

Our Father's Love

Last month on Mother's Day I spoke of the incredible love only a mother can feel for her child. Today is Father's Day. And so today I would like to talk about the kind of love of which a father is capable. There are many examples of fatherhood in the Bible. Some are outstanding examples of courage and faith such as Noah, Abraham, and Jacob also known as Israel. But there is one father that doesn't get a lot of attention. He was a very religious man. The Bible tells us he was fair minded, loving, faithful and obedient to God. In this father's heart was the ability to love a child as if it were his own, even though he knew it wasn't.

The Father I am referring to is Joseph, the Father of Jesus. There are not a lot of scripture references to this Joseph in the Bible. But from them we get a picture of what type of man he was. Matthew 13:55 doesn't mention Joseph by name, but it tells us that he was a carpenter. From this we can deduce that he was a hard-working man. Just ask anyone who makes a living working with their hands, and they will tell you, you don't get paid until the job is finished, and you must have so many jobs a year to make a living. So, Joseph's trade means he worked hard. Matthew 1:19 tells us that Joseph was a just, some translations say righteous man. He didn't want to publicly humiliate the woman he loved even though it appeared that she had been unfaithful to him. The next verse shows us that Joseph was obedient to God and was willing to listen God's messengers and do their bidding. That evidence is reinforced a second time when Joseph takes Mary and Jesus into Egypt on the orders of God in Matthew 2:13. Luke 2:4 shows that Joseph could trace his family back to King David.

There isn't a lot of scriptural evidence to judge what kind of father Joseph was to Jesus, but there is one story in Luke chapter 2:

Luke 2:39-50

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

41 Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

43 After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

(NIV)

So, Joseph and Mary cared enough about Jesus to go the whole way back to Jerusalem and search until they found Him.

Joseph did that even though he knew that Jesus wasn't his son.

We don't get any more information about Joseph. We know that he and Mary had more children. In Matthew 13:55 we read that Jesus had at least four brothers James, Simon, Judas, and Joseph Junior. There may have been sisters as well. For Joseph there could be no doubt that the other children were his, but he knew he wasn't the father of Jesus. Still he treated Jesus as he would his other children. Taught the boy a trade, took him to church, taught him respect for parents and authority, and overall did a good job raising some one else's son. This is the essence and the irony of the love of Joseph. Joseph did for Jesus, what God is willing to do for the entire human race. Joseph accepted Jesus as his own son, a kind of adoption into his family even though he knew that he wasn't the father. He gave to Jesus what God gives to us unconditional love. Because God loves us so much and wants to have a relationship with us, we are adopted into His Family by way of the Holy Spirit. As Rom 8:14-17 says:

14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

(NIV)

As a country songwriter put: Let me tell you a secret about a father's love. A secret that my Daddy said was just between us. You see Daddy's don't just love their children every now and then. It's a love without end Amen.

Biblical evidence supports that Joseph had probably died before Jesus was crucified. But we can be sure that Joseph loved Jesus his whole life, both as a messiah, and as his own first-born son. Joseph stands as a fine example of what goodness can be found in men. And he is a great witness to the depth and width of our Father's love.