



“I BELIEVE IN LOVE...”

Matthew



A letter from Joseph to Mary

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BCUMC/CCUMC

Pastor Brad

Love means never having to say you're sorry. Well – I'm sorry, but I just don't think that's true.... If you don't say I'm sorry to the people you love, who will you say it to?

I've been thinking a lot about Joseph and Mary lately – go figure, right? And I am beginning to think that Joseph is more of a hero in this story than we give him credit for. Sure, Mary is the mother of God, Jesus the Savior, and God-with-us-Emmanuel; but I always get the feeling that she didn't have a whole lot of agency in all this – that she didn't really have much of a choice.

In that kind of 1st century patriarchal society, a woman's only purpose was childbearing. So, if a man – especially an angel -- tells a young girl that she is going to have God's child, I don't think she's likely to give him much of an argument. As we talked about last week, Mary does question the angel – “How can this be since I have never been with a man?” But eventually and with some guidance from her older cousin Elizabeth, she willingly becomes ‘Handmaiden to the Lord.’”

Joseph on the other hand, has some serious thinking to do and decisions to make. Between Jewish law of the time and the way people in small towns like to talk, it's not too far-fetched to imagine Joseph making some very different choices.

So I got wondering what his thought process might have looked like. What was he thinking? How would he talk to Mary? I think we can get a feel for some of Joseph's struggle to let go of disappointment and his pride in a letter he may have written to Mary....

Dear Mary

I'm sure you figured out by now that I'm not very good at feelings, or talking, or talking about feelings. You know I'm just a carpenter, but still -- lately there are some things that have been weighing heavily on my heart. I can't stop my mind -- it keeps turning them over and over in my head. I can't sleep. In fact, I had the strangest dream last night, but I'm getting ahead of myself. I thought that maybe it would be easier if I could tell you these things in a letter.

Lately, when I go into town, you should see how people look at me. It's a look of disapproval and judgment, but it's mixed with something I can only describe as pity. It's a look that says, "Poor Joseph..." And I hear people talking. I hear the whispers, and I worry for your safety. You know how mean people can be.

Maybe people think I'm stupid -- I don't know -- but I'm not. I know that you told me the child you carry is God's child -- a child of the Holy Spirit. God's child? How can I believe that? I'm not stupid. I can see your growing belly starting to show under your clothes, and if I can see it, so can everybody else. What am I supposed to think? All I know is that it's not mine -- it could never be.

I thought I knew the people here in Nazareth, but I guess I don't. You should've heard this one guy. He came to the workshop one day as a 'favor' to me, to "have a little talk," and to make sure I knew what the law says. I know what the law says. I know exactly what it says -- I've heard it enough times in the last week: "...they shall bring [you] out to the entrance of [your] father's house and the men of ... town shall stone [you] to death, because [you] committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting [yourself] ..." (*Deuteronomy 22:21*) -- God, I hate being Jewish sometimes!

Over the last few weeks, I've done a lot of thinking. Of course, I can't do that whole stoning to death thing. We've known each other too long. My parents and your parents have been friends for years. Remember how we played together by the well when our mothers took us with them to get water? I made

fun of your curly hair... Sorry about that. I love your curly hair. I love how that one strand hangs down in your face all the time. I remember how you used to come to the workshop -- you thought I was busy and didn't see you peeking around the corner of the house, watching me work with my father.

You're an adult now -- almost 13! I have to tell you that I've grown to care deeply for you. I do love you, Mary. Anyway, I thought a lot about it and I thought it would be best if we just didn't see each other again. My heart breaks fresh all over again every time I see you. We'll have to make it official and get a real divorce, I think, but I thought it would be best that way. You could go on with your life and then the father of your child could marry you. I prayed that, whoever he is, he would take good care of you; that he would do the right thing. Oh Mary, I prayed so hard -- I prayed that if we just didn't see each other anymore -- ever -- that the people in this stupid town would shut up finally.

I was going to tell you today. That was my final decision -- to quietly divorce you in secret and let you go -- until last night. How can I tell you -- I can't even describe what happened to me last night. I don't know if it was dream or not. I've been so bothered the whole situation that I couldn't sleep. I was tossing and turning and suddenly this man appears out of nowhere. I just about had a heart attack! He was tall and dressed all in white, and he had this kind of weird glow all around him that lit up the room like hundred lamps -- but without the smell. I don't know how, but I knew right away that I was in the presence of an angel. God, I love being Jewish sometimes!

So this angel looks right at me and calls me by name! "Joseph -- son of David," he says. His voice was strong but gentle at the same time. Then he tells me that I shouldn't be afraid to take you as my wife. He said that the child conceived in you is from the Holy Spirit, just like you said. The more I think about it, the more I wonder why I didn't doubt what he said even for a second. He told me that you -- we -- were going to have a son and that he is going to save

his people from their sins. I hope that's us! Mary, we have to name him Yeshua – the angel told me so – just like you said the angel told you! You know that means 'salvation,' right?

Oh Mary, I'm sorry I ever doubted you. Somehow by listening to the angel my faith has given me new eyes to see. We must never get divorced. I can't imagine what my life would be like if I never saw you again. Please accept my apology. You have to know that I will do everything in my power to protect and support you -- and our child. I promise.

Mary, last night the angel taught me something very important. I think that sometimes we just have to let go. We have to let go of the 'law.' We have to let go of tradition and fear. We have to let go of what people might be saying about us – whispering behind our backs, judging us. You know, they're going to say that we're crazy – or that I'm crazy anyway -- that I've lost my mind, but I think that what other people say about us is really none of our business anyway. I mean, who do they think they are? As if any of them was without sin... I'd say they should throw the first stone, but they probably would...

The heck with them, I say. Mary, thanks to the angel I'm all yours. I want to let go of all of my doubts and questions. I don't care about my reputation anymore. I belong to you and I belong to our Son, Yeshua. The only reputation I care about is a reputation of being a good, loving husband and provider. Let me love you and support you. I pledge my life to you and our child. I believe God is clearly in you and in your womb. I believe the holy spirit is growing inside you. Don't you see? God is with us, Mary! You're pregnant with God! We're pregnant with God!

I don't know what we're going to tell our parents. Dad is going to have a fit and my mom is going to cry, of course – you know how she is. Please let me assure your father that I can take of you, and that it's going to be ok. Better than

ok! I'm a good carpenter and I can provide everything you and the baby will ever need. I want to, Mary – and I always will.

I know our marriage was arranged long before we could even walk or talk, but as we grew up together, and played and teased each other, I grew to love you. I believe you, and I believe in you. I just forgot for a while...

You have always been so strong and so thoughtful. You never fell for any of the tricks we tried to play on you when we were kids. The spider in your bed, the toad in the well bucket – they never frightened you.

You forgave me then, can you forgive me now? I believe in you, but more importantly, I trust you. I trust you, and I trust God to do whatever God needs or wants to do with us. I only pray that with your help, I can keep trusting, and letting go -- letting God work -- and I promise I'll do my best to stay out of God's way.

I love you always, and will remain...

Your Joseph, son of Jacob