

"When God Changes Your Plans"

Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction: Today I want to look at a message that will focus upon the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ. I had planned to look at the announcement to Joseph this week and the announcement to Mary next week and the birth of Jesus the following week. But Next week is the Sunday before Christmas so we will look at Jesus birth next week.

Now today I am stepping out of my comfort zone and I am preaching a message that I would consider to be "topical" and that is not my style. I would much rather TEACH than I would preach but this is what God placed upon my heart.

Have you ever had plans in the making and had everything planned out but before they completely unfolded something happened and nothing went the way it was supposed to?

We have all been there and there will come a time when we will find ourselves there again someday. Maybe you are there right now and as you walked in here today you have come with a huge cloud of disappointment hanging over your head.

Well, if that is the case then the message today will be one of great encouragement for you.

Let me start by saying that it is good to make plans and to even be detailed in making the plans. I am the type of person who sometimes flies by the seat of their pants and it has landed me in some stressful situations before.

Example: We went on vacation one year and we ended up sleeping in the Kmart parking lot because I did not think we needed reservation for one night. So I learned that planning and preparation is good.

I have also learned over the years that it is essential to include God in every one of the plans we make. I also learned that God can often change our plans and I need to learn to accept that when it happens.

Proverbs 16:9

⁹ A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Proverbs 19:21

²¹ *There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.*

Psalms 37:23

²³ *The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*

I love Psalm 37:23 because the verses tells us that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord but there is another thought here also. Not only are the **STEPS** of a good man ordered by the Lord but so are the STOPS of a good man ordered by the Lord. That means that sometimes God closes doors and we may never know why it has been closed. Let me show you an example of how God can order our STOPS.

Acts 16:5-7

⁵ *And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

⁶ *Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,*

⁷ *After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.*

Here in these verses we see how God had closed the door so that Paul could not go to preach the Word in Asia and Bithynia.

So the point is that sometimes God changes our plans but we must understand that He always has a purpose and this we will see today.

I. The Surprise

Notice Matthew 1:18

Now as Matthew begins writing in this section we need to keep in mind that his goal is to present Jesus Christ as the King of Israel. So he writes about the genealogy of Jesus Christ starting in Matthew 1:1 then here in this section he points to the virgin birth of Christ to show us He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy.

Here in verse 18 we see that Joseph and Mary were "espoused" at this time. The "espousal" was an engagement period and it was as binding as the marriage. We also see within this verse that Mary was "found" to be pregnant before her and Joseph had any

kind of sexual relations. Matthew also tells us that the Baby within her was the Child of the Holy Spirit.

So, let me pull some thoughts together here. Mary and Joseph were engaged so therefore we know that Joseph had plans. He had plans to take Mary as his wife and together they would raise a family. They had the hopes and dreams of a couple who are preparing to get married. But in this verse we are told that Mary was "found" to be with child. Now we must understand that when Joseph received the news of this however it reached him that he had no information about God's plan for her to be the mother of the Messiah.

So when he received the news it would have completely shocked him. This was not what he had planned. The first thought in the mind of Joseph was that Mary had been unfaithful. That is what any man in Joseph's situation would have believed. He had no idea that the Baby in her was the Messiah nor did he know that Mary had been chosen by God for this mission. So we can only imagine the pain which Joseph felt within his heart.

This was all the result of God changing the plans of Joseph so as to carry out His plan.

Application:

This often happens in our lives as I said in the beginning. But the question is, "How do we handle the situation when our plans get foiled?" That brings us to the next point. But as we look at this point I want you to keep in mind that Joseph does not know what God is doing at this time. He will not know until the angel of the Lord reveals it to him. I say this because we can read ahead and we know what was happening but Joseph could not read ahead. He could not connect all the dots at this time.

II. Joseph's Response

Notice Matthew 1:19a

The first thing we see about Joseph as we enter this verse is that he was a "just" man. That means he was "upright". In other words Joseph was a man who desired to live a life that was pleasing to God. It was his desire to walk in obedience to the Word of God.

Application:

Let me just use this thought for a moment to help you to see that even when we follow close to the Lord and we live by faith that there will be times when God will test our faith and there will be times when God will change our plans.

The reason is because God had a plan for the life of Joseph to accomplish one major point and it is the same for us but we must wait until the end of the message to see the plan.

Notice Matthew 1:19 again.

Here we see the proof of Joseph being a "just" man. To put Mary away was to give her a writing of a bill of divorcement. You see back then the engagement period was as binding as the marriage. So under the culture back then if the engagement was broken it would require a divorce. But the verse also tells us that Joseph did not want to make a public example out of her so he desired to put her away privately. Let me show you what the Law said in this situation.

Deuteronomy 22:23-24

²³ If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her;

²⁴ Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die: the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

Joseph did not choose to do this but instead he desired to put her away privately. This meant there would have been a private hearing before several witnesses and she would have been given a bill of divorcement.

Deuteronomy 24:1

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

Most likely the plan of Joseph was to have the hearing before several witnesses but he would not reveal the reason as for her "uncleanness". So she would have been privately divorced.

There is something I see within Joseph that needs to be pointed out. He did not desire to inflict pain upon her because of the news. He did not desire to retaliate. Why? Because Joseph loved her and this is exactly the way lover responds when it is hurt.

Let me show you the description of love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

⁵ *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;*

⁶ *Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

⁷ *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

1. **Love is long suffering.** - Love does not retaliate.
2. **Love is kind.** - Love shows kindness instead of seeking to get even.
3. **Love does not envy.** - Love does not resent the success or advantage of others.
4. **Love does not boast.** - Love does not brag.
5. **Love is not puffed up.** - Love does not consider itself to be superior to others.
6. **Love is not unseemly.** - Love is not rude.
7. **Love does not seek her own.** - Love seeks to meet the needs of others while setting its own needs and rights aside.
8. **Love is not easily provoked.** - Love is not easily aroused to anger but is patient when offended by others.
9. **Love thinketh no evil.** - This means that love "keeps no records".
10. **Love does not rejoice in iniquity.**
11. **Love rejoices in the Truth.**
12. **Love beareth all things.**
13. **Love believes all things.**
14. **Love hopes all things.**
15. **Love endures all things.**

This is the way believers are to love one another. This was the very love that Joseph had for Mary.

Notice Matthew 1:20a

I want you to see here that Joseph thought on these things. Joseph did not have a knee jerk reaction to the news. He does not lose his mind over the matter and make a choice based upon his feelings. But instead he takes the news that he has received and he thinks

upon it. It was news that turned his world upside down but as he formulated a plan in his mind he meditated upon the plan before he acted upon it.

Application:

This is a characteristic that should be found in all of us. We should learn to think things through before make any quick decisions.

What's the benefit?

Notice Matthew 1:20-21

Don't miss the word "WHILE"! While Joseph thought on these things God sent the angel of the Lord to reveal to Joseph the plan of God.

Application:

This is the advantage of moving slow when we are not sure of what to do. When God changes our plans and we do not know what to do we need to seek the counsel of God.

Psalm 25:8

⁹ *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*

Psalm 94:19

¹⁹ *In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

⁶ *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Proverbs 26:3-4

³ *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

⁴ *Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:*

When we are faced with a situation and we do not know what to do then we need to wait upon the Lord for direction.

III. The Lord's Purpose

Notice Matthew 1:22-23

Here was God's purpose for changing the plans of Joseph.

Application:

When God changes our plans there is always a purpose.

IV. Joseph's Submission

Notice Matthew 1:24-25

Conclusion:

Joseph did as the Lord instructed him but we need to understand that it would not have been easy. He and Mary would have been ridiculed by the society of their day because of Mary being pregnant.

Here is the closing point that I want you to grasp:

God's purpose in all of this was to bring the Son of God into the world.

Application:

When God changes our plans it is also for the purpose of manifesting Jesus Christ to a lost and a dying world. You see as believers He lives within us so God often changes our plans so that ours can see Christ.