

# Faith in the Midst of Change

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning we're going to consider even the announcement of the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Joseph, as we see in Joseph, you see in the title of the sermon this morning, Faith in the Midst of Change.

And three things that were, or three headings, three points to follow in the sermon, as you see the character of a faithful man, as we see the character of Joseph, as Matthew tells us of that character.

And then the command of obedience to a faithful man. Joseph's been given that command to obey what God spoke through God's angel. And then thirdly, the calling of the name of Jesus, the faithful Savior.

So we're going to consider these aspects of this account of the announcement of the birth of Jesus. You know, it's a wonderful blessing at this time of year, all times of the year, to know that God is sovereign.

That God is in control of every detail of your life. Every detail is under his sovereign care and under his love.

[ 1 : 13 ] Even when the plans that you have in your life don't work out the way that you think they ought to be, and when you still know that you have the assurance that God knows and God cares.

Of course, there'll be times when the plans that you make don't turn out the way that you expected them to turn out. And there are many times when you can be so disappointed and even disorientated as to why God should have allowed such and such a thing to happen.

But still, you continue to trust God. Trust him even in the shadows. Even when his ways are not our ways that become our ways.

If you exercise faith in the midst of change. As we see, as we read there this morning in that passage, in the example of Joseph and his faith in the midst of change in his life.

Matthew, the author of this gospel, Matthew's telling us of the birth of Jesus from the standpoint of Joseph. If you were to go to Luke's gospel, you'll see the account given from the perspective of Mary.

[ 2 : 25 ] But here's Matthew introducing us to the circumstances of the birth of Jesus. And he brings us to see the amazing truth of the conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As he does so, he draws us to see Joseph's response. The response to the news of the birth of the Son, the Son of God. And it's Joseph's response that we'd all do well to pay attention to.

Because his response, as we said, speaks of faith in the midst of change. Faith in the midst of unexpected change. So let's look at the details then that we read there in that section of Matthew's gospel.

Let's look at the, as we say, the facts. There's Joseph. And Joseph's been engaged to his young bright-to-be. Here's this humble carpenter from Nazareth.

And he's been plying his trade, no doubt, for a number of years, maybe many years in that little Galilean village. But he's met a woman. He's fallen in love with her.

[ 3 : 35 ] And no doubt, he's already made plans for their future. Betrothal would happen in a year's time. That was the custom of the day. But Marian, during that time, she'll remain at her parents' home until the time for the wedding to take place.

Then we can just, you know, read Joseph's mind. They're going to settle in a small house in the village. They'll raise a family. They'll have his business to look, to care for and continue and hopefully continue through the generations.

But out of the blue, the bluest it were, Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant. And the scandal in a society of a child conceived out of wedlock weighed heavily in Joseph's mind.

But he loved Mary. So how could this thing have happened? His plans have been turned upside down. But as he's pondering, as he's reflecting on how he's going to save Mary's reputation and at the same time respect the law of Moses, God intervenes.

And God intervenes through an angelic appearance and a dream that Joseph has. And through this angelic appearance, Joseph hears this most wonderful news.

[ 4 : 55 ] Let's read again in the passage. 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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

And it's the faith of Jesus in the midst of this unexpected change in all his thoughts, all his planning. This wholly unexpected change.

That's what we're going to look at this morning. As we turn again in our thoughts to the birth of the Lord Jesus. So what of the character of a faithful man?

Because, you know, character, particularly the character of a faithful man, a faithful woman, is so often highlighted when unexpected change happens in his life, her life.

You know, some event, some incident, something life-changing happens. How's your response? How do you respond? Do you maintain a trust in God so much that, well, your faith far from being battered is actually strengthened in your knowing that God is sovereign, that you can still say your will be done?

[ 6 : 10 ] Or do you take a sort of a knee-jerk reaction and cry out, Lord, why me? And then sink in the sand of despair, self-despair, and even question God's love for you?

Well, let's look at Joseph. See, in Joseph's case, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, he didn't succumb to despair. He would do what's right.

That's what his plan was. He was going to divorce her. Of course, that was the law, the law of Moses. And he would do it in particular circumstances that would save her reputation.

He would do it quietly. Again, that was what was provided for at that time. He could just write a letter in front of two witnesses, give it to Mary. That was the legal way of divorce, rather than going before a public court.

And if Joseph had done that, Mary would be exposed to full public scandal. He wants to do what's right. And at the same time, avoid the shame that Mary would face if the divorce was made public.

[ 7 : 18 ] He cared for Mary. I mean, at this point, before he receives the announcement of the birth of Jesus, at this point, his life's in turmoil. All his plans are in tatters.

But still, he's not going to reduce Mary as an object of scandal. He'll be honorable. Honorable even in these difficult circumstances that he saw from a human perspective were irreversible.

So even before he hears the announcement of the birth of Jesus, his character shines through.

Even in his own way of thinking, even in his own way of seeking a solution in what appeared to be a situation that seemed no way forward for him and Mary to be married.

His mind was resolved. He's going to move on. But he'll do it with dignity. The dignity of an upright, righteous, law-abiding man. And there's surely a reminder here to each one of you, each one of us, that when your plans are not God's plans, when his ways aren't your ways, that we still remain true to his word.

You remain true to your witness for the Savior. And true to your confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. True as you continue to love God and your neighbor.

[ 8 : 50 ] And we're not going to challenge God's righteous ways with us. We're not going to seek to harm others. Joseph didn't seek to harm Mary's reputation.

But at all times, surely we'll seek to fully accept God's sovereign will, even in things that seem so difficult to take, like a bitter pill to swallow.

And we'll wait on God for his direction. We'll wait on him for his leading, just as Joseph waited in the Lord, as Joseph listened to God's directing his life, a life that would be changed in him and changed for all for whom Jesus came to give his life.

And that life-changing announcement that Joseph hears and Joseph obeys in respect to the command to obedience to a faithful man.

Do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[ 9 : 56 ] Again, just picture the situation in your mind's eye. Joseph, it's before the announcement, Joseph's gone to bed. I mean, he's still able to sleep, obviously, despite the turmoil in his life.

And in the way that, as we see in other cases and in biblical times, as God directs, for Joseph, he's receiving God's Word through a vision, through a night, through a dream, a night vision.

And Joseph's spoken to, through this angelic appearance. And it's a vision, a dream that's going to change Joseph's life. It's going to change Mary's life. It's going to change, and that's changed your life, my life, the announcement of the birth of Jesus.

Joseph's life would never be the same again. Mary's life would never be the same again. And your life, through the faith in the Lord Jesus, never the same again. All because of the supernatural birth of the Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' conception.

That miracle, that miracle of the virgin birth that, well, that Joseph was informed of, and that we're hearing again as we hear again and again each year. And we pray more than just once a year.

[11:17] And as we come to worship God, as we come to give thanks and praise to Him for the life-changing event of the incarnation 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

But what are the commands? What are the, in fact, several commands that Joseph's given? And how did Joseph respond to these commands?

Well, he's told, first of all, the first command, not to fear. In other words, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. I mean, he'd gone to sleep, he'd gone to sleep with that plan in his head to divorce Mary quietly and to do it according to the provisions of the law.

But he'll awake, no longer committed to that plan, but he'll do as he was commanded by God's messenger to do. He will take Mary as his wife.

He's not going to shrink back and shrink back from taking her as his beloved. And there's not going to be any hesitation either. If God has spoken to him through his angel, Joseph, the man of faith, will obey.

[12:27] And for you, for all who are faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, Jesus who came from heaven to earth, who came in human form, it's your revealing of faith in him that's going to be seen in your doing all that God commands you to do.

Even when God's commands run contrary to your own plans, even however well conceived your plans are. You know, in Joseph's case, think of Joseph for a moment again.

In Joseph's case, from a human perspective, his plans were honorable. I mean, he honored God. He was a man of faith. He loved Mary. He loved his fiancée.

I mean, his plans to dissolve even the intended marriage, these plans in themselves were honorable. But God had far higher plans for Joseph that were going to keep Joseph and Mary together.

But above all, bring together God and man, that reconciliation between God and man through the birth of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God.

[13:38] Jesus becoming man for us. Jesus coming to take our place, to be our representative, to face the justice of God and pay the price that we all deserve for our sins.

And so again, we're reminded that it's for each one of us to heed the commands that God gives us, that God gives us through His Word. His plans, His plans for you, His plans for His church, His plans are right and they're true.

Remember the words that God spoke to His people when they were in exile as He spoke through His prophet Jeremiah. These words that again have resonated through the ages.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a hope, to give you a future and a hope.

God's plans for Joseph and indeed God's plans for all who are His, for all for whom Jesus came to save. His plans are for you to come into that right relationship with God by faith.

[14:51] These are God's righteous plans, God's plans to give you a future, to give you an eternal future, to bring you into God's presence eternally. These are plans that engender hope, the hope of mankind, the hope that we have in salvation all because of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus for us.

And there's Joseph being so privileged to hear of the working out of God's plans even through the supernatural birth and birth not of his own natural son, but of the Son of God through the overpowering of the Holy Spirit on Mary.

And through Mary, Jesus would have a human nature, fully man, in order to pay the price fully for our sins.

And of course, Joseph, Joseph will play his part. He'll play his part. He's going to take Mary as his wife. He'll be the legal, the legal father of Jesus. He'll name the child, the child born to Mary.

He'll name him Jesus. That name that speaks of salvation is from the Hebrew word Yeshua. That means, well, that means God saves. And Joseph will obey the command of God.

[16:12] He's not going to be afraid to take Mary as his wife and he'll do as Jewish fathers did. He will name the child. And he'll name the child not according to his choice of name.

The name Jesus would not have been his choice for any son of his. Breeel, he's given that name, Jesus, to give to the child. That name from all eternity.

The name that speaks of the rescue plan of God for sinners. Sinners to be saved from our sins. And Joseph obeys the commands, these commands. Why?

Because he knows that these commands are from God. And so in his faithful following of his Lord, he knows by faith that something supernatural has happened to Mary, his betrothed.

Something that's been planned from all eternity. And Joseph's been privileged to hear of this. Mary herself had been informed of it when we read of the account of the same time in Luke's Gospel.

[17:16] And now Joseph's been informed of this wonderful plan of God fulfilled through Mary. So Joseph's not going to follow his own plans anymore.

He's fully resolved to do as God has commanded him to do. And you're seeing here then a shining example of faith in the midst of unexpected change.

Because he sees, he recognizes God's hand in the sending of the angel through that vision. He doesn't understand all that that angel has said to him about the Holy Spirit and the supernatural conception of the child.

But he'll obey. And you know there are times, many times when we don't fully understand God's purposes and changing the direction of our lives.

Even the circumstances that unfold that, well, that we never expected to happen. But we still trust and obey because by faith and in faith we believe, as we can say so faithfully, that God knows best because he is God.

[18:30] Listen to the words that God spoke through his prophet Isaiah, that we read in Isaiah 55. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. You know, even in the present circumstances that we're facing as a church and by the church, I mean the body of the church, not just congregationally, but the church of the Lord Jesus.

Even amidst all the changes that we're facing, the rapid changes that we're living through even at this current time that the pandemic has brought in relation to even this time last year, we never have envisaged how things were going to be this time.

Even in the midst of these unexpected changes and even in the rapid social and moral changes that we're seeing happening in our land that even a generation ago we would never have envisaged, yet we remain fully convinced by faith that God is sovereign.

And God's not going to permit those, for example, those who are intent on the destruction of the gospel and the gospel's influence, God's not going to permit that to prevail because there are God-given limits.

[19:54] And God's ways do include permission for evil to happen but not to have the victory. Listen to the words of Proverbs 16, verse 4. The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

And we firmly believe by faith that God's purposes are sure and true and pure. And so we trust Him for His sovereign rule, His sovereign grace, His sovereign ruling, even in this world that Jesus came to redeem for the glory of God.

And we'll obey His word. Even though we don't always understand God's ways, we'll do as Joseph did. Joseph obeyed. Joseph obeyed all that God had commanded him to do.

Even though Joseph didn't understand all that was involved in the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth and even in the naming of Jesus as Jesus.

Well, let's finally think of that calling of the name of Jesus. Jesus, the faithful Savior, she will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.

[21:07] And then listen, when Joseph woke from his 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.

Joseph was to do something extraordinary. Joseph was to name the child whom he'd had no natural part in as a son. And he's to give the child a name that, well, a name that's resonated through history and will resonate through eternity.

And this is important. You see, by Joseph's part in giving the name of the child to Mary, by his giving the name, he was accepting the child, he was accepting Jesus into his family line.

And his family line, as Scripture tells us, was the family of David, the line, the family of King David.

Joseph was a direct descendant of King David. And so, Jesus truly is a son of David.

He's called Jesus, son of David, fulfilling the prophecy. He'll be David's son, the prophecy that spoke of David's son ruling forever. And notice how the angel gives the command about naming of the child that we read there in verse 21.

[ 22 : 30 ] For he will save his people from their sins. The emphasis is on he, whether it's the original Greek or the English here, the emphasis is on he.

For he will save his people from their sins. He. In other words, he and no one else. He will do what he'd come to do in coming from heaven to earth.

He'll do what he'll come to fulfill and what his name speaks of. His name that tells of God's work in man's salvation.

It's his name, the name of Jesus, that's higher than any other name because the name of Jesus speaks of full rescue, full deliverance, full deliverance from the dominion of sin, full salvation made possible because Jesus was born for us and lived for us and died for us.

So Joseph does what he's commanded to do. He does take Mary as his wife. He does name the son of Mary as Jesus and he's showing then faith in the midst of unexpected change and by faith he obeys.

[ 23 : 50 ] So he's playing his part in this great drama of salvation. He's not expected to have such a dramatic role in his naming of Mary's child Jesus.

He hadn't expected to legally adopt Jesus and for Jesus to be included in the family line of King David. But Joseph was a mature man of faith and Joseph complies with God's commands.

So what then for yourselves? God still has much to do in you and through you. There will be changes.

There will be changes in your life. Unexpected changes. Unexpected changes for yourselves. Even unexpected changes in the life of the church.

But do you have that faith to be courageous even through these changes and continue to trust in God knowing that God is sovereign, sovereign over all? Do you have that faith even in the midst of so much change that we're seeing in our present time?

[ 24 : 58 ] Do you have that faith to continue to trust Him for all things and not to be afraid but to live by faith and faith in the promises of God, faith in the purposes of God and faith in the provision that God has made for you and is sending of His Son for you to save you from your sins?

Well, trust Him. Trust Him even for the days that are now and for the days that yet remain in your life as you serve Him, as you seek to glorify Him, as you seek to follow Him, as you seek to follow the Lord Jesus who came to save His people from their sins.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we give praise and thanks to you for this renewed opportunity that you have given to us to be reminded of the name of Jesus, that name that is higher than any other name, the name that brings comfort and encouragement to your people, the name that gives that sure hope of eternal life for all who put their trust in you.

Hear us then, Lord, as we continue to call upon your name, as we continue to worship you, even through the praise that you have given to us and for us, that we might praise you.

Hear us, Lord, as we do so now, and in the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.