

“JOSEPH’S ANGEL.”

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Scripture Texts: Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph’s discovery and dilemma, vss. 18-19.

We need to begin by understanding the Jewish practice of betrothal. It is almost nothing like our western idea of engagement.

An engagement is a social agreement between a man and a woman with no legal ramifications, it can be broken off at will by either party. None of that is true in a betrothal.

A betrothal is not the first step toward marriage, it is the first step of marriage. It is a legally binding covenant, they are pledged to be husband and wife. Notice in the text Joseph and Mary are referred to as husband and wife. They have made vows, paid the dowry, and all that remains is for them to have one more formal ritual, and then the husband takes her from her home to his. The reason for the interim period may be for her to come of age, or for him to secure a home or job.

One thing is clear, during this time there is no sexual intimacy between them and if either has sexual intimacy with someone else it is marital infidelity and falls under the judgment of God’s law for adultery. It is during this time Mary is found to be pregnant.

This helps us understand the magnitude of the betrayal and crisis this creates for Joseph.

We cannot even begin to enter into the mind of this good and righteous man, Joseph. He loves Mary, they are both godly, pure, God-fearing and they love each other.

Then Mary breaks the news that rocks his world. How could he have misunderstood her character so much, how could he have been so deceived? Everything in him refuses to believe this is possible, but it can’t be denied.

What a cauldron of emotions, disbelief, anger, rage, jealousy, self-doubt, grief, vengeance.

Then add to this Mary’s complete unwavering denial of any sin, her complete lack of repentance, guilt, shame, tears of remorse. And if that isn’t enough, Mary makes the most unbelievable, outrageous claim, God has made her pregnant with the Messiah, the son of David.

Vs. 19 Joseph being a righteous man.

We are told Joseph is a just man, meaning a righteous man, a devout man of faith and moral integrity. He fears God and is committed to doing the right thing, even at great personal cost.

On the one hand, he can come to no other conclusion than his wife is guilty of committing a great sin, a crime against God and the Law of God, it is truly a scandal. God's Word and God's honor are at stake. Her offense is first and foremost against God, that can't just be winked at, or swept under the rug. He can't be more lenient than God. In every way, morally, emotionally and legally, he couldn't live a lie, there had to be a divorce.

But he is torn by his love for Mary, and seeks a way to uphold righteousness, justice and truth, and be as restrained and merciful as he can be toward her. He fears God and seeks to do the God-honoring thing, and he loves Mary and wants to honor her even in her appearance of sin.

It speaks volumes about his character that he is not vengeful, spiteful, he doesn't fly into a rage and act rashly. He wants to be as righteous as God, and as merciful as God.

He could have exposed her to public disgrace, moral shame and severe penalties. He is not covering it up, but he is also not holding her under the extreme application of the law to avoid a shameful trial. By a quiet divorce Joseph means to spare Mary public humiliation.

There is a lesson here for all of us. When dealing with huge issues and issues of sin, we ought to be careful, guard our tongues, seek God's wisdom, not rush to judgment or condemnation or accusation.

We must allow we don't know all the facts or circumstances. Not everything is as it seems and to wait for clarity.

We can relate to this. When our children sin, we should discipline them but not in anger, or to shame them publicly. This is true with anyone in sin, take them aside, deal with it in a manner that maintains their dignity, the way you would want to be treated.

I want to say a word about sin in our families. We are all sinners and we all have lots of it. But now days we take sin too lightly, and this is especially true of sexual sin. They are serious, serious against God and serious against our own bodies and souls. When we cover them up we are doing even more damage. Too many husbands, wives, parents, have kept silent and the cost is too great.

If there is any sexual sin in your home, porn, abuse, fornication, confront it, get it in the open, turn the lights on, call it out of darkness. I know it is scary, Joseph faced those same fears, but he didn't go soft in the face of sin. If you need help talk to an elder or pastor, but get help.

Restore righteousness in your hearts and homes, do what is right, obey God's Word and deal with sin, love God more than you love yourself, honor God's Word in your heart and home.

Joseph's divine dream, vss. 20-23.

He is also a prudent man. He wisely decides to sleep on his decision.

"But as Joseph considered these things, God sent an angel."

Notice, God doesn't spare us from all difficult and painful decisions and He doesn't spare us from wrong decisions even if your hearts are seeking the right thing.

God allowed Joseph to go this far with his thoughts and actions based on ignorance of the true circumstance before bringing Joseph in on the divine providence at work in their lives. There is wisdom in God's method. God is in the midst of it all.

God waited until Joseph came to a firm conclusion to divorce his wife for her adultery, and then God sent His angel. This was a test of Joseph's character, like when God tested Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac.

Joseph only changed his mind because of the divine authority of God's holy angel. Joseph didn't do what he did because he wimped out or got soft, or gave in to Mary's emotional pleading or tears, he didn't cave in to family or friends. His decision to reverse course were motivated and guided not by faithlessness but by faith in God.

Joseph now understands what the precious treasure concealed in the womb of Mary is from God, and he is willing to protect it under the veil of marriage until the time of revelation.

God often lets us make our plans and journey down a certain path, making decisions, charting a course of action, and then He shows us another way, His will. In that moment we are faced with a serious decision. We must change our plans, we must surrender what we thought was the way.

How does the angel convince Joseph to go ahead with the marriage and become the adoptive father of Jesus? ***Three reasons.***

First, the angel calls him Joseph, son of David, reminding him he is a descendant of the line from which comes the Messiah and the promised salvation for the world and the restoration of the kingdom of God. This seeming scandal was actually the fulfillment of God's long-standing promises.

Second, the angel tells Joseph this is God's design, this is a divine conception, the Holy Spirit is the one who made Mary pregnant.

The angel assures Joseph, don't be afraid, things are not as they appear to him and he can take Mary and live with his wife with a clear conscience, there is no hidden sin, no lie being covered up. She is still a virgin, as innocent, pure and righteous as he hoped.

Third, the angel tells Joseph the child's name, ***Jesus***, which means the Lord saves. Joseph can move forward with this risky obedience because of who the baby is and what He is coming to do.

By telling Joseph to name the child this indicates he is to legally adopt the child as his own son.

Vs. 21, you shall call his name Jesus.

Jesus, as His name means, will save His people from their sin.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

But who of us thinks we need to be saved from anything? We men certainly don't, right? We're not lost, we never get lost. I have what I need, I don't need help. Anybody here lost, anybody here need help?

The great truth is we are all lost and desperately need to be saved. The entire human race is under the just judgment and condemnation of God and the proof of it is the entire human race in under the curse of death. All die because all sin. There are no exceptions.

This is a universal problem, it is the central reality of my life and yours. And the salvation we need must come from outside of ourselves and outside of our fallen, material world, it must come from heaven or there is no hope.

The Christmas story says Jesus came to save us from our sin. Do you know your heart well enough to believe it? Do you know your sin well enough to know you need to be saved from it?

Do you have the courage and faith to look at the sin of your heart and not deny it or excuse it or lie about it or compare it to anyone else and bring it to Jesus. Come to Jesus, bring your sin to Jesus.

Vs. 23, they shall call His name Immanuel.

What better name to announce in this universe there is a God and this God has come down to us and dwells with us and in us. Christ become God in the flesh and puts on the title, Immanuel.

This is an open universe, there is a one true living God, He is not absent or silent, but He has come to this earth in person, taking on our flesh and bones, and now by the presence of His Holy Spirit He is with us always, and will never leave us or forsake us.

The world is full of deniers, there are people who deny the holocaust, deny Stalin murdered millions of Ukrainians, deny man has been to the moon, who deny the earth is a globe, deny JFK was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald.

You can believe or deny all of those things with little or no eternal consequence. But to deny God is a whole other matter. He created you and in the end you will have to face Him, either as your Savior or your Judge.

Joseph's obedience, vss. 24-25.

Joseph's obedience is evidence both of his faith, and of the clarity of the vision. There was nothing left for him to question, nothing impeding his conscience.

He had just been thinking about divorcing his wife because of her ungodliness and uncleanness and now in an instant he is ready to take her as his wife.

Something happened, something huge happened, something supernatural, other worldly, something that had God written all over it.

What a picture of obedience. Joseph and Mary, caught complete off guard, their lives completely interrupted and change by God's intervention in choosing them to be part of His universal plan for the salvation of the world.

What faith to submit and surrender to the will of God, to be servants of God. To listen to God and obey. To set aside their plans, their impulses, and accept their role in the grand and miraculous divine drama.

This is written for our benefit, this is written for us to learn from, this is written for us to come to the very same conclusion. God is God, God is in His heaven and God has come to His earth, God has invaded our lives and still does every day.

May we live our lives always open on the Godward side, always open to God's perfect plans and purposes for us, always open by faith to whatever His will is.

In every trial and difficulty and distress may we turn to God in faith. In every joy and blessing, may we not give the credit to ourselves or our good luck or hard work, but give the glory and thanks to God. God is with us.

Implications and application.

Why did God do it this way? Have you ever wondered why God didn't just send His Son as a 30 year old man, to begin His ministry? Adam started out as a full-grown adult? Why didn't Jesus just beam down and walk up to John the Baptist there in the Jordan River and start that way?

Couldn't God have figured out how to send His Son to earth without the indignity of being inside a woman's womb for nine months?

Why does God do it this way?

First, this took place to fulfill what God said 700 years before through the prophet. Scripture is the Word of God and it will be fulfilled just as He said.

Second, His miraculous birth reveals His utter uniqueness among all mankind. There is no one like Him, in conception, birth and life.

Third, He being God humbled Himself to become man, and He went all the way to experience every aspect of our humanity. He knows what it is to be a baby, a toddler, a child, an adolescent, a young adult. He knows all our weaknesses, all our temptations. He reveals His full humanity by becoming a weak, dependent, helpless pre-born baby.

Fourth, God did something you find all through the Bible and in Christianity, God honors women and childbearing and childrearing. In the OT all the nations killed their children and forced their women to do so. It was the girls that were exposed in Rome. But God's people were the first to protect women and children. Christianity is the only religion that honored women and childbearing. This is why there is a huge disparity in China and India between number of men and women. In those countries where the Gospel has not penetrated, they kill their babies if they are girls.

God dignifies women and honors motherhood by putting His Son in the womb of a woman. The church of Jesus Christ honors women and children, motherhood and fruit of the womb.

Home and family are created by God and important to God. Jesus was cared for and raised by a father and a mother, surrounded by siblings.

May we honor the authority of God's Word by our obedience.

May we honor the example of Jesus by our humility and selfless sacrifice, killing our pride.

May we do no less than God has done and rise up and call blessed, Mary, and all the Mary's in our midst, our wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, as Jesus did and does.

This is Christianity, this is the Gospel, this is Christmas.