

JESUS CHRIST—A FAMILY PORTRAIT

It was the will of the Heavenly Father that Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God, should grow up within a human family environment. A consideration of the biblical data of this arrangement reveals some interesting and rewarding details.

The Family Unit

The apostle Matthew provides us with a snapshot of the Lord's human family:

“And coming into his own country he taught them in their synagogue, inasmuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brothers, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?” (Matthew 13:54-56). [Note: the plural feminine adjective “all” in this final sentence may imply more than two sisters.]

Let us briefly reflect upon these family members.

Joseph

One must conclude that Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, was an extraordinarily devout Hebrew inasmuch as he obviously was selected providentially to be the foster-father of baby Jesus from among the thousands of available Israelite men.

Matthew depicts Joseph as a “righteous” man (1:19). He was “betrothed” to Mary, a young Jewish virgin. Betrothal involved a prenuptial contract which was generally formalized by physical marriage after about a year. The couple was considered legally married before the union was consummated (1:24-25), and a sexual breach of the betrothal was judged adulterous and subject to the most serious consequence (cf. Deuteronomy 22:23-24).

When Mary's pregnancy was effected, Joseph was troubled about the matter, obviously not persuaded initially that a miracle had occurred. Nonetheless, he was a compassionate soul and was not willing to publicly expose Mary; but he seriously considered putting her away discretely (Matthew 1:19b). When he was informed in a dream of the true nature of the conception, he “arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife” (vs. 24). Joseph was an obedient soul.

Luke records that it “came to pass in those days,” i.e., the days when Mary was near to the delivery of her holy child, that Augustus Caesar issued a decree that a Roman subject should adjourn to “his own city” for taxation purposes. It is rather amazing, in view of Mary's condition, that she accompanied Joseph on a seventy-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem (either by walking or by donkey). While Mary was obligated to pay taxes “it was not required for her to go and do so in person” (Geldenhuys 1956, 100).

It is entirely possible that both Joseph and Mary were aware of Micah's prophecy that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; cf. Matthew 2:4-6), and thus yielded to the prophetic declaration. What courage and devotion beat within the hearts of this couple!

After the birth of the precious child, when the brutish Herod the Great resolved to search out and murder the baby, Joseph was warned in a dream: “Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee unto Egypt” (Matthew 2:13). Immediately the yielding husband arose, took the baby and Mary, fled Bethlehem in the dead of night (the most dangerous time for travel), and began the 150 mile journey to Egypt. Does not the submissive confidence of this devout couple shine with brilliance?

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

GETTING THINGS DONE

Text: _____

I. There is a System of _____

Notes:

II. There is a System of _____

Notes:

III. There is a System of _____

Notes:

BREAKING DOWN BLIND BARTIMAEUS

Text: _____

I. The Beggar's _____

Notes:

II. The Crowd's _____

Notes:

III. The Master's _____

Notes:

The final time the Bible student encounters Joseph alive has to do with the family's journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem to observe the annual Passover, a dozen years after Jesus' birth (Luke 2:41). During those early years Joseph had trained young Jesus in the carpentry business (Mark 6:3). The rabbis taught that to rear a son without teaching him a trade was to bring him up as a robber.

Joseph also saw to it that his "son" had regular religious instruction. We later learn that it was the Lord's habitual "custom" to attend the synagogue service on the Sabbath. He could both read the Hebrew Bible and locate specific texts (Luke 4:16-17)! Although we happily acknowledge that Mary was "highly favored" (Luke 1:28) (though never treated as "Mother of God" or "Queen of Heaven"), we must not forget the contributions of Joseph as well.

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to be continued*

BIBLE TEACHERS—TAKE HEART

He was an old man, tottering toward his grave. After a class session in Ohio where he was visiting, he arose and said:

"I am an old man, but the greatest work I have ever done was to teach a Sunday School class. I arrived in an Ohio town a total stranger. The first Sunday morning I went to Sunday School and asked for a class, but they didn't have one to give me. 'If you want a class,' said one of the elders, 'go out and get one.' I went out and found four boys playing marbles in the street and asked them to be my Sunday School class. They consented. I had the greatest time of my life with them. I stayed with them and they stayed with me. They write me every year on my birthday."

Who were they? The one man went on to tell this story:

"A few years have passed, but here are thee of those marble-playing boys. One is Charles Conway, a missionary to India. One became secretary to the United States, and one became President of the United States—Warren G. Harding."

That old man's name is lost. Nobody now knows who this teacher was, but the results of his teaching are unforgettable. Teachers, your work is powerful. Do your job well, and it will not return void (Isaiah 55:11).

THROWING SALT IN AN OPEN WOUND

Few experiences are more agonizing than having salt come in contact with any sort of cut to the flesh. In fact, the pain of such is so great that it has itself become a metaphor for any type of hurt that can be experienced whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. I find it, then, to be ironic that Jesus declared early in the Sermon on the Mount that New Testament Christians “are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13); because as worldly people examine our lives the emotional agony they experience is comparable to throwing salt in an open wound. They feel offended, disrespected, and condemned; notions that are simply unacceptable to the twenty-first century’s social mindset. But why are these feelings experienced in the first place? Because they recognize the moral, upright, and pure lives of Christians that are a reflection of God’s will as an implied condemnation of their lives blemished with sultry sins. Consider briefly the assault on the household of a man named Jason. After Paul and Silas’ three week stay in that home in Thessalonica, Luke records that “the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people” (Acts 17:5). Why such the hostility against an innocent man with whom no legal guilt could be found? Because his life and acceptance of gospel truth was to them as though he were throwing salt in the open wound of their very souls that were blemished by sin. Jason and his family recognized their role as “the salt of the earth” and the worldly minded people simply could not stand the pain. What a marvelous way of impacting those around us though! By allowing our lives to serve as simple sermons of the saving gospel, the world not only can hear it taught but see it displayed. And by such, we too will throw salt into spiritual wounds, opened by the daggers of sin. What, though, is the most effective means by which we can impact those around us by being “the salt of the earth?”

Say what’s right. Our prayer as Christians should always be like David’s; that “the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14). Knowing our words ultimately reflect what is in our hearts (Matthew 12:34), our foremost desire must be to ingest that which is righteous. If we do not saturate our lives with truth and goodness, our words will never themselves be true and good. But upon that established fact, efforts must be continually made to carefully guard our words. It is amazing how one ill spoken statement can dramatically change the landscape of our lives and the lives of others. We influence people by our words, whether it is in common conversation or in efforts of teaching the gospel. However, if evil and error are reflected by our words then we have essentially joined in to the world rather than standing out from the world. If we are truly going to be the salt of the earth to the gaping spiritual wounds of the world, we must be committed to saying what is right.

Do what’s right. Saying what is right will be in vain if our lives, too, do not reflect purity and godliness. Hypocrisy is a death nail to any person’s efforts of evangelism and good will. Worldly minded people want complete control of their own lives. They want to satisfy any lust for pleasure and feel justified in such, absent of any accountability. But if we, as Jeremiah, conclude “that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23), it sends a very strong message of reproof to their mindset. It opens their eyes to the fact that there is another way to live. Not a way that is self-centered, but one that is God-centered. And such a realization will enrage a great many people, again because it represents a condemnation of their lifestyles. But it also will be a means of teaching them about that great and better way paved by Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:13-14). Thus if we are seeking to be the salt of the earth to a wounded world, we have to do what is right.

Encourage what’s right. Not only is there the need to directly influence our own lives according to righteousness and thereby indirectly try to influence others, often there is great opportunity present in directly exhorting others to set aside the wrong mindedness with which they have approached life and seek God’s way. Paul always sought to be an example in word and deed of harmony, unity, and faithful living. But at times he saw it necessary to speak up and out for what is right. To the Corinthians he said, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Is that not hitting the nail on the head? Sometimes it is necessary to call a spade a spade. And when done so with the proper mind, heart, and action, a direct call to action can be very effective in serving as the salt of the earth to a weak and withering world.

Pain is never enjoyable, but the old adage is that “whatever does not kill us will only make us stronger.” The world will not and does not appreciate our attempts to display for them lives of righteousness. It hurts inwardly and agonizingly. But ultimately, we know that such efforts are done in hopeful anticipation of a great eternal good that will bless them forever in heaven. If a temporary pain will bring about eternal joy, I do not mind if my life serves as salt to an open wound.