

Joseph's Belief

[Announce Text] Please keep your Bibles open to Matthew Chapter 1.

[Scripture Introduction] My name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here. If you are new here we are in our second week in a three week series of four sermons celebrating Advent- culminating at our Christmas Eve service. Advent comes from the Latin and means "coming" and it's our celebration of the coming of God the Son to this earth as the man Jesus Christ...I'm really excited about this series and today's sermon.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Have you ever heard of the rule of three? It's a way to prioritize how to make decisions when you are in survival situations. These priorities arise out of your most essential **needs**. While not to be taken with precision, the general guidelines go something like this: You can live three weeks without food, three days without water, three hours without warmth, and three minutes without air. You see, it has been shown that a lot of people die in wilderness survival situations because they don't understand what they really **need** to survive. Commonly, these people spend all of their time trying to solve their need for food rather than focusing on their more important needs of water and shelter. **Do you know what you really need? And, if you did know these things in your head, would you really believe it?** Would you really **believe** that the best thing you could do is find shelter, rest, and wait instead of seeking a lesser need like food?

The Bible gives us a picture of the way the world works. It never discounts the need for survival essentials like clothing, water, and food. It goes beyond the material world and tells stories that prove our need for friendship, our need for pleasure, our need for wisdom, our need for purpose. And the Bible's truthfulness continues to the very depths of the most essential need we have. God's Word tells us that we have incredibly deep needs. You see, **the Bible tells us that we are all sinners in need of salvation.** In fact, **if you believe** what God's eternal Word says, then it supersedes the rule of three. You may only be able to make it three minutes without air to breathe but even if you came up short in that essential, the need to breathe- and you had salvation- your deepest need has been solved. This text was written to meet that need. It tells us that salvation comes to those who believe in Christ. It calls us to

[Proposition] Believe in the virgin-conceived Jesus.

Matthew 1:1-17 revealed in crystal clarity the humanity of Jesus and his rightful designation as the King of God's people. He's come to satisfy our need. Now in vv. 18-25 we are going to see that not only is Jesus truly man, He is also truly God. And our **deep, essential need for salvation is met by believing in him**. So the story of Jesus' adoptive Father Joseph will walk us through the nature of believing in the virgin conceived Jesus by showing us three things: **Belief's Obstacles, Belief's Source, and Belief's Results**. First let's look at:

[Main Point 1] Belief's Obstacles

If our need is salvation, and salvation comes from believing, why don't we believe in the virgin-conceived Jesus? What obstacles prevent this?

[Subpoint 1] Obstacle 1: We don't believe God's truth.

Joseph is just like us. When he hears about pregnancy, he understands that it occurs through sexual contact between a man and a woman. But when these things are revealed to Mary as we hear in the detailed account in Luke 1, we hear a different story. Undoubtedly, Mary, who was in the process of beginning to share every aspect of her life with this man, would have told Joseph this story. But when Mary told him that her pregnancy is the work of the Holy Spirit- He doesn't believe her. We are the same way. Many of us have heard people deliver God's truth to us many times in our lives and we refuse to believe it. We don't believe God's truth and we don't want to believe God's truth.

This passage gives us further insight into our unbelief. It shows us a second obstacle

[Subpoint 2] Obstacle 2: We believe we can solve our own problems.

You see, when we don't believe God is active, we'll feel the need to do everything ourselves. Joseph seems to have a **problem** in his pregnant wife-to-be. Joseph doesn't believe God's truth about the virgin-conceived child in her womb, so he seeks to solve the problem himself. Marriage, the blessing that it is, requires work, time, and money. Raising children- the joys that they are- requires work, time, and money. Do you really want to sign up for that with someone you can't trust? Because you have good reason to believe she's been unfaithful? Do you

really want to put all of this into raising someone else's child? Joseph responds the way we do. And so Joseph does what we all do. We think, and we strategize, and we don't pray and we look for a way to solve this problem ourselves. In this case that answer is to break off the engagement. To divorce Mary. It seems easy. It seems obvious. It seems like it will solve the problem. Look at verses 18-19-

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ^[e] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed^[f] to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

[Illustration] If you want a few laughs google the phrase "home improvement fails." You'll see pictures of people undermining the structural integrity of their homes by cutting into floor joists so that they can put a hose bibs or plumbing pipes. You'll see toilets in all kinds of strange places such as the kitchen or simply two toilets right next to each other- I guess so that two people can hold hands while they go? You'll see outlets in showers or under faucets. Faucets that don't reach sinks, so that when you turn them on they'll just spray on the countertop. But my favorites are the way people try to deal with leaks. One hot water tank was patched with a flattened Coors Light can. Another gem showed a welcome mat on the roof of a house to cover a hole in the shingles and another showed a six foot circular blue kiddie pool sunken into an attic's insulation to collect water that had leaked through the roof. These are people that didn't take advice. People who didn't believe the obvious truth that they were incapable of fixing their own homes.

[Application] How about you? Do you hear something in the Bible and refuse to believe God's truth found there? Let's talk about the pressure points with our culture right now: Do you refuse to recognize that sleeping with someone who isn't the opposite sex and isn't your spouse is a sin? Do you refuse to accept that there are only two God-given genders, male and female, and they are determined physically? Do you refuse to embrace that there is only one way of salvation? I know this is unpopular, but it's God's truth. Let's flip it over to those who are religious: Do you refuse to accept that you are no better or no more righteous than others- including the people who sin in the ways I just mentioned? Do you refuse to acknowledge that your Bible-reading, prayer, church attendance

contribute nothing to being saved by grace alone? Do you realize your trust in yourself is a greater sin than any of those involved in the so-called culture wars?

You see, if we don't believe God's truth, we have the ultimate obstacle to believing in the virgin-conceived Jesus. Joseph encountered this problem. And when we don't believe God's truth about that obstacle, we'll believe we're capable of solving our own problems.

But if that's the issue. If unbelief leads to more unbelief, how do we get to the bottom of that? How could we overcome these obstacles? How could we ever drill down deep enough to find a foundation for belief? The same way that belief came to Joseph. Let's look at

[Main Point 2] Belief's sources.

The source of belief for a Christian never comes from blind faith. It never, finally, comes from intelligence or education either- as helpful as those may be. The source of belief is always supernatural. God supernaturally reveals two things:

[Subpoint 1] God supernaturally reveals our problem: sin.

Joseph is in a bind. He thinks his problem is his circumstances. These people around him. These people around us. But God says that our deep need for salvation is our deepest need and **THAT** means solving our real problem: sin. Then, God supernaturally intervenes in Joseph's life through an angel, and in our lives by His Spirit and reveals our true problem: sin. Listen to verses 20-23

*²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save **his people from their sins.**" ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us).

The supernatural source of our belief shows us that our problem is not ultimately poverty, income inequality, loneliness, serious illness, or racism- as horrible as

those things are. The thing we need salvation from is our sin. That's the thing God says we need to be saved from.

So belief's source includes God supernaturally revealing our sin to us. The source of true belief also means

[Subpoint 2] God supernaturally reveals our solution: Jesus.

The Angel supernaturally intervenes and confirms God's truth to Joseph. That had been shared with him by Mary. And the Angel tells him that the name of the child. The One conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. Is to be named Jesus. Why "Jesus?" Because the name means "The Lord is my salvation." It means "Savior." Jesus is the One who will solve our problem. Jesus is the One to Satisfy our deepest need. Jesus is the One we need to save us from our sin. And this Jesus, we're told three times in this passage- in verses 18, 20, and 25 was conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit. The solution to our problem is the virgin-conceived Jesus who will save his people from their sins.

[Application] This is always how true belief comes. It comes from God, supernaturally revealing His truth to us. This can happen through dreams like Joseph- there are lots of stories of this. But more often it's not that. Maybe it's something we've heard relayed to us through other people, like Joseph had heard from Mary. Maybe it's supernaturally revealed through preaching or teaching. Maybe it's revealed through your own reading of the Bible or a book explaining Biblical truth. Whatever is the case, it occurs when the Holy Spirit supernaturally takes the truths that He's written in God's Word (He'll never contradict Himself) and it will penetrate to a deep conviction of our own sin and the goodness of Jesus to save us. When it comes to belief, experiences, suddenness, emotions, may all be different and one is not better than the other, but all will include these elements. And if this is all supernatural, we should be people of prayer. Asking God to act supernaturally toward our own hearts and the people around us. Are you seeking God to reveal your sin to you so that you are humbled and see your great need? Are you asking God to reveal Jesus to you? Are you asking God to give you a supernatural understanding of the cross of Christ? When God supernaturally reveals our sin and Jesus our Savior, we'll not only believe in the supernaturally virgin-conceived beginning of Jesus' life, we'll also believe in the

supernatural, God-pleasing, wrath-taking, faith-purchasing, sin-destroying end of Jesus' life. Where we see that He has done everything to save us from our sins.

Today, through my human words and God's divine words in Scripture, God is calling all of us to believe in the virgin-conceived Jesus. There are obstacles to this belief and there's a supernatural source to this belief. But what difference does it make? Let's now look at

[Main Point 3] Belief's results.

A lot of people claim to believe in Jesus but the divine virgin-conceived Jesus would grow up to be history's greatest teacher on his route to the cross. And in his teaching He said that not everyone who says they believe in Him actually does. This text shows us that true belief yields two results.

[Subpoint 1] First, when we believe we obey.

True belief in Jesus means believing His word. True belief in God's word means we'll seek to obey everything we're told in Scripture. Just as Joseph sought to obey God's command to marry Mary and help her raise Jesus. Listen to v. 24

*When Joseph woke from sleep, **he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,***

But this text tells us that belief results in something else as well.

[Subpoint 2] When we believe we get Jesus.

This should be awe-inspiringly profound to us. Think about Joseph for a moment. At the beginning of this passage Joseph wanted to get away from Mary and the child in her womb. In his natural unbelief He wanted to get away from Jesus. But when something supernatural happens and we believe we are not only getting salvation, we are getting God Himself in the second person of the Trinity. We are getting Jesus. So Joseph obeys God's word, delivered from the angel, and obeys. And he becomes the earthly adoptive father of Jesus. He gets Jesus.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

This is the significance of v. 23 as well. God has come to us. Jesus is God. He is fully man and fully God. As Shai Linne says in his song "The Hypostatic Union"

I know it's deep but when you peep you'll find it's dense, Jesus both God and man, two hundred percents.

Jesus was born of a virgin. Free from the corruption that the rest of us inherit from being sons of Adam. And we can't save ourselves. Our sin has turned a ladder to Heaven into a greased slide we can't climb. So God had to come down to us to save us. And look at the glorious circle we arrive at. God comes to be with us? Why? So that He can save us from our sins. And why does God save us from our sins? So that we can be with God. We get to be in God's presence forever thanks to the work of Christ.

[Illustration] Many of you know that this past week has been a really tough week for me. Last Sunday evening, my dad died of a sudden heart attack at age 64. My dad was a good father to me. He taught me many things. He helped me in immeasurable ways. And I'm going to miss him terribly. My dad and I spent many hours of our lives next to each other, oftentimes with no words passing between us. Riding in the truck. Hunting in the mountains. Installing tile floors. We were together. I can still do a lot of those things- but he's gone. I can go for a drive. I can go hunting and fishing. I can do home improvement projects. **But what I want is my dad *with me*. I want his presence.** If I could just be with him again. Just watch him do some boring task. Bait a fishing hook. Lift things into the bed of his pickup. Pick up my children. **I just want to be with him.** If I could get that, the result would bring me incredible joy. **I wish my dad was with us.**

[Application] *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel- which means **God** with us.* What do you think your need is? Your deepest need is salvation. And the result of our salvation is that we get God with us. We get God's presence. The most glorious benefit of this incredible miracle of the birth of Jesus Christ is that He is God and He's come to be with us. We are people who have fled from God's presence. We'd rather be anywhere than with Him. And we deserve what we ask for. Loneliness. Isolation. But they shall call his name Immanuel- which means God with us. Jesus was born to be God with us while He walked this earth. He died on the cross, rose from the dead, and has ascended to Heaven so that He can pour out His Spirit on all those who

believe. Living inside us. So that we would have God with us. And at our death or His return (whichever comes first) He promises that those who believe will stand in His presence. We will be with God. And God will be with us.

[Conclusion] Throw the rule of three out the window. What we really need is salvation and we get it when we believe in the virgin-conceived Jesus. And for all those who do- are you one of them?- we get what Joseph got. We get Immanuel. God with us.