

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE

Relating Rightly To Relatives At Christmas

Part II. Responding Well To Threats Too Great For Us To Handle (Mathew 1:18-25)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Though Christmas has traditionally been a time when people are friendly toward one another, in today's world, one often faces threatening situations in relating to others, including relatives, that are too great for him to handle:

(1) Last Sunday, two of our members told me of people they know who experience deep, lingering fears over our nation's politics. Such fear is not confined to just a few individuals or conspiracy theorists either, for it shows up in the media: indicating their support for it, the editors of the Republican-American on December 5, 2016, ran in their "Quotable" section on the editorial page (p. 6A) the following quote by Paul Mirengoff: "It's widely accepted that election fraud used to exist. Our political history is full of examples such as Mayor (Richard) Daley's Chicago. If voting fraud is no longer a problem, what caused it to disappear? Is less at stake now in elections? Of course not. Do safeguards prevent fraud? No. . . . Have the big-city machines that promoted fraud in the old days vanished? They have not." (www.powerline.com proprietor, "Illegal voting and what to do about it (updated)," Dec. 1)

(2) In the realm of relating to relatives, Annie Lane's "Dear Annie" column (Ibid., p. 8A) ran a letter by a woman who reported her "mother-in-law . . . has constantly criticized my weight, my hairstyle, what I feed my children and how I dress and discipline them . . . I have kept my mouth shut to keep the peace, and I respect my dear father-in-law and husband too much to tell her off and cause a family rift." The tension finally erupted when the mother-in-law publically called the woman "hurtful names," so the woman "called her a troublemaker and walked out," resulting in a deep rift between two segments of the entire extended family! (Ibid.)

Need: *So, we ask, "This Christmas, how does God want me to respond well to threats too great for me to handle?!"*

I. Mary and Joseph were tempted to feel helplessly vulnerable to great harm from their community and relatives due to Mary's pregnancy that was caused by God when she was in her betrothal period:

- A. Mary's pregnancy while a betrothed virgin would have tempted her to feel helplessly vulnerable to great harm:
 - 1. We learned in our last message that Mary' twelve-month betrothal was arranged between Joseph, her and her father to test if she would remain a virgin in that time period as proof of her moral integrity before Joseph took her to live with him, Lk. 1:26-27. (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 357; Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ, 1974, p. 147-151)
 - 2. Thus, after Mary had become pregnant by supernatural conception and visited her relative Elisabeth in Judah for edification, her obvious pregnant condition upon her return to Nazareth three months later would have caused her relatives and Joseph to conclude that she had surely been immoral, Luke 1:26-27, 56.
 - 3. That left Mary vulnerable to seeing Joseph break their betrothal by divorce, leaving her to face a hard life!
- B. Mary's pregnancy while a betrothed virgin would have tempted Joseph to feel helplessly vulnerable to harm:
 - 1. We know from Matthew 1:18, 19b NIV that Joseph's discovery that Mary was pregnant led him to plan to divorce her *privately* versus publically disgracing her because he loved her, B. K. C., N. T., p. 20. Thus, when Mary was found to be with child during her betrothal, the discovery would have crushed Joseph.
 - 2. Yet, Joseph was upright, not wanting to harm his reputation or marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him, so he planned to break the betrothal that in his era required the hurtful act of divorce, Matthew 1:19.
 - 3. The crisis proved to be great for Joseph, seen in his stalling to "reflect on; ponder" (*enthumeomai*, Abbott-Smith, A Man. Grk. Lex. of the N. T., 1968, p. 154) the situation before he took legal action, Matt. 1:20a.

II. Yet, the couple's reactions to the crisis exemplify godly responses to threats too great for one to handle:

- A. In facing threats too great for them to handle, both Mary and Joseph aimed to do what was righteous:
 - 1. Mary believed God would want her to be faithful to her betrothal agreement with Joseph, so in leaving her relative Elisabeth in Judah, she returned to her town of Nazareth where her espoused husband also lived, believing God would arrange for him to want to marry her in spite of her pregnancy, Lk. 1:56 with 26-27. She thus believed that God had led her to become supernaturally pregnant with the Messiah after she was espoused to Joseph because He fully intended her to marry him in spite of her unusual pregnancy!
 - 2. Joseph's concern for righteousness was evidenced in his plan to end the betrothal agreement by the required act of divorce for what appeared to him to be immorality by Mary, Matthew 1:19.
- B. In facing threats too great for him to handle, Joseph aimed to do what was loving:

1. Joseph's decision to divorce Mary quietly without publically disgracing her demonstrated his love for her, Matthew 1:19b NIV. She may have emotionally crushed him, but he was not going to react in bitterness!
 2. When Joseph took time to think about the effects of his plan to divorce Mary, knowing it would put a lasting block between him and Mary and her kin, he showed love by not rushing into divorce, Matt. 1:20a.
- C. In facing threats too great for him to handle, Joseph aimed to act with care: he took time to consider the effects of implementing his hurtful plan for divorce, what also gave time for God to give him direction! (Matt. 1:20b)
- III. God then sent His angel to inform Joseph of the supernatural nature of Mary's pregnancy, thus urging him not to fear to take Mary to live with him as his wife, Matthew 1:20b-21.**
- IV. Once Joseph understood the divine cause of Mary's pregnancy, he acted IMMEDIATELY to protect the reputation of all involved: he arose from sleep and that night traveled to Mary's parents' home to take her to be with him though the twelve-month betrothal period had not yet been fulfilled, Matthew 1:24.**
- V. Nevertheless, in righteous respect for God's role in Mary's pregnancy, Joseph did not become intimate with his wife until after she had given birth to Jesus, Matthew 1:25.**
- VI. Significantly, God had a reason for allowing this crisis to occur -- to provide proof from MAN'S view of the VIRGIN BIRTH of Christ, and hence of the VALIDITY of Christ's SALVATION (as follows):**
- A. God was sending His Son into the world as the *sinless* and thus **qualified** Sacrifice for man's sin, 2 Cor. 5:21.
 - B. Of necessity, this meant that Jesus could not inherit Adam's sin nature by way of a natural conception and birth (Rom. 5:12), so God supernaturally had to conceive Jesus in Mary's womb to bypass man's sin nature!
 - C. Nevertheless, Jesus had to be of David's line to gain access to Israel's throne (Luke 1:31-32), so God had to utilize Mary's DNA to construct Jesus' body, but supernaturally so in nevertheless omitting man's sin nature.
 - D. So, to **reveal** Jesus' **divine** origin and thus **sinless** nature at birth, God had an **espoused virgin** conceive Him, creating a **negative** reaction in her **espoused husband** to where **that man initially intended to divorce her** as **EVIDENCE** that Jesus was **NOT a MAN'S son**, but **GOD'S SINLESS Son**, Luke 1:34-35; Matthew 1:22-23.

Lesson: *When vulnerable to threats too great for them to handle, Mary and Joseph aimed to function righteously, lovingly and carefully, and God then directed Joseph on what to do to terminate the crisis. God let them face this overwhelming crisis to provide human proof for Christ's virgin birth to validate His atonement and our salvation!*

Application: *If we face threats too great for us to handle, be it from relatives or from any other entity, (1) may we trust in Christ to have eternal life (John 3:16) and come under God's "much more" care, Romans 8:32. (2) Then, may we function (a) righteously, in alignment with Scripture, (b) in love, (c) with care, (d) giving time for God to provide a resolution and (e) trusting that He has let the crisis occur for a necessary purpose in His master plan!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Four men in our congregation have recently and on separate occasions told me of the helpfulness of a sermon we gave out of 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2 on overcoming a life of fear. Since today's message is similar in thrust to that one, we use this section to focus on God's ***all-inclusive*** guidance for dealing with any great threat we face today:

(1) First, Scripture claims that the Holy Spirit by Whom we believers in Christ are equipped of God to live a godly life (Romans 8:3-4) and serve Him effectively in the church with a spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11), is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4) who controls the entire world system (1 John 5:19 NIV). Thus, **no** threat that we believers face from ***today's*** world can hinder us from succeeding in God's calling for us ***IF we stay upright!***

(2) Second, Scripture records Jesus as promising to build His Church so the gates of Hades would not prevail against it, Matt. 16:18. Thus, no threat from the world system can ever keep God from building His Church!

(3) Third, Scripture reveals that God's plan for our era, as we before noted, is to allow for a mix of past strong with current weak secular government forms (iron-clay mix, Daniel 2:41-42) while the races neither intermarry nor unify (Dan. 2:43) up to the rapture (Dan. 2:44; Rev. 17:12 with 2 Thess. 2:1-14), and to let people in the world become disillusioned over oppressive leaders who gain power by intrigue in the world's ecumenico-ecclesiastical, commercial, governmental complex so that the afflicted seek and find solace in Bible teaching, Rev. 3:21 with 7:17.

(4) Thus, (a) we must believe and heed Scripture for us to know every good work God wants us to do until the rapture (2 Tim. 3:15-4:2), and to do so (b) by trusting the validity of the Scriptural information given above about our times for proper orientation, (c) by then relying by faith on the Holy Spirit for godly living and (d) using His personally-assigned spiritual gift (e) to minister in the local church to disciple others. ***Failure to believe or to heed these truths will produce fearful insecurity in today's world where believing and heeding them will bring us peace.***

May we trust in Christ and heed Mary and Joseph's lead to face threats too great for us alone to handle.