

Matthew 1:18-25 "The Birth of Jesus Through the Eyes of Joseph"

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Date: 09 December 2018

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Go to Matthew chapter 1, 4 of them, remember?

Yep. This is one we haven't seen for a while. We are looking this Christmas season at the birth of Jesus through the eyes of people there in these biblical accounts to help us get a close-up, personal look at what Christmas really means in our lives.

More than sentimental tradition and dizziness, and there's plenty of that. This baby is life-changing, world-altering.

Last week, through Mary's eyes, we saw how Jesus is God's grace reaching down to the undeserving, entering into our mess, taking on our weakness to bring us His grace.

That's a life-changing reality when that happens. This morning, we'll look at Joseph's story, and that once again focuses on Jesus.

[1 : 10] Mary's gotten this great news from the angel about this divine pregnancy, but her fiancé is not in the loop yet. This could be interesting.

Let's read Matthew 1, beginning at verse 18, God's holy word. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, 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.

She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. 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.

[2 : 27] 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 God's word. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for sending your son, for the gift of Jesus, for the gift of your word, for this account in Joseph's life of the impact of Jesus.

Would you not just teach us about him? Would you help each of us to encounter and experience Jesus this morning? We ask it in his name.

Amen. If you ask anyone who lives or works with me, they will tell you that one of the least pleasant times to be around me is when my plans get changed.

No one has ever accused me of being spontaneous or flexible. So when life gets interrupted, I often don't respond well.

[3 : 40] One slightly humorous example of this. The night I proposed to my now wonderful wife, I had a plan. We were driving from Clemson to her hometown, and where when we got there, I had plans to go to a park that closed at sundown, and so I was on a tight schedule.

So when we neared the end of this two-hour drive, and she had the gall to ask to use the restroom, I said, no.

No. That idea made me anxious, concerned of how things would work out if we were kind of not going to make it on time, and what might happen while we stopped.

That was not in the plan. I said, no. No to her house when we drove by her neighborhood. You can't stop there. No to McDonald's on the side of the road when she asked. Nope, not there either. No to interrupting my plan. She got a restroom only after she got a ring. And again, many of you wonder, why did she say yes?

[4 : 53] Good questions. For most of us, life has been interrupted on a much larger scale than a restroom stop.

You can imagine how I handle that. When there's a serious disruption, anxiety, confusion, fear, stress, whatever it is that you go to, any and all of those might be there for you when life gets interrupted.

It's funny how you all just all took a deep breath and settled back in. It's tense when I don't have a microphone, isn't it? We can acknowledge that honestly, and we need to, because in this passage, through Joseph's experience, we see a particular kind of interruption.

It has nothing to do with electronics. These interruptions happen in our lives, but all of us experience a particular kind of interruption that's in our story this morning.

It's Jesus showing up. And we may not be ready for the change that Jesus brings. Christmas means God interrupting our life plans and meeting our deepest need.

[6 : 23] We'll come back to that second part later, but the birth of Jesus is not just a cute nativity scene. Put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a second, how his life is being interrupted.

That's where the story begins with Joseph, right? Joseph experiencing interruptions. Verse 18, when Jesus' mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. Now, that's not what he had planned.

Not what he wanted, but he resolved himself to it. Joseph's got a budding carpentry business, a small town network of friends, a marriage to a young woman arranged and coming soon.

Life has a clear path forward for Joseph, doesn't it? But Mary's pregnancy interrupts. We don't know how much explanation Joseph got about the divine nature of it, but he heard the pregnancy part for sure, and he does what I often do when my plans get changed.

[7 : 45] I make another plan. A plan that minimizes the disruption. A reasonable, upstanding plan. In this culture, betrothal was such a formal commitment.

Breaking it off was tantamount to divorce. Joseph wants to do right by his fiancée as much as he can. Rather than the social shame he could have subjected her to, he's wanting to protect her and her family as well as his own honor wherever he can.

I've got to tell you, that's a good idea as far as plans go. From a just man, as the text indicates. But God has other ideas.

Maybe you can relate to this too. Boy, I've had a lot of good ideas God didn't go along with. You may have had some. Plans that seemed thoughtful of others and myself.

Ways of handling situations I thought God would surely want to do. Paths of least resistance that would minimize disruption, avoid shame, soothe potential conflict.

[8 : 56] I mean, it doesn't get much better than that for a guy like me, right? You can do all those things in one plan. If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans, right?

Noted theologian Woody Allen got that one right. God is about to call Joseph to something harder, more painful, and more glorious than he could even imagine in this moment.

He's going to call him to trust God's sovereign plan over his own good idea. And I, for one, need to be honest enough to say how hard it is when God interrupts my new good idea plan too.

Things are starting to feel a bit unstable here, out of control. I just want normalcy back. God, I'm trying to do the right thing here, okay? And the angel recognizes that fear in Joseph.

Verse 20. What does he say to Joseph? Son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.

[10 : 12] Do not fear, Joseph. Don't be afraid. And angels say that a lot, don't they? Because angels are not little nativity figurines like you may have seen.

They are warriors of light. Messengers from Yahweh himself. They're scary when they show up and you don't expect them. So they're often saying, do not fear.

But why is he saying it here? It's not, don't be afraid of me, Joseph. But don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. He's asking Joseph to involve himself in the scandal in an ongoing way.

To take more of the shame on himself. To make a decision most of his town will not understand. Or will explain incorrectly to Joseph's shame. Joseph is afraid of the shame he would have to endure. He sees this disruption. To be honest, he doesn't know how much more lies ahead. This child, Jesus, is not just disrupting now, but he's going to continue to interrupt.

[11 : 16] He's going to cause this small town carpenter to move his family out of the country when they flee for their lives to Egypt. He's going to bring confusion into his lives of these first time parents when he's at the temple and they expect him to be with them traveling back home.

Jesus interrupts our lives, doesn't he? He enters in and asks us to follow him. Saying no to other people and things and saying yes to him.

Can you relate to those emotions? Fear? Anxiety? Confusion, perhaps? When your life is interrupted. When God asks you to do something that will cost you.

That will interrupt your life. That will change your very reasonable plans. When I considered that this week, my first reaction was, yeah, but I've never had an angel show up and command me to do something in a dream.

But then I remembered a situation when someone who'd wounded me asked to come and talk to me to reconcile, to apologize to me.

[12 : 36] And I remember in my hurt, in the stress that had caused that in this situation, my thought was no. I decided to move on without deep relationship with them.

And the Holy Spirit kept bringing Ephesians 4 to my mind. Bear with each other and forgive one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

God often speaks to us as clearly in his word as he does through angels. If we'll listen to it. Forgive. Yeah, but they don't really understand how this impacted me.

And I don't know if they'll really change. And it could cost me time and reputation to be friends again. And it was as though the Holy Spirit just kept nudging my finger back.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Joseph didn't have to forgive Mary for a sin here.

[13 : 43] But to restore the relationship, he did have to bear the weight of a shame that wasn't his, which is very similar to forgiveness and very costly like forgiveness.

Is there someone God's calling you to forgive, to restore relationship with? But do you know how embarrassing it will be to take him back? Do you know how deeply she has hurt me?

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Joseph's picture of his future family has been thrown off, hasn't it? A son who's not mine right now?

I'm not ready. That will be different. That will be costly. I don't even know all the ways. And God has told us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Welcome the hurting, marginalized, and oppressed as he does. Has he been calling your family perhaps to foster? To adopt?

[14 : 50] To welcome another child into your life that you hadn't planned for? To welcome a widow into your home? To welcome a refugee into your family?

To move to another country or another neighborhood? I don't know specifically how for each of you he might disrupt your perfect family picture.

But I do know he tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Not almost as much as we love ourselves and our kids, but as we love ourselves.

For the sake of his kingdom and the work he is doing in this world, God calls us to give sacrificially. When it costs us an ideal Christmas or social status.

He calls us to obey faithfully. When it costs us a promotion. He calls us to honor him with our bodies. When it costs us a relationship. He calls us to trust him.

[15 : 56] When it costs us our plan. In the respect of others. In different ways, our lives have been interrupted. And we have to decide whether heeding God's call is worth the cost.

Whether we will trust him. You feel Joseph's angst again for just a minute before we move on. It's there in verse 20 as Joseph considered these things.

That Greek word is full of emotion. Of frustration. Of angst. He was feeling as he considered this situation. He's ready to have the interruption set aside.

He's finally settled into moving ahead with his plan. And God interrupts and calls him to a path of costly obedience. For the sake of his kingdom.

I don't know if my controlling, safe, rut loving personality. Could have handled it. But Joseph does.

[17 : 03] You know how this story ends, right? Let's skip ahead. This is quick and simple. Verse 24. 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'd given birth to a son.

And he called his name Jesus. With apparently no hesitation, he wakes up and obeys the angel. He faithfully reverses course, marries Mary, demonstrates self-control in the relationship, and names the child Jesus as he has been instructed to do.

Now it's stated briefly. But you and I know how difficult that decision of obedience must have been for Joseph.

Joseph's not going to get a lot of attention in the gospel accounts, but here his big moment ends well. God called him into service for the kingdom at great cost to himself, and he obeys as Mary did last week.

The crux of the passage, then, is why? Who or what prompts a guy in his kind of situation with this kind of interruption to be faithful?

[18 : 21] To respond in obedience? And if the focus is not Joseph, then who is it? That's where we see the turning point. The crux of this whole passage is what the angel tells Joseph in his dream, isn't it?

It's all about Jesus. Jesus' presence and his saving mission is the only thing that allows interrupted Joseph to move forward faithfully.

Knowing God's sovereign plan is not merely to interrupt our lives, but truly to meet our deepest need is what enables us to trust him in the disruption.

Listen into the angel talking to Joseph. Joseph, Mary will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

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.

[19 : 32] God with us, Joseph, and not to destroy us, but to save us. Give him the name Jesus. Jesus, Yahweh saves.

Because finally, the promised one is coming who will do what all the bulls and goats for centuries was never able to do. He will truly save his people from their sins.

He'll bring them back into a relationship with their father, the holy God who's been behind the curtain. God has come to be with you, Joseph, in this baby.

And he will save you and many others from your sins. See, Joseph, your biggest problem is not this life interruption right now.

Your biggest problem is not Roman oppression that disrupts your life day in and day out so that you can never have any power or control over your life at all.

[20 : 40] No, your biggest problem is one inside of you that not even your good ideas, your best plans can fix.

Our culture, and sadly, many churches these days tell us in one form or fashion that our biggest problem is outside of us.

It's somewhere, something, someone else. And the solution is inside of us. The gospel says our biggest problem is inside of us.

Sinful hearts bent away from God and toward ourselves. And the solution is outside us. God entering into our lives, yes, in a disruptive way to save us from our sins.

Kids, did you know that's why the baby Jesus came at Christmas? It wasn't just so that you could have a fun reason to celebrate an open presence once a year. Did you know that? Kids, the baby Jesus came at Christmas as a gift from God to you.

[21 : 55] The best gift ever. The one you most needed. Jesus came to live for you and die for you. To pay the penalty for your sins.

You know what that is? Death. Jesus came to die and then to heal, to fix your broken relationship with God.

That you couldn't even know Him or be with Him. And Jesus came so that you could be with God forever. Do you know John 3.16? Any of you ever heard John 3.16?

Parents, you ever heard John 3.16? Oh, okay. I knew there were more of you. God so loved the world. He loved you so much that He gave.

It's a gift. He gave you His only Son. That whoever believes in Him would not perish, would not die forever, but would have eternal life, would live forever.

[22 : 58] That's what Christmas is about, kids. That's actually why we give gifts to each other. Did you know that? Why you open presents and get presents for other people?

It's because we're celebrating the best gift ever that God gave to us. That's what we most need. That's what we most need. You've told your kids that, haven't you? But how often, when circumstances get hard in your life, are you convinced that fixing them is what you most need? That what you really need is the difficult circumstances to change, the complicated problem to go away, the disruption to disappear. God says to Joseph, listen, I'm doing something here bigger than fixing your situation, bigger than dealing with your interruption. I'm securing your eternity, Joseph. Don't you love that? It's a simple but rich statement in his name. His primary mission is not to achieve social change, although the good news certainly impacts and transforms society.

[24 : 17] It's not to teach moral reformation, although Jesus certainly helps us know how God created us to live. But what? To save his people from their sins.

In fact, it says he will save his people from their sins. He never fails to save even when we fail to obey. He accomplishes a full and free salvation.

Not merely the possibility of salvation for some people out there somewhere who might trust him and have their sins forgiven, but a certain salvation, complete forgiveness for those people, his people who are close to his heart.

He brings them back into relationship with his father who has their names written on the palm of his hand. And that's what this child does. When God moves miraculously to bring his son to the world, to walk and talk and live and die with us, he's not just coming to improve your life a bit so you're more comfortable for a few years.

He's not. It's bigger than that. He's coming to rescue you from eternal death and give you eternal life to save you from your sins so you're with him forever.

[25 : 43] That's why he comes. That's who the baby in the manger is. His father faithfully names him Jesus. And he so, so faithfully saves his people from their sins.

So, let me connect the dots here at the end. So, Joseph, you can trust me.

I'm taking care of your deepest need. So when I lead you into the uncomfortable circumstance, you can follow me. You can bear the cost of restoring relationship with Mary because I am paying the cost to restore relationship with you.

One Christmas, my grandmother decided that she wasn't well enough to get out and shop for us for Christmas presents. So she sent us a check for \$500 with a note that said, Will, will you get presents for each of the girls and something nice for the whole family?

So I called my grandmother to thank her for that. And she said, can you can you afford to do that? Can you afford to get something nice, a nice dress or a new toy for each of the girls?

[27 : 04] Yeah. Can you afford to get our girls? Yeah. Yeah, Grandma. We absolutely can. Thanks to your generosity.

Maybe you forgot what you sent us. It's not that it costs us nothing to get our girls a gift, but with what you've given us, we can afford it.

It's not that it costs you nothing to forgive someone else, but with your biggest need taken care of, you can afford it.

You have the resources of forgiveness to share. It's not that it costs you nothing to love your neighbor, but with your family's biggest need taken care of, with your family's eternity secured through his gracious love.

You can afford it. You have resources of love to share. I hate to admit this, but I need my life and my plans interrupted.

[28 : 19] To deepen my relationship with God. To draw me into the glories of his kingdom work. I've even hesitantly, I'll admit, started praying for that this week.

Maybe we all should. Oftentimes, it's the interruptions to our lives that allow us to be part of his greatest kingdom progress that are actually genuinely painful.

The circumstances truly disruptive. The price of obedience, significantly costly. You felt that.

And God is saying to us, you can trust me. Look at the baby in the manger. I'm with you, and I will never leave you.

I'm rescuing you so you can be with me forever. You can afford to trust me in this pain, too. In this sacrifice, too.

[29 : 20] In this interruption, too. This table says that same thing. This table reminds us that our biggest problem is inside us.

It's so big, in fact, that the Son of God had to come and give his life in order to deal with it. We couldn't handle it ourselves.

And it also reminds us, this table also reminds us that he has come, and he has been the solution from outside of us to deal with our biggest problem.

That he has met our greatest need in giving his life in our place. His blood. His body.

Given for us on the cross. So that we can come and talk about our sin, and confess our sin in a service like this, and rejoice.

[30 : 26] And actually sing, God, make you merry, gentlemen, and let nothing you dismay. No circumstance.

Nothing make you afraid. Why? Because Christ, our Savior, was born and lived and died, and so there's hope.

There's comfort. There's joy. There's really hard things.

I can't look at y'all while I talk about this. In a lot of your lives right now. And there's a really good Savior who loves you.

If the Father sent him for you, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give you all things? I think I can break it with one hand.

[31 : 40] The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread. And he broke it. Better than I did.

He gave it to his disciples and said, Take. Eat. This is my body. Broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

And after supper he took the cup and said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. To take care of your biggest problem.

Drink from it. All of you. If you know him. If he's come to pay the penalty for your sins. Come and rejoice in the joy of the gospel.

If you hear that and it sounds like a good idea, but you haven't actually trusted Jesus, don't come to these elements that are just a sign of who he is. Come and talk to us about Jesus.

[32 : 39] We want you to know Jesus. You can still come forward. We'll pray with you. Talk with you. But come to Jesus. And know life and fullness of forgiveness in him.

Let's pray and then we'll come to this table. Jesus, thank you. For a reminder for us this morning of how great your love is. That you would come all the way here to us.

To live for us. That we'd have your record. To die for us. That you'd take our sins. That we might be with you forever. Would you use these elements to write that truth on our hearts.

To remind us and strengthen our faith. That we'll believe it again. Or for the first time. In Jesus name. Amen. escapes.

He cares. He cares. Theyéfono and He cares. They perceber him not well. Sheng he cares. And he cares. Tschendete