

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor
Christmas Characters Advent Series

WHEN GOD CHANGES OUR PLANS (JOSEPH)

Matthew 1:18-25

December 4, 2022

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I'll be speaking today from the book of Matthew, and we'll be looking at the story of Joseph. We'll cover how:

- Joseph's plans changed.
- God presented a new plan.
- Joseph responded to God's plan.

1-JOSEPH'S PLANS CHANGED

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-19

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

EXPLANATION: As we discussed last week, Mary and Joseph were legally and morally bound to one another. Notice that the Bible calls Joseph Mary's husband, not her fiancée. This engagement was not like modern engagements. It was as binding as marriage. Their families had worked out the details. Most likely, a *mohar* (the bridal price) had already been given by Joseph or his family to Mary's family. Mary's dowry, what she was taking into the marriage, had been determined. Her bags were packed. Wedding bells were about to ring. But as poet Robert Burns once wrote, "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry."

After Mary received the news of her impending pregnancy, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The Bible tells us that she stayed with Elizabeth for three months. By the time she returned to her little village of Nazareth, it would have been difficult to keep her pregnancy a secret much longer. We can only imagine how hard it was to break the news to her family and then to Joseph.

Verse 19 tells us that Joseph was faithful to the law. The original word dikaios (dik'-ah-yos) means just or righteous. He was a good man who obviously wanted a good wife. He did not want to be caught in a scandal, but he also did not want harm to come to Mary. According to the law, a woman caught in adultery could be stoned. A pregnancy outside of marriage would be considered proof enough, but Joseph did not want to subject Mary to that type of punishment. He would cancel the wedding, but he didn't want her physically harmed or humiliated. Life had taken a turn for the worst, but he would manage. So, he made a plan. He decided to release her from her obligation to him and send her away to have the baby and live in secret.

ILLUSTRATION: Joseph had a plan for his life. He planned to marry a good girl and have a family. When that plan did not work out, he came up with another plan. He is not unlike us or many other people in the Bible.

- In the Old Testament, we read about Saul. He had a plan to look for his father's donkeys, but the Lord had a plan for him to become the first king of Israel.
- Ruth had a plan to be a wife and mother, but the Lord had other plans.
- David had a plan to take his military brothers some lunch, but the Lord had a plan to make him a famous warrior and a king.
- Peter had a plan to catch fish, but God had a plan for him to become a fisher of men.
- Zacchaeus had a plan to watch Jesus on parade, but God had a plan for him to host a meal for the Savior.
- Paul had a plan to go to Rome, but God planned for him to experience a shipwreck on the way.

Proverbs 19:21 says, *“Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.”*

EXPLANATION: Do you wonder what Joseph may have been thinking about as his eyes closed and he slipped into sleep that evening? Was he still mourning the life he had just lost, the dreams that he believed would never come true? Had he resigned himself to the facts, believing that he had come up with the most suitable option to handle this sticky situation? Perhaps, he was praying that God would heal his broken heart and provide him with a new bride-to-be. Whatever was on his mind that late night so long ago, we know this: God was getting ready to throw another wrench in Joseph's plans. Joseph's life was about to be redirected again.

- Joseph's plans changed.

2-GOD PRESENTED A NEW PLAN

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:20-23

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

EXPLANATION: Like Mary, Joseph would have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies. He too would have been looking for a Savior. I am sure that in his wildest dreams, he never imagined that God would use him and his wife in this way. Although Mary had already told him about her angelic visitation, Joseph needed one of his own to confirm the news. The plans Joseph made for his life were no more. God gave Joseph a new set of directions.

ILLUSTRATION: It reminds me of a missionary kid named David. He grew up on the mission field in Africa. As a missionary, David's father did not have a lot of money. While he always had the basic necessities, David hated being poor. He vowed that when he grew up, he would become a businessman and earn a lot of money. Very early in life, David developed a physical condition that severely limited his mobility. Eventually, he wound up in the hospital unable to walk. He spent weeks and then months bed-bound. Finally, David submitted under the Lord's conviction. He vowed that if God would get him out of that bed, he would be

obedient to whatever God asked him to do. David did walk again. He went to college in the states, became a pastor, and eventually followed Christ's call to the African mission field, where he served for many years.

Like David, Joseph's life did not go as planned. Both men had an idea of what they thought they were supposed to do, of who they thought they were supposed to become. For both men, God had a different plan.

- Joseph's plans changed.
- God presented a new plan.

3-JOSEPH RESPONDED TO GOD'S PLAN

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:24-25

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

APPLICATION: Life seldom goes according to plan. Sometimes, things seem to be going along just fine when all of a sudden, here comes a curveball. Sometimes we recover well. We pick ourselves back up and take another swing, only to get knocked back down again. Joseph's plans were changed. God presented a new plan. His response serves as an example of how we should react when God revises our stories.

First, **Joseph recognized the truth.** Notice that Joseph did not argue. He had listened to Mary. So, he knew that the angel was giving the same message to him that she had been given. More importantly, he had heard the prophecies, and he was awaiting a Savior. He knew that what the angel said was God's message as given through prophets many years before. While he may not have understood the details, his role in the plan, or any of the implications for his life, Joseph recognized the Word of God. Knowing the truth helped him believe it.

Where do we find truth? How do we know truth? In John 14:6, "*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*" In John 17:17, Jesus, while praying to the Father on behalf of His followers, asked God to "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*"

If we want to effectively deal with the unplanned detours of our lives, we must be able to recognize the truth. To do that, we have to first know Jesus, and then, we must know God's Word. While we can certainly be introduced to Jesus and begin to learn about God's Word in moments of crisis, it is always more helpful to prepare in advance.

Having recognized the truth, here's the second thing Joseph did. **Joseph obeyed.** When Joseph woke up after having come face-to-face with God's direction, he did not rethink the situation, reconsider his plans, or redirect his mind. He did not bow down and begin to pray again, did not make a visit to the local rabbi for clarification, did not talk it out with his parents or Mary's family. He did what he was told; he followed through with the wedding. He became Mary's husband.

I've thought about this before. By this time, it is possible that Mary was showing a little bit. It is possible that people had figured out she was pregnant. If that were the case, this whole situation would have been radical for its time.

- Most people would have been very judgmental, but I believe there would have been a few who respected Joseph for marrying a pregnant woman.
- Mary probably felt compelled to tell her side of the story, that an angel appeared to her and that she was carrying the Christ child.
- Joseph probably felt compelled to tell his side of the story, that an angel appeared to him as well.

BUT WE HAVE NO RECORD that either one of them defended their story. My belief is that they were totally confident, and therefore they felt no need to defend their decisions. When a person has a divine interaction, there is no need to defend anything. For example, I realize there are people who like to defend the faith, but personally, I've never been one to argue with atheists. I'm confident in the world of Christ in my life, and therefore I feel like arguing with atheists would be a waste of time in the same way that Joseph and Mary trying to convince others that Mary was a virgin would have been a waste of time.

James 1:22 tells us that we should not just hear God's Word; we should also obey it. 2 John 1:6 reminds us that if we love God, we will do what He commands. If we claim to know and love the Lord and wish to receive His approval and blessings on

our lives, then we have to react in obedience—even when things do not work out the way we anticipated or wanted.

- Joseph’s plans changed.
- God presented a new plan.
- Joseph responded to God’s plan.

CONCLUSION: Sometimes, God takes us on a path we never would have chosen for ourselves. I am sure that Joseph never dreamed that he would have the privilege of raising the Savior. It was not the plan that he had for his life, and it was not necessarily an easy road to travel, but Joseph was blessed and honored as a result of his obedient heart.

When our lives take unexpected turns, what should we do? If we are wise, we will seek and know the truth of God’s Word, and then we will obey. It’s the beginning of the Christmas story. It was for Joseph, and it is for us as well.

With those of you listening to this message, can you say that your life has worked out according to all your plans? There may be a hand or two, but likely not. Joseph was just living out Proverbs 16:9 which he would have known: *A wise man plans his ways but God directs his path.* He had plans and goals. They changed. And the change was more than he could have ever imagined.

We don’t hear much about Joseph outside of Jesus’ young life, and while it would be nice to know more about him, the Lord didn’t tell us any more than we have right here in the scripture. It’s what we need to know.

INVITATION: When was the last time you talked to God about the plans you have for your life? Have you sought his will and his ways? Maybe things are not working out so well for you. Maybe you need to ask him what it is he wants you to do. I can guarantee you this. First and foremost, God wants you to be in a personal relationship with him. Second, God wants to use you and your life to bring glory to himself and to bless others.

The first step in knowing God’s will is knowing his son, Jesus. You may have always thought that religion is how that’s one, such as following rituals and respecting certain holidays, and saints, or whatever. While the early church fathers

instituted these things to enhance the life of the Christian, they quickly became distractions. Jesus is the only way to God. And you don't come to him through religion. You don't come to him by giving all your money to benevolent causes. No. You come to him by repenting of sin and trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This week I saw a meme that jumped out at me. The meme had two photos. One photo had a picture of confident-looking man with the words, "What some think a Christian is," and the man said, "I am a good person." The photo right beside it had a picture of a man with his hands on his face and it said: "What a Christian really is," and the man said, "God forgive me, a sinner." That about sums it up.

If you want to know this Jesus, we invited you to come forward while we pray with you for salvation through Christ.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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