

Matthew 1:18-25 – A Family Like No Other

Introduction: Everyone has aspirations and dreams in life. And of all the things which we aspire to attain and the dreams we dream are never of sadness and heartache. Many single young people think fondly of one day getting married and having children. Everyone wants companionship, friendship, community, love, respect, faithfulness. That's what we all want, isn't it? But nearly all of us already bear the scars of living life in a fallen world. Many of us carry the weight of shattered dreams and aspirations which we have given up on as lost causes. Nearly all of us know what it means to be betrayed, used, abandoned, and scorned. Nearly all of us have had dreams of good, godly, and righteous things come apart or fall to the ground in sore disappointment. And if we have not yet experienced such things in our own lives, we likely know someone who has – and most likely, we ourselves will endure such things.

What a day it must have been for Joseph – a man who, it is very clear from the text, had a deep love and affection for his betrothed wife, Mary – to find out that this precious girl he had pledged his whole life to, and who had pledged her whole life to him, *was pregnant*. A day of shattered dreams it must have been for him, no doubt. He could already see the end: He would never be able to be with Mary, to grow old with her, to father children of his own with her – *He had lost her – forever*. And now, all he could think of and do was to try to find a way to salvage a bit of dignity for her from this wreckage.

Application: No one dreams of being broken-hearted, frightened, and alone. But God in His sovereign providence often brings us through such things for His own purposes. Those great purposes include answering our cries for deliverance as well as God's own desire to draw *near* to His precious children: **Psalm 34:17-18** [17] *The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.* [18] *The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.*

1. A Shattered Dream – V18-19
2. A Shattered Dream Restored in a Dream – v20-21
3. The Virgin with Child – v22-23
4. A New Royal Family – v24-25

1. A Shattered Dream – V18-19

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. [19] Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Point 1: Betrothal in the OT law was on a level entirely different from engagements as we know them today. We would never refer to an engaged couple as “husband” and “wife.” But look at v19: “Then Joseph, her husband...”

Teaching point: What was a “betrothal” in this culture:

- a. They were usually arranged by the two families – and often the two families were related. The marriage of 1st and 2nd cousins at this time was rather frequent – and even of uncles to nieces, as they could often be close in age due to large family sizes.
- b. Betrothals were nothing like a man getting on a knee and putting an engagement ring on the girl's finger and setting a wedding date. Betrothals were formal ceremonies conducted in the presence of witnesses, concluded by a benediction, perhaps over a cup of wine tasted in turn by the betrothed

couple.

- c. The marriage contract accompanying the betrothal specified what the bride's father was to pay, what part of that became the property of the husband, and what reverted to the wife in case of divorce or the death of her husband.
- d. The groom presented a gift to the bride – and in much of Palestine at this time, this ceremony was followed by a festive meal
- e. After this ceremony, the woman was from that moment forward called a “wife,” and would be known as a “widow” if the betrothed husband died.
- f. **Application:** After going through this, doesn't this remind you a lot of our modern day “weddings?” The only thing missing here is their immediate, subsequent co-habitation and consummation of the marriage.

Point 2: How did Joseph find out she was pregnant? No conversations between Mary and Joseph are recorded for us where she informed him – Mark and John contain no birth narratives, and Luke gives us no such information either.

Point 3: We know that Mary had visited her cousin Elizabeth for a total of 3 months just after Jesus had been conceived – Luke 1:56. Most women are showing at 3 months. In any case, Joseph becomes aware of this and is understandably deeply troubled by it and thinking about it constantly.

OT connection: What had happened here is addressed directly in the OT law:

Deuteronomy 22:23-24 [23] "If a young woman *who is* a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, [24] then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, ...

Application: God designed this entire event in such a way that it left Joseph in a state of turmoil, perplexity for a time before he is informed by an angel in a dream.

Application 2: We must learn to have a heightened vision of the size of God. ***There are no accidents with Him – There is only design.*** It is so easy for us to look at circumstances, as I have no doubt that Joseph himself did, and say, “it's all falling apart!” But for those who truly belong to Christ and know God as their adopted heavenly father, *nothing is ever falling apart.* When you look at your life, its direction, its events – never say, “It's all falling apart...” ***nothing is falling apart – God is building.***

2. A Shattered Dream Restored in a Dream – v20-21

[20] But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. [21] And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Point 1: v20 “While he thought about these things...”

Application: How many of you at some point been shocked at what someone you thought so well of was *really capable of*? We are the most hurt by those we are the closest to. The more our hearts are exposed to someone else, the more crushed they can become if betrayed.

Application 2: One great truth we learn about the Biblical notion of marriage is that Adam and Eve were “naked” yet unashamed. To marry someone is to become naked ***in every way***. It is easy for us to build walls which we hide behind – disallowing anyone to become close to us to avoid the heartache of

betrayal and sin... But to those who have the courage to love strongly, *you will suffer*. If you love people deeply, you will experience pain – pain of loss, betrayal, sin.

Application 3: But Joseph's desire to be wed to Mary was a good desire, a holy aspiration – and it had been crushed: ***Because Joseph knew full well how babies are made***. What else could he possibly think had happened? His betrothed wife *was pregnant!*

Application 4: Notice that God did not dispatch an angel to let Joseph know what the plan was *immediately*. God let *Mary* know before she conceived what was happening... but not Joseph. At least, not yet.

Question: Do you think God had a purpose in withholding this information from Joseph for a time? Doesn't God have a way of testing His children to strengthen their faith?

Illustration: Genesis 22:2 [2] Then He said, "Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

- Did God know what His purpose was in this? Indeed, the previous verse says, **Genesis 22:1**, "Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham..."

Application 5: Joseph's thoughts were no doubt across the board – probably the full range of emotions, but finally he goes to sleep – and it is not until then that God brings him relief. Often God waits until we are at the end of ourselves – at the end of our wits – in the pit of blackest darkness before He decides to bring us rays of light.

Application 6: And doesn't that make sense that God would do this? If we always knew why everything happened in our lives, we would not need to walk by faith trusting in the Lord, ***we would be walking by sight***. It is the very existence of uncertainties – the fact that so much of what we face confounds and disturbs us and makes us cry out, "Why" that increases our implicit trust in the goodness of our God.

2 Corinthians 5:7 [7] For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Point 2: v20 "behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife,'"

Teaching point: "do not be afraid..." What was Joseph afraid of? The term here for fear is the verb: *phobeomai* (where we get the word, phobia). It means in this specific context: "to be in an apprehensive state." Why was Joseph "apprehensive?" *no doubt because he thought Mary must have been with another man – how else could she be pregnant, except possibly rape – but if that had happened, wouldn't he know?* Joseph is considering his own honor at this point. He doesn't want to bring shame or reproach on his own head.

Application: How many men here would not be thinking the very same thing – and have fear of taking a pregnant woman to be your wife? All of us would.

Point 3: v20 "for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit..." Here God makes it known to Joseph that the child in Mary's womb is not of *another man* but is of the Holy Spirit. Mary is innocent! She is not an adulteress, she has not betrayed him.

Proverbs 12:25 "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad."

Point 4: v21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people

from their sins.” **[This will get its own sermon]** Suffice it to say for the time being that Jesus name itself carries within it the mission for which He came – **to save**. Not to make salvation possible. Not to try to save. Not to open the door of salvation to all – but 1) **to save** 2) **His people** 3) **from their sins**.

3. The Virgin with Child – v22-23

[22] So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: [23] "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

Point 1: Matthew gives us the specific purpose for each and every historical facet he has revealed to us in this section – v18-21 – to show that the conception and birth of Jesus was a fulfillment of prophecy from the Jewish Scriptures – specifically from Isaiah 7:14 here.

Point 2: v23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.” Which is translated, “God with us.”

Teaching point: This prophecy from Isaiah 7:14 is packed with meaning:

1. **A virgin shall be with child.** Many have pointed out that the Hebrew term used here is not the specific term for virgin (bethulah), it is the term *almah* – a young *unmarried* woman. In fact, everywhere *almah* is used in the OT it is referring to a young, unmarried, virgin.
 - Let’s say that Isaiah had in mind here just a regular young married woman who conceived a child – for the sake of argument. **How could this constitute a “sign?”**
 - It is the very fact that she is a young, unmarried, virgin that makes it a sign!
2. **They shall call His name “Immanuel” which means “God with us.”** This does not contradict the fact that His given name by Joseph through the angel who spoke to him in his dream was *Jesus*. For Him to be Savior (Jesus means “Yahweh is salvation”), He must be fully divine – hence, “God with us.”
 - **That Matthew would cite and use this passage that calls Jesus “God with us” is very significant – especially in light of the extensive genealogy that comes right before this. Jesus’ humanity has now been fully established. It makes much sense therefore that His full deity would come to center stage.**
 - Right here in the opening chapter of the New Testament – we have seen:
 - a. “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.”
AND
 - b. “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”
 - c. **Full humanity and full divinity united together in the person of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.**

4. A New Royal Family – v24-25

[24] Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, [25] and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

Point 1: The dream that seemed so hopelessly lost has been miraculously rescued. That things would turn out this way must have surely been the farthest thing from Joseph's troubled mind when he went to sleep the previous night.

Application: Isn't this so like God? To bring hope out of hopelessness? Remember this wonderful episode: **Genesis 18:10-14** [10] And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which *was* behind him.) [11] Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; *and* Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. [12] Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" [13] And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear *a child*, since I am old?' [14] Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Application 2: You see, we ourselves were once in a position *infinitely more hopeless than even this!* Paul said: **Ephesians 2:11-13** [11] Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- [12] that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Application 3: Not that we were barren, in financial distress, depressed, had a wayward child, had a broken marriage – but that we were *far from our God and under His just judgment!*

Hear this prophecy from Isaiah 61 – a portion of which this little baby we now read of in Mary's womb would one day as a full grown man stand up in a synagogue and read:

Isaiah 61:1-3 [1] "The Spirit of the Lord God *is* upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; [2] To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, [3] To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."