

Matthew 1:18-25

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[0 : 00] Jesus. Friends, this is God's holy, inerrant, inspired, and sufficient word for us today.!

Lord, will you soften our hearts and change us today for your great glory.

We pray these things in his name. Amen. Quick show of hands. How many of you... Thanks, Tyler.

How many of you are familiar with this passage?

Have you heard it? Yeah, look, right? It is a blessing that God's people are familiar with God's word.

Yet, familiarity can inoculate us to seeing the glory.

This can really easily become just, oh yeah, that's that thing that we read, you know, around Christmas time. Each year. Kind of like how, you know, our kids already, probably, if you have kids in your house, they've forgotten about the Christmas presents that they unwrapped just, what, two or three weeks ago.

[1 : 43] We can get used to familiar things. And they suddenly and suddenly become less glorious to our hearts.

Less shocking to us. If this passage is familiar to you, it is to me. Let us try today to look at it with new eyes, with fresh eyes.

And I want to start by reading to you all the parts of this passage that a first century Jewish person would have found to be normal and expected.

I'm going to read all of the parts of this that are normal. You ready? When Mary, his mother, had been betrothed to Joseph.

That's it. That's the only normal part of this passage. Every single word beyond that is unexpected.

[2 : 48] Everything else is unexpected and should cause us and prompt us into awe and wonder at our God. Everything else is new and subversive and should prompt us to worship.

That really is the major theme. If we look at this passage, everything is unexpected. We have an unexpected new main character in Joseph.

We have an unexpected development in that this new main character doesn't speak at all in the passage. There's an unexpected pregnancy in verse 18.

In verse 19, there is the first unexpected reaction to that pregnancy in his mercy. In verse 20, there is an unexpected messenger and message.

In verse 21, there is an unexpected salvation, and that's going to be maybe central to our time today. In verses 22 and 23, there is an unexpected moment of fulfillment of prophecy.

[3 : 59] And then, in verses 24 and 25, there is an unexpected second reaction to the pregnancy in adoption.

After the introductory words, when his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, every single word of this passage sets itself against our expectations.

And so, if we come away from this thinking, it was good to hear that familiar old story. Well, we've missed the point because God is trying to startle us in this passage.

He wants us to stand in awe. So, let's begin in verse 18 with that one expected moment, that one moment of normalcy. Mary is betrothed to Joseph.

And it's a pretty similar idea to what we would call engagement today. It's a little bit more binding. Typically, it lasted a year, and it was really a legal binding thing. We can sort of call off an engagement without any repercussions today, but betrothal in the first century in Palestine was a legal binding agreement.

[5 : 18] And so, it had to be terminated by a divorce if it was to happen. And that's why Joseph, in verse 19, is called her husband, even though he hadn't officially wed her yet.

Now, this is the moment, the one moment of normalcy, because anywhere you go, in any human society, you expect to see people forming families. That's normal. And then, from this point on, the

bottom falls out on normal.

Because the next words are, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Now, if you've grown up in church all your life, and you've heard this passage or Luke's account of this same event, this might sound like, yeah, duh, right?

That's what happens at Christmas. But it should shock us. First, there is glory here.

Now, Matthew doesn't give us the details of how, but God, the Holy Spirit, acted in a mighty way, transcending the laws of nature that he established to bring God the Son into the world.

[6 : 34] God with us, as our passage will say later. Now, our minds do not have the capacity to understand this great mystery.

In fact, there are mysteries, plural, here. We see the mystery of a miracle. God intervening in the physical world in such a miraculous way that a virgin conceives a child.

We see the mystery of the triune God on display. Two of the three persons of the Trinity appear here. One God in three persons.

That is a mystery too wonderful and beautiful for us. If that's something that you need or feel a need to explore more, there's a book on the back table.

I want you to take it. It's called What is the Trinity? Take it away today and read and learn some more. There's also a book on the back table called Who is the Holy Spirit?

[7 : 40] He is the one who is acting here today. If you want to know him better and understand his ministry and what his presence in your life should mean, day by day, grab that book.

Take it home with you. So we see the mystery of the miracle, the mystery of the triune God, and we see this mystery of Jesus the God-man. The mystery theologians call the hypostatic union.

God the Son, without changing his deity in any way, assumed a human nature.

Well, Matthew only hints at it here in this moment. He is a true human being. He's a true son to be born to Mary.

He identifies with his people, says the angel. God the Son, while remaining true God, also becomes a man, which means he is not like a half-God, half-human hybrid, like you see in Greek mythology, right?

[8 : 50] Nor is he God animating a fleshly sock puppet. Hebrews 2 says that since we are flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things and was made like his brothers in every respect in order to save us.

These are profound and glorious mysteries. None of this should be expected to us. They are too big for our minds to grasp. How does God work miracles? How does he exist eternally as one God in three persons, two of whom are active in this moment?

How can one of the divine persons take on a human nature and remain God? These mysteries prompt us towards awe and wonder as we consider a God who is entirely beyond our comprehension.

Yet, in this moment, comes and assumes our human nature to enter into our troubles, to show himself to us, to walk alongside us, to suffer for our sakes and to save us from our sins.

There is glory here. Glory we don't have the capacity to fully comprehend. Glory that we will spend eternity unwrapping and exulting in as the Lord on the last day removes the veil so we can fellowship with him face to face.

[10 : 26] There is glory here, but there is also shame. The world would not recognize this situation is glorious.

To everyone around her, Mary looked like an adulterer. Our culture doesn't really bat an eye at premarital sex.

It's not because of grace. It's because we embrace sin. But in a world of classical values, a pregnancy before the time of marriage would be a scandal.

And Mary would never be able to climb out from under this. What an unexpected irony that the greatest honor ever given a woman would be received by her community as a mark of shame.

But that is only the first moment that goes against our expectations in our passage today because as soon as we move to verse 19, there's an unexpected transition in the main character.

[11 : 41] Last week we were in verses 1 through 17 and it was all about how God was fulfilling his covenant promises to the great patriarch Abraham and the great king David in one person, Jesus.

So we would expect this following passage to be about Jesus. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, says verse 1. The son of David, the son of Abraham.

In an ultimate sense, this passage is about Jesus. But the main character, the person through whose eyes we see this text, the events unfold, suddenly shifts. Matthew begins recording the story of Joseph.

It's Joseph who plans to act when Mary is found to be pregnant. It's Joseph whose character is demonstrated when his plan is to not shame Mary.

It's Joseph who receives a dream. It's Joseph who receives a divine message. It's Joseph who receives a divine command. And it is Joseph who at the end of the passage acts. And so a figure that most of us don't know except from a Christmas card becomes the center of Matthew's introduction.

[13:05] What does this new and unexpected main character do? He gives in, well, unexpected mercy.

See, for the most part, you and I don't live in an honor-shame kind of culture. There are still cultures like that around the world, but the Western Hemisphere, not so much.

But Joseph did. He lived in an honor-shame culture, and so to preserve his own social standing, he would have to call off the marriage, which would publicly shame Mary. for the breach of their betrothal.

One scholar put it this way, there was no real option in the first century. Jewish law virtually demanded that a husband expose a wife who, by infidelity, had so diminished his honor. as a righteous man, he won't participate in what looks like adultery, so he intends to divorce her.

[14:10] But, in a decision that echoes God's grace in the gospel, he chooses to bear part of the suspicion to degrade his own social standing by not making a public spectacle of this.

He chooses, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, he resolved to divorce her quietly, which would have cast suspicion on him.

He chooses to still shield her as best he can by making it as private as possible. Husbands and wives, do you bring that heart to your marriage?

Do you live daily in the love of a grace-giving God such that your heart overflows with gospel grace? And do you look to preserve and shield your spouse as best you can?

Or do you forget your Savior and live without eyes set on grace? Do you hold a shield to your spouse in front of your spouse or point a dagger at them?

[15:37] And for those of you who are not yet married, is grace like this, grace that protects and shields, is that on your list for a future potential spouse?

Is it on your list for your own heart? At this point, a first century Jewish person and we should be very impressed with Joseph and his humility, his mercy, and his graciousness.

But of course, something else unexpected is on its way. Verses 20 and 21. As he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, which echoes the genealogy last week, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

God intervenes and sends a messenger. This is not normal, right? He confirms for Joseph what we already understand from verse 19.

The unexpected, or verse 18, excuse me. The unexpected is actually true. But the angel isn't done. His message continues. He has yet another most important message for Joseph and for the whole household of faith.

[17:10] She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. everyone agrees that the world is not perfect.

I don't know a single person. I've never met a person, never heard of a person who's like, this world is perfect. Right? The world needs fixing, saving even.

But people do not agree on what we need saving from. Your answer to that question, what do we need saving from, shows what you think is fundamentally wrong with the world.

Shows what you think is fundamentally wrong with you and me. Your answer shows what kind of a savior you think we need.

Now, the people of Israel had an answer to that question. They have had a long history from many generations of foreign rulers of a span of about 500 years that had the people longing for deliverance from oppression.

[18:32] Foreign occupation was their world and had been for generations. If you think back to the time of the prophets of the exile, the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, oppression

from Assyria and captivity by Babylon was on their minds.

After Babylon fell and the Persians allowed them to return, they still didn't have true autonomy. They were simply a province of a greater, more powerful nation. Then Alexander the Great conquered the known world and they were subservient to him.

When he died, his generals basically carved up the world and Israel was living under the Seleucid dynasty. Antiochus the Fourth Epiphanes, one of the series of rulers there, wanted to shatter Israel's self-image.

Here's an account that the Jews wrote. Not content with this, Antiochus dared enter the most holy temple.

He took the holy vessels with his polluted hands and swept away with profane hands the votive offerings. So Antiochus carried off 1,800 talents from the temple and hurried away to Antioch.

[19 : 58] He left governors to oppress the people. And they transformed the temple of the Lord into a temple to Zeus. And in the highest offense the Jewish spirit could possibly conceive, they sacrificed a pig on the altar.

The way they recorded it is simply this, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. Israel. And it was this moment that spurred a revolution in Israel.

It was called the Maccabean Revolt and it was a short window where they had overthrown the Seleucids and driven them out of the land of Israel and they had a brief period of self-governance until in 63 B.C.

The general Pompeii conquered Israel again for Rome. And it was under that banner that Jesus was born.

If this was your nation's history, what would you want? What would you be longing for if your parents and their grandparents and their grandparents going back hundreds of years were living under a revolving door of brutal foreign oppression?

[21 : 41] What would you want? What would your goal be for your people? To a first century Jew, salvation meant freedom from oppression.

That's what it meant. They wanted a ruler who would finally rescue them from the cycle of foreign rule and restore them to the glory of the kings like David and Solomon.

And so their idea of salvation was shaped by their circumstance. And that principle is really important because that's not just ancient history.

That idea that our perception of what salvation means was shaped by circumstance. That's not ancient history. That's true of every people at every time including you and me today.

It's also true of societies as a whole not just individuals. Our culture is looking for its own version of deliverance. Right?

[22 : 46] It just takes a different shape because we live in a different time. Let me show you. We're still at the very beginning of 2018.

So it's still a good time to reflect back on 2017. Right? In God's I think good providence cultural events in 2017 coalesced into a spotlight that kept America's gaze fixed on two major societal sins. Racism and sexual misconduct. Those were all over the news and the conversation of our nation for the whole year. And your answer to verse 21 right?

What kind of salvation do we need? Your answer gets put to the test here. How do racism and sexual misconduct enter the world?

And how are they extinguished? I think the first half of the year had more to do with racism and the second half of the year more to do with sexual misconduct so we'll go in that order maybe.

[24 : 06] When we think about racism and the way our culture addresses it will marches and activism and removing confederate symbols and requiring diversity training and promoting diverse hiring practices will they end racism?

In the justice system in hiring practices or simply in person to person interactions on the street? Will they end it? Basically can activism political action and institutional reform can they cure it?

Now they certainly won't hurt right? And in fact we should celebrate as Christians things that bring evil into the light and make it more costly to go down that road.

But will they eradicate it? Monuments and unfair hiring practices and unjust application of the law and other racist behaviors behaviors are not actually the problem themselves.

They are symptoms of the problem. When you take your child to the doctor with a fever of 103 degrees she won't prescribe an ice pack because your child's hot right?

[25 : 36] She'll prescribe! She'll prescribe antibiotics because your child has an infection and that's why they're hot. Racist behavior at the individual level and racist oppression at the institutional level are the fever.

They are the symptom. They are not the cause. Marches and laws and activism are all acting. They are good things but they are acting against the symptoms not the cause.

The infection the real problem the disease is hearts that hate. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks Jesus says and with our mouths we curse people who are made in the likeness of God says the apostle James.

What does God call heart deep hatred like that? He calls it sin sin is what is wrong with the world. We need deliverance from sin. What about sexual misconduct? Will public service announcements special outfits at award shows social media campaigns will they end predatory sexual behavior?

[27 : 10] In other words will awareness and education eradicate harassment and assault? And again we should applaud measures that seek to reduce evil and make it unacceptable.

we should support those things and I'm sure that it will help stem the tide. But here's the thing harassment and assault don't happen because people are ill informed.

It's not a matter of education. People harass and assault because they do know. They know what they want and they take it. I like the power.

I like the pleasure. I know what I'm seeing and I want it. It does not come from a place of ignorance. Harassers already know.

They know and they do it anyway. Sexual misconduct springs from somewhere deeper inside a person than their education.

[28 : 20] It comes from the place where we weigh things. We weigh the things we know and choose what takes priority.

The place where we decide what we value, what we love. The place God calls the heart. And so what does God call heart-deep desire for evils like sexual harassment and assault?

He calls it sin. Sin is what is wrong with our world. Our cultural moment proves that out. We need deliverance, a savior from sin.

But in another unexpected moment, the angel from the Lord doesn't say he will save his people from Rome's sins.

Does he? See, it's easy to point at other people. It's easy to point at prominent, notorious sinners in the public eye, be they celebrities or politicians and the like.

[29 : 41] And just agree with this. Yeah, we need deliverance from, we need to be rid of their patterns of sin because they're prominent, they're in front of everybody, they're making big decisions, those sorts of things.

It's easy to point at society, you know, that nebulous, faceless collective and nods that, yes, we live in a corrupt society, we need deliverance and rescue from this sinful generation.

It's easy to point at people who have harmed us as individuals and agree that, you know, we need deliverance from their sin. Yes, I've been harmed, save me from that bad guy in my life.

But that is not what the angel tells Joseph. He doesn't say, you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from Rome's sins. He says, you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

What does that mean? It means that no matter what you and I think our greatest need is.

[31 : 05] God thinks that what you and I need is not chiefly rescue from sins committed against us. What you and I need more than anything is salvation from our own sin.

all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death.

I do not say that to diminish anyone's suffering. God does not mean to say by that that sins committed against you are inconsequential or insignificant.

Instead, this magnifies seriousness and severity of our own sin. If Israel's plight was this desperate and still their greatest need was a savior from their own sin, how great is that need?

If our lives are marked by sufferings of many kinds and still our greatest need is salvation from our own sin, how great is that burden?

[32 : 36] I'm glad that our culture is waking up to the fact that even minor moments of racism are real injustice. And I'm glad our culture is coming to the point where even small moments of sexual harassment are considered serious offenses, but they do not weigh these sins heavily enough.

Our culture doesn't have a category for objectifying or assaulting or demeaning or stereotyping men and women with eternal souls made in the image of God himself.

The Christians do. We see those sins in the light of Scripture and I pray that we will see our own sins in the light of Scripture.

To consider our own sins, even the small ones in our own minds, unbearable offenses against a most holy God. In the early 20th century, there was a famous author named G.K.

Chesterton. The Times of London sent out an inquiry to famous authors asking the question, what's wrong with the world today? Chesterton simply responded, Dear Sir, I am sincerely yours, G.K.

[34 : 09] Chesterton. I am going to send you home with homework.

There's something else that I don't want to dive into today, but I would like for you to take with you for your reflection. The angel does not simply say he will save his people from the consequences of their sins.

He does not simply say he will save his people from the guilt of their sins. He does not simply say he will save his people from damnation to hell for their sins.

He says something broader and more comprehensive. He says he will save them from their sins, which includes all of those things, but has in view our sanctification.

We are delivered in Christ from sin and given an inheritance in the Holy Spirit who produces in us new birth, new life, and new obediences.

[35 : 35] And so we are freed not only from the guilt and penalty of sin, but in Christ we are saved from lives of sin.

I encourage you to take that with you this week and reflect on it.

of course there is another unexpected moment in our passage today. Beginning in verse 22, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. the most extraordinary thing here is that, this is from Isaiah 7, the most extraordinary thing about this is that this is both the means and the end of our salvation.

See, he's God with us in order to save us. The book of Matthew recounts his earthly ministry culminating substitutionary death on the cross for our sins.

[37 : 01] He will save his people from their sins. And his victorious resurrection for our justification.

And that is the means of our salvation, but it is also the end of our salvation because the gospel is not Jesus saves you from hell.

Not really. that's a piece of it. But he saves us from hell to himself. Paul calls it the ministry of reconciliation.

We don't just depart to heaven and sit on a cloud and strum a heart in boredom for eternity. We get God with us.

God with us. And verses 24 and 25 show the shape of that reconciliation. It takes the form of adoption.

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

[38 : 16] Jesus. Though Jesus is not his biological son, Joseph adopts him. The father of a child is the one who names him in this culture, and so he is calling him his own.

It's kind of an incredible irony that Joseph is adopting Jesus, and yet it is through Jesus' work that Joseph can be adopted into God's family.

Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 1, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

Joseph adopts Jesus, and it is through Jesus' ministry that Joseph might be adopted into the family of the triune God.

[39 : 45] How beautiful is that? So as we leave this most unexpected passage today, let us take with us this recognition that salvation is not simply justification, that is like right standing before God so that we don't go to hell, but it's reconciliation so that we can have God with us.

See, God with us, Emmanuel, was the means by which he came to save us, but it is also what he came to bring us to. This should make Christians prize, adoption, in a spiritual sense, in our

salvation, but also in a familial, tangible sense.

Religion that is pure and acceptable to our Lord is to visit widows and orphans in their distress. You will hear more about that here at Shoreline in the coming months.

Let us take from this passage a sorrow over sin. If you have big problems in your life, recognizing that they are dwarfed, still big, but dwarfed by the problem of sin, and that your biggest need is a savior from your sin, should make us tremble at the thought of our own sins.

And we should consider Joseph, who obeyed God at a high cost. This would cost him greatly. In adopting Jesus, he would be considered by his community to be a man of lesser value.

[41 : 45] He married this adulteress, right? In that culture, that was a high price to pay, much higher than in our own.

It was a very high cost, but consider the blessing. Obedience to God is worth any cost, always.

And I'd ask you to think this week and every week, we often count the cost of the obedience, right?

This is going to cost me socially.

To not do this thing, or not participate in that thing, or I'm expected to do this thing by my friends, or my co-workers, or my neighbors, or my family. Or, I feel like I'm going to miss out if I don't sin, miss out on some pleasure, miss out on some fun.

Obedience to our eyes often comes at a high price. I want you to look at this passage, and look at Joseph, and know that it is worth it.

[43 : 02] And finally, as we walk away from this passage today, and into Matthew chapter 2 next week, let us revel in the gospel.

The one we offended, right, because sin is an offense against him, he is the one who was born so he could die to redeem us from that sin.

Friends, let's pray. Oh, great and glorious God, you surprise us with unexpected mercy and help and life by sending your son for us.

Lord, will that never go stale? Will you always remind us the great price he paid? Will that change and shape our hearts?

Or will you be glorified in us? Finally, Father, we simply say, thank you. We praise you for your great grace and your great love.

[44 : 31] We pray these things in the matchless name of Jesus Christ who was born to save his people from their sins. Amen. Won't you stand with us again?