

# Obedience

Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-15, 19-23

**Central Idea:** Because Joseph was obedient to the plan of God, Jesus was kept safe from evil plans to kill Him.

## Introduction

Many of us are comfortable going by the book. What I mean by this is that we all have a routine that obeys the rules and is a good decision that we make, that glorifies God in our lives, and carries out the moral rules He has given. But that does not always mean that this is the plan of God for us. Sometimes it's just our plan.

There was a time in my final semester at Bible College that I fought with God about my future. I was finishing up and about to gear up into looking for a church to become a pastor in, but God had other plans. God opened up the possibility of seminary study for me to receive a Masters degree. I was not open to it at all!

I spent about two weeks in intensive prayer, trying to explain to God that a Masters degree would put me deeper in debt and that it would tack on another three years away from the field of ministry in a local church. I fought and I fought. Was I evil to bring up these points? No. God teaches us in His word to be good stewards of our resources, and certainly the passion to pastor after four years of preparation was godly. But the timing did not agree with God's better plan. So I went to seminary after I graduated, getting a summer full of experience in associate pasturing and then finishing my Masters in two instead of three years. My plan is good. God's plan is better.

And this is the lesson that Joseph does not have to learn, because he knows that God's plans are better. For us to know what God's plan is, we have to seek Him for it and He has to reveal it before we can know and execute it in our lives. Joseph shows us how to be obedient to God when He gives clear direction.

## Text – Matthew 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, 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. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the

Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

I. We need revelation and direction from God (Matt 1:18-21).

A. Sometimes our own good plans are not God’s plans.

- i. Joseph had a plan that he formulated in his mind. He was trying to figure out the best way out of a pretty sticky situation. I would imagine, although Scripture does not show us, that Mary told Joseph about her run-in with the angel Gabriel.
- ii. We talked last week about how Mary’s life would have been impacted by being pregnant before marriage. But imagine what Joseph could expect if he did not deal with the situation.
- iii. Take a moment to put yourself in Joseph’s shoes. In Israel, Joseph and Mary had come to a point that was essentially marriage, being pledged to one another. It was so close to marriage that apparently, Joseph needed a certificate of divorce to end it with Mary.
- iv. Divorce in Israel was a very public matter. There was the public issuing of the certificate itself, surrounded by Joseph’s reason for not marrying Mary, as well as his blacklisting her from any other relationship.
- v. If a woman was found to somehow be unfaithful, the law actually had rules to keep her away from other men. Mary would suffer alone for the rest of her life if Joseph gave her a certificate publicly.
- vi. At the same time, there was no way to explain the situation that Mary presented to him. What was going through Joseph’s mind when this woman that he loved told him she was pregnant?
- vii. And then after that shell-shocker, she explained that the Holy Spirit did it. It takes some real trust in Mary to accept that as the reason she is pregnant. As most realize, there’s only one sure-fire way to get pregnant, and it isn’t with a spirit.
- viii. Joseph had to fight back all of the feelings that come with such a “betrayal.” There’s the surprise and shock that this has happened, the anger over the “someone else” and the desire for revenge or ill-will. These are just some of the things Joseph had to get through emotionally.
- ix. So he sets up a plan and puts it in place. It is a good plan. It is a plan that doesn’t destroy Mary’s reputation, because it won’t be public. It is a plan that honors God’s law by not marrying her because she was pregnant. It seems to be the best plan that Joseph can have.

- x. **Application:** It is important for us to know how to formulate a plan based on the revelation we already have. God's Word is chalk full of principles that help us to decide a way of attack in our problems that pleases the Lord. The first step in figuring out how to get direction is to seek God in His Word already written and revealed. Don't look for an angel or a miracle or the audible voice of God until you have found the best way according to what's already in His Word, because everything we do must be in God's Word to honor Him.
- B. God always sends us direction if we're sensitive to it.
- i. There are several large issues with divorce that are in effect in the time of Mary and Joseph that are not in effect today. I want to spend just a moment on these, because they will help us appreciate Joseph's choices before the angel arrives.
  - ii. Because a pledge of marriage was so binding in Israelite custom, Joseph would have already paid at least part of the bride price. A woman who was betrothed would have been considered legally married, although the marriage was not yet consummated.
  - iii. Because Mary would have been seen as an adulteress, if Joseph divorced her publicly, it would shame her, and the penalty under the law for adultery is stoning a person to death. So Mary would have been killed for adultery if Joseph went the public route.
  - iv. However, the law allowed for a private divorce, not even requiring a judge, but rather two witnesses and a legal document. In this ceremony, Mary would not be executed, and this is what Joseph wants to do.
  - v. It is clear that even though Joseph must have been hurt by what has happened, he still loves Mary and doesn't want her killed. So Joseph seeks to find this way out of the situation with everyone as in tact as possible.
  - vi. Let me take just a moment, as an aside, to deal with divorce in our culture. We live in a culture in which divorce is expensive, and very messy, but also very much on the table.
  - vii. A spouse always has it as a way of escape. In America, we want you to be happy, sometimes more than we want you to be holy or obedient to God and His Word.
  - viii. I want to say this clear as day for everyone to understand. The Bible speaks of divorce never in a flattering way. In fact, Jesus tells the Israelites it is because of their wicked hearts that Moses even allowed for divorce at all. But that is the key in Scripture. There is at least one and no more than about three allowances for divorce, but it is never a command to divorce.

- ix. The Bible does not condone divorce, even in the most dire of situations. I realize that there are some brutal situations in marriages in our nation. I realize that divorce can be seen in a positive light in such situations.
- x. But I think we are too candid about divorce in America. We make it too easy to slip away into the night. I bet if people still got stoned for adultery divorce wouldn't be a card so many pulled.
- xi. Part of our biblical/Christian worldview is that there is no situation so lost or dark that God cannot redeem and restore it. Even in the allowances of Scripture, the better way is still not divorce. In matters of infidelity, the higher road is not divorce, but rather forgiveness and love. It is always my counsel that divorce should never be an option except in the most extreme of situations, and you should consult God, His Word, and spiritual counsel before you would go that route.
- xii. There is too much brokenness in our world, and divorce does not mend it. Divorce makes it worse. God can redeem any situation. But we must be obedient and open to His ways and purposes.
- xiii. So Joseph is between a rock and a hard place as he attempts to deal with this situation. But then God shows up and gives an answer through an angel while he is sleeping.
- xiv. Contrary to a cursory reading of the Bible, angelic appearances are extremely rare in day-to-day life. To have an angel appear, even in a dream, is proof that God is personally interacting in your life.
- xv. Joseph takes very seriously an angel coming to him, and he listens carefully to what God is saying through the angel's message. He heeds the angel's words because they come from God in an extraordinary way.
- xvi. There are times when people will reference some special spiritual, albeit non-verifiable reason, for what they are about to do, or say that it is God's will. There are valid and vivid times in which God speaks in such a profound and clear way that we can't miss it. Sometimes that choice God commands goes against traditions and seemingly good reasons, and cultural norms and societal moorings. But one thing is clear: it will never go against Scriptural standards.

### **Text – Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23**

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."<sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt<sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” <sup>21</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

II. We need to be obedient to God’s plans (Matt 1:22-25; 2:13-15, 19-23).

A. Obedience requires our cooperation and energy.

- i. Divorce was allowed, but never preferred by God. If Joseph would have divorced Mary quietly, she would not have been killed, but her life would be miserable.
- ii. She would have no one to take care of her. She would have no financial support, no child support, no social support, no cultural support, and without a husband, she would be on her own for every resource.
- iii. But this would still be better than death. Life would be extremely difficult, but it would be life. This was seemingly the only option for Joseph to choose, though he loves Mary.
- iv. Right in that moment of knowing that his plan follows the biblical standards for a woman who is in Mary’s position, Joseph receives a visit from an angel to show him the best way.
- v. The angel is clear that these are unusual circumstances, which God has ordained and set in motion, and that Joseph needs to get on board with what God is doing.
- vi. You see, just like God picked Mary because of her character, God picked Joseph because of his character. Joseph, as we will see, is an honorable man who serves with excellence. Joseph is a man of God who protects, preserves and teaches his family.
- vii. He’s a man’s man, with a carpentry job working hard, and yet God’s man when it comes to family life. He is strong in the ways of God and teaches Jesus how to be a godly man.
- viii. We lack Joseph’s in our homes today, and we suffer violence after violence for it. God picked Joseph to be a part of this story because He saw Joseph’s obedient heart, his will to protect and preserve his family, and his strength to provide for their needs.
- ix. **Application:** Any guy can have a kid. In our culture, most have figured out how. But most men aren’t man enough to become a father, moreso on Joseph’s part to father a child you know is from God and not you. Many are not ready to be fathers, so they should not bring children into the

world. But think about this for a moment, gentlemen especially. God trusted Joseph enough to let him be the earthly father of His Only-Begotten Son! Can God say that about you? What needs to change for you to be an even better father?

- B. Obedience promises our security in God's master plan.
- i. In the next section of the story, we find out that Herod, who is jealous of Jesus' Kingship, wants to kill all the boys in his realm that are about Jesus' age.
  - ii. But Joseph is attentive to God's plan and the messages of his servants, the angels. Through their guidance, and his complete obedience, despite the dangers of parenting baby Jesus, Joseph and Mary remain safe.
  - iii. Our obedience to God could mean life or death, physically or spiritually. God has to be able to trust us to obey Him as well. Through our obedience, God can do great things, like keep His Son alive when an infant cannot defend itself.
  - iv. God wants to do great things in our own lives, but many times we have learned how to not trust and obey Him. But the benefits of obedience far outweigh the dangers of it.
  - v. We can be secure through our obedience and see God's plan become a reality in our lives like Joseph did, or we can choose to live in fear and distrust, and grow farther and farther from what God has for us.
  - vi. Joseph was wholly yielded to God's plan and obeyed at every turn, and his obedience saved the lives of his wife and child. Joseph went above and beyond the standard in his obedience.
  - vii. He waited to consummate his marriage with Mary until after Jesus was born. He named the baby Jesus instead of after his own name or family names. He not only didn't divorce Mary, but kept her as his wife.
  - viii. **Application:** What is God asking of you today? What are you keeping yourself from following in His Word or in His commands to you? As we seek to obey God, we will stumble or fear or doubt from time to time, but we must place our trust in Christ, and our obedience must be carried out for God to do His good plan and good works in us. Obeying God has extreme rewards, but terrible consequences when we don't obey.

## Conclusion

Joseph is a stout and impressive witness to what can happen when you are obedient to God. His mention in the Gospels is quite short. We see him in the birth of Jesus, and also as part of Jesus' life at the age of 12, but after that, no mention is made of Joseph in his ministry in his 30s. Think about the kind of character of a man who is given such great responsibility to be the earthly father of the Son of God, and yet, though his time is short, he teaches us all so much

about obedience. May we all be a vibrant testimony to godly character even in the shortest amount of time and space! May we learn to trust God implicitly, and to obey His every word!

### **Action Points**

- What is keeping you from obeying God in this situation in your life? What road blocks have you put up? Are they logical? Are they biblical? Has God responded to them?
- Despite the roadblocks we put up, God wants us to trust Him and obey His every word. Even when our obedience might come at our own personal expense or social expense, our trust in Him is marked by our willingness to obey.
- What great thing God can do in your life is being hindered by your inability to completely obey God? How long does God have to wait, and what more does He have to do, before you will trust Him and obey?