

FATHER'S LOVE

A lady told her husband that she dreamed he had bought her a diamond necklace for Christmas! The husband replied saying, "wow, that is amazing, I was going to wait until Christmas to give this to you, but I guess you should have it now!" He went to the bedroom and came back with a beautifully wrapped gift. As she eagerly tore open the wrapping expecting to see her diamond necklace, all she found was a little book that was titled, 'How to Interpret your Dreams.'

Not exactly what she was expecting! Today we conclude our series Gifts of Christmas and we are looking at the life of Joseph. He was given a dream that was not what he expected.

Matthew 1:18-25 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. 19 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. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel -- which means, "God with us." 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

1. God can Use any Past

The first 14 verses of chapter 1 talk about the Genealogy of Jesus. What really stands out to me as I read this are the people that God used. People like Tamar. Maybe you remember the story from Gen 38. Judah (one of the sons of Jacob) had a son named Er who's wife was Tamar. He died and Tamar had no children. One day she dressed like a prostitute and seduced and had twins by her father in law. We have King David who committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed. We have Ruth who was a Moabite widow. We have Rahab who was a Canaanite prostitute.

So what do we learn from this genealogy? Each of us has a little Rahab in us. All of us come into this world broken. Not only do we carry the brokenness of original sin, we bear the marks of ongoing sin. All of us have done things in our past that we are not proud of. All of us have blown it. All of us like sheep have gone astray. All of us are guilty and sometimes that guilt can weigh heavily upon us. There are times when we can feel that there is no way that God could ever forgive someone like us.

The truth is that Jesus died for broken imperfect people just like us. Nothing that we have done disqualifies us from the plan that God has for us. If God could use a prostitute like Rahab to His glory, that He can also use you and me. If God can make a rock praise him, surely he has the ability to use these broke down vessels of ours. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things!

We know that Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter in the bible. You have people like Noah and Abraham and Moses. And you also have Rahab;

Hebrews 11:31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

What am I saying? You do not have to be perfect to be used of God, you just have to be willing. God can take anything in our past. Things that we have done or things done to us, and He can use them for His glory if we will give them to Him. It is not your past that is important, it is your future!

Gladys Aylward was a missionary to China during the Second World War. You may have seen the movie "The Inn of the 6th Happiness". She was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded the city she was living in. Refusing to abandon the orphans she was caring for, she led more than 100 children over the treacherous mountains toward Free China. Along the way she grappled with despair and a feeling of utter hopelessness. One morning after another sleepless night, a 13 year old girl reminded her of how Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt. Gladys replied: "But I am not Moses". Then the little girl said, "Of course you aren't, BUT JEHOVAH IS STILL GOD!"

2. God can Use any Person

Perhaps you are thinking "OK, God can redeem any person's past, but the problem is my present. I just do not have the gifts or talent or resources to be used by God." History is full of people that came from very humble beginnings but they are able to overcome those obstacles and make a name for themselves and attain greatness in their own strength. They had what it took to make a difference in the world. They were special, I am not. We sometimes wrongly think that if God wants to use us in an extraordinary ways then we must first be extraordinary people. We have to be gifted. We have to be driven and highly educated. We have to have loads of resources. The reality is that this is just not the case. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things because He is an extraordinary God.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Joseph was an ordinary person. He was a blue collar tradesman from a small insignificant village in Galilee. We know very little about his life. We see him at the birth and during the early years of Jesus' life, but then he disappears and is presumed dead. Has no speaking part in the story, the bible records none of his words. When Jesus later came, people in Nazareth would say;

Matthew 13:54-56 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 55 Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

Translation, how did Joseph's kid get so wise? Certainly not from his father...

It is not about age, it's about spiritual maturity. You can be 9 or 90, God can still use you. Samuel was just a boy helping out in the temple. God chose him and spoke through him.

1 Samuel 3:1-4 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. 2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."

It is not about ability, it's about gifts. God came to a young man who was working in secret for fear of his enemies. God said through the angel to Gideon

Judges 6:12-15 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." 13 But sir, Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." 14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" 15 But Lord, Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

It is not about approval, it's about calling. It does not matter whether people agree with you or whether or not you are popular.

Acts 9:26-28 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Saul's preaching was so powerful that there were those who were plotting his death, so he left and went back to his hometown of Tarsus. Later, Barnabas would again go get him;

Acts 11:25-26 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Barnabas was willing to trust when others were not. As a result, God was able to use them powerfully.

It is not about occupation, it's about mission. It does matter if you are a butcher, a baker or a candlestick maker. You may be a teacher, lawyer, accountant or a homemaker. It is not you do in life that matters, it is who you do it for.

Charles Spurgeon, wrote: "Don't hold back because you cannot preach in St. Paul's; be content to talk to one or two in a cottage. You may cook in small pots as well as in big ones. Little pigeons can carry great messages. Even a little dog can bark at a thief, and wake up the master, and save the house. Do what you do right, thoroughly, pray over it heartily, and leave the result to God."

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things -- and the things that are not -- to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

Until about the year 1100, most people in Europe had only one name. However, with the increase in the population, surnames were added so people could be more easily identified. These came from basically four different primary sources. Some came from occupation, such as Cook or Miller or Fowler. Some came from a location, such as Hill or Brook. Some came from an ancestor, such as Johnson (John's son) or McDonald or O'Neal.

Sometimes they came from personal characteristic, such as Short, or Longfellow. When God wanted to name an entire people He looked past occupations, locations, and ancestors to base this new name on the character of one imperfect man: Jacob. He called him Israel – which means ‘God contends.’ It is the picture of a people in relationship with God struggling together and God fighting for them to give meaning and purpose. It is not our strength but our weakness.

Billy Sunday, described himself. He said “I was born and bred in Iowa. I am a rub of the rubies, I am a hayseed of the hayseeds, and the odors of the barnyard are yet on me. I have greased my hair with goose grease and blacked my boots with stove blacking. I have wiped my nose with a gunnysack towel. I have drunk coffee out of my saucer, and I have crept and crawled out from the university of poverty and taken postgraduate courses at the school of hard knocks. I have said “done it” when I should have said “did it” and “I have saw” when I should “have seen”, and I expect to get to Heaven just the same.” Billy Sunday was a great evangelist. His influence of Mordecai Ham is what eventually led to the crusade that Billy Graham came to faith at.

3. God can Use any Path

God can use any past, and He can use any person. But sometimes life is just messy. Things do not always work out according to plans. Put yourself in his position. Joseph must have thought that his life was pretty well planned out. He was pledged to be married. That means that he and Mary had made all necessary arrangements. The wedding ceremony would soon take place. After that they would settle down in Nazareth. He would continue on in his carpentry business and of course they would live together happily ever after.

It was then that things did not go according to plans. Mary came to him and told him that she was pregnant. Joseph knew that the child was not his, so that must have meant that Mary had been unfaithful. It must have hit him like a bombshell. He loved Mary, but she had betrayed him. The penalty for unfaithfulness back then was death by stoning. That is what she deserved, but that is not what Joseph wanted. Because he loved her he decided to just divorce her quietly. In a moment his life was turned upside-down. All his plans went out the window.

In the middle of it all, an angel came and told him that everything was going to be all right. The circumstances did not change but his perception of them did. Joseph trusted God. Even though he must have had a list of questions, he trusted God because he believed that God’s will was best.

There are times in our lives when we, like Joseph, seem to have everything planned out. Then something happens to those plans and we cry out to God saying "Why is this happening to me? God, why are you allowing this to happen?" Like Joseph we hear a still small voice from God saying, "Trust Me." God’s ways are not always our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Even though we may never understand everything that God is doing this side of heaven, still God says, "Trust Me, everything is going to work out in the end."

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Christmas happened because Joseph trusted God. And we need to learn to trust God, too. With Joseph, there was NO hesitation. He understood clearly what God expected of him, and was ready to obey! He would take Mary as his wife and suffer the cutting remarks about a child conceived out of wedlock.

He would obey in spite of the fact that this child of divine promise would be born under a cloud of suspicion of adultery. He called his adopted son “Jesus,” exactly as he had been told to do. Joseph believed God and obeyed Him.

Later, God tells Joseph in a dream to take Mary and the infant Jesus to Egypt, and Joseph does so instantly, just as God had instructed literally in the middle of the night. And think about it: in doing so, he left behind an established carpenter’s trade and business. He left family and friends—all to obey God and go to Egypt. He did ALL that God commanded Him to do.

The Bible repeatedly pairs faith with obedience and obedience with faith. In other words, they’re two sides of the same coin. The Bible is clear that we’re saved by faith; but that our faith is demonstrated by obedience. It’s vital to BELIEVE in God, but the proof that your belief is genuine is obedience.

D.L. Moody, was conducting a series of meetings in Boston Massachusetts. Leading the congregation in song was Daniel B. Towner. One night a young man responded to the invitation and said, “I’m not quite sure I completely understand everything, but I am going to trust and I am going to obey.” That statement struck Mr. Towner, who jotted the sentence down, and sent it to a Presbyterian minister. Together they wrote the famous hymn, “Trust and Obey.” A believer’s philosophy can be summed up in these two words: Trust and obey.

4. God can Use any Power

God can use any past. He can use any person. He can use any path. Lastly, He does not need our strength. He can use any power. In our weakness, He is strong.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us

We were never meant to live the Christian life in our own strength. Like appliances, we were designed to rely upon an external power source to operate fully. God has strength and resources that we do not understand. God is able to do things we cannot even imagine.

A woman was sitting in her room and noticed a sad poorly dressed man standing by a tree on the road below. Remembering how much she had she had pity on the man. She placed a \$10 bill in an envelope and wrote on it “don’t despair” and then threw it out the window. The man picked up the envelope, saw the money and then looked up and smiled at the woman. Latter that day there was a knock at the door. The same man as before handed the woman \$100 saying “this is yours lady, Don’t Despair came in at 10 to 1 in the fourth race”. God works in our lives and suddenly we have a power beyond ourselves.

When the angel came and told Joseph about the baby, Joseph obeyed. He did what he was told to do. That does mean that he fully understood what was to come. If he could have seen his life laid out before him, what would he have thought. If he had known it would include a trip to Bethlehem and having a baby in a stable. If he had known about the shepherds and wise men. If he had known about the flight to Egypt. If he had known that he would not make it to see Jesus’ ministry. What would he have thought.

God never shows us the full path of our lives. He only shows us the next step, and gives us the strength to take that next step. Once we have done that, we find the strength to take the step after that,

and so on. God gives us what we need when we need it. Sometimes we mistakenly think that God somehow needs us. The truth is that God really does not need us. He uses us if we are faithful, but He is still able to work without us if we are not.

Lou Johnson was a 1965 World Series hero for the Los Angeles Dodgers. After his baseball career, he fell on hard times, and made some bad decisions in life...but finally turned his life around. Unfortunately, drugs and alcohol abuse had cost him everything from that magical season, including his uniform, glove, and the bat he used to hit the winning home run in the deciding game, and worst of all, his championship ring. He tried for 30 years to recover the championship ring he lost to drug dealers in 1971, but he didn't have enough money to get it back. When the Dodgers president, Bob Graziano, learned that Johnson's World Series ring was about to be auctioned on the Internet, he immediately wrote a check for \$3,457 and bought the ring for him before bids were even posted. He did for Johnson what the former Dodger outfielder had been unable to do for himself. In the same way, God has done for us what we were unable to do for ourselves. He paid the price for our sins with the blood of His Son. He bought us back; He redeemed us. What an awesome gift!

D.L Moody once said that Moses spent 40 years thinking that he was somebody, 40 years learning he was a nobody, and 40 years discovering what God can do with a nobody. God uses ordinary people to reveal his plan.

In 1993 there was a 19 yr old girl working in the mail room at a church in Australia. When she was only 13 her parents had divorced, and she struggled with depression and bulimia. During that time, her father became a Christian and started taking her to church. One day she too gave her life to Jesus.

Working in a mail room of Hills Christian Life Center was not great pay, so she worked part time writing jingles for commercials. One day she was sitting down at her piano writing a jingle when God placed a song in her heart. She started playing the tune and singing the words "Shout to the Lord all the earth let us sing..." The song just seemed to flow out of her heart. Over the next few days the song stayed with her and she sang it over and over again. It began to dawn on her that this might be used a worship song.

She was terribly shy and felt embarrassed when she mentioned the song to the church's Music Pastor. She said that she had written a song, and he asked to hear it. She was so nervous she could hardly play it. She made him stand with his back to her because she was so nervous. Eventually she got through it and the worship pastor said he loved the song. She thought he was just being polite, but they soon introduced "Shout to the Lord" into the worship services and it began to spread from church to church. Before it had even been recorded she began receiving thank-you letters from people all over the world who had sung the song in their churches.

Just a few years later in 1996 that woman, Darlene Zschech took over the position of worship pastor at that church, which was renamed Hillsong. Today Hillsong ministers to over 100,000 people all over the world.