; one for the husband, one for the bride's father, one that was filed at the temple. During this stage and before the next stage, the husband had to fulfill a "dowry" to the bride's father; pay the "bride price," which was usually set at 50 shekels of silver; and an inventory of the bride's estate – what she was contributing to the marriage – was taken. The second stage was the "chuppah" which was the consummation of the marriage. This stage usually happened within one year, however, it could take up to 7 years. The final stage was the wedding feast. At the conclusion of the wedding feast the couple had concluded the traditional Jewish ritual of marriage.

When the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and Christ was conceived, Joseph and Mary had completed only the first stage, "ketubah," of the Jewish wedding. This meant they were legally 100% married and to legally end the marriage Joseph had to divorce her. However, Joseph had a choice in how he would divorce her. He had great grounds to divorce her by claiming she was unfaithful and no longer a virgin. The pregnancy alone would be his evidence. If he did it in this manner, then the dowry and bride price would be returned to him. This choice, however, would harm Mary's reputation. Joseph's second choice, and the one he had made, was to secretly divorce her without cause. This would harm Joseph's reputation and he would not be given the dowry and bride price back. In addition, he would have to pay an additional 100 shekels of silver for divorce without cause.

In looking at what Joseph had to sacrifice we see that his heart of compassion still overshadowed the suffering he would have to endure. He considered Mary's reputation above his own and in doing so pleased God. Scripture shows us ways that we can have this same heart. Look at the following verses and write down the behavior it tells us we should have if we are to be compassionate.

Ephesians 4:29-32:

Galatians 6:1-2:

Colossians 3:12-14:

Now review these verses again and write below the One who is described in each as the example we should follow.

To have a compassionate heart we must follow the example of Christ. These Scriptures describe behaviors of a compassionate heart. However, to fully display these behaviors in a Christ-like manner we must look to the Holy Spirit to guide us in all we do.

Joseph's heart of compassion was courageous and willing to take risks to do the right thing even when it meant his own pride would be trampled upon. We see this heart even more when reading how he was obedient to God's Word in Matthew 2:13-15. This obedience was one that fulfilled the words the Lord had given the prophets in the Old Testament. In addition, we see in Matthew 2:19-23 that Joseph's heart walked closely with the Lord and followed directions. Overall, showing us how Joseph's heart displayed righteousness and how he pleased the Lord in his actions.

Can the Lord describe your actions as righteous? Are you obedient to Him? Do you seek to please Him in all you do? Is your obedience evident by the fulfilling of God's promises in your life? Consider how you can adapt the compassionate heart of Joseph by seeking to please the Lord and by seeking to do the right thing in your life – even if it means you will suffer.