

# Change of Plans

## Matthew 1:18-25

### Intro

*Maybe you have heard that following saying...*

***“If you want to make God laugh, make plans.”***

Now, this saying may seem a bit cynical but there is a great deal of truth to it...

- The reality is that we make plans but usually those plans do not turn out the way we thought they would...

For example, our workplace may be a place that be never expected to work...

- We may be living in a city that we never expected to move to...

We may have good friends that we never planned on meeting — our paths crossed and here we are...

- And if we look back over the story of our lives, it seems certain that we will find countless ways in which our lives diverged from the plans that we had made...

*And as we read the scriptures, we see that this is not unusual...*

In our lives, we are plan to do life in a certain way but the Lord has His own way of doing things — and at least some of His ways are *inscrutable* — they are impossible to understand...

**Ecclesiastes 11:5 (NKJV)**

**As you do not know what is the way of the wind,  
Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child,  
So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.**

**Isaiah 55:8-9 (NKJV)**

**8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.**

**9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”**

*And because this is true — because we cannot fully understand the works of God — because God’s thoughts and ways are so far above ours...*

***God has to intervene in our lives so that He might accomplish His greater plans — He cannot simply leave us to our own plans...***

*In fact, we read in...*

**Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV)**

**There is a way that seems right to a man,  
But its end is the way of death.**

*The way of death is not what the Lord wants for us...*

So, as disciples we should take heart when God initiates a **change of plans** because we know that **all** of His plans are working for our ultimate good...

*And it is just this sort of change of plans that we find in **Matthew 1:18-25**...*

In this passage, we see that Joseph and Mary have **their plans** but the Lord steps in and presents a **change of plans**...

*So, with this as our introduction, would you please follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying this morning...*

### **Matthew 1:18-25 (NKJV)**

**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.**

**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."**

**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."**

**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.**

*Now that we know where we are going, let's move into vs...*

### **18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows:**

Here Matthew lets us know that he is going to give us the narrative of the events leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ...

- And at this point we should remind ourselves of Matthew's primary goal of presenting Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah — as the Christ...

I believe that Matthew's goal is that we would recognize the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and as a result we would worship and serve the Lord Jesus as His disciples...

- [expand — this knowledge of Jesus as the promised Messiah should inevitably lead to worship & service — it is not knowledge for knowledge's sake (like knowing the capital of Idaho)]...

***APPLICATION — You and I should be growing in the knowledge of the Lord for the express purpose of worshipping the Lord more fully...***

- [ex. employee studying work manuals so that he might do his job better...]

*Continuing on in vs 18 we read...*

**After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,**

Here we see ***the plan*** of Mary and Joseph — they are betrothed and ***their plan*** is to get married...

- And from what we can tell, this is a ***good plan***...

**Proverbs 18:22 (NKJV)**

**He who finds a wife finds a good thing,  
And obtains favor from the LORD.**

So, Mary and Joseph were betrothed to be married...

- And it is important to understand that betrothal was much weightier than our modern engagement...

Betrothal was a binding agreement that could only be broken by death or divorce...

- Now, at this point we must remind ourselves that Mary and Joseph were ***real people*** who lived about 2000 years ago...

*They were normal people — people like you and me...*

And they had a ***simple plan*** — they wanted to get married — and they probably wanted to raise a family and just live life together...

*But the Lord had **other plans** — we see this as we move on in vs 18...*

**After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.**

*Now, there is a lot to unpack here...*

- [expand — there was to be no sexual relationship during the betrothal period — it was not until the actual marriage took place that the marriage would be consummated...]

So, Matthew is making it clear that Joseph and Mary **did not** have a sexual relationship at this time...

***However, Mary is pregnant — and this is definitely not according to plan...***

Now, Matthew tells us that Mary was found with **child of the Holy Spirit** — in other words, this pregnancy had a **supernatural origin, not a sexual origin...**

*With this in mind, we move into vs 19 and get Joseph's perspective on this extremely difficult situation...*

### **19 Then Joseph her husband,**

Please notice that even though Mary and Joseph had not had their wedding ceremony, Joseph was considered **her husband** and Mary was considered his wife...

*This was a big deal — the betrothal of Mary and Joseph was legally binding...*

So Joseph is in a tough spot — his betrothed is pregnant — and it is not his baby...

- [expand — let this sink in for a minute — try to imagine what Joseph felt — pretend you don't know the end of the story...]

And this is where we may be right now — in the middle of a ***change of plans*** — and we can't see how God is going to work this thing out...

- But even though you and I can't see the good that God is going to bring through this ***change of plans*** — God sees it — so trust Him — trust that it is His job to work it out...

*Continuing on in vs 19 we read...*

**Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.**

*Let's consider what we learn about Joseph from this sentence...*

***First of all, we are told that he is a just man...***

**just** — *upright, righteous, virtuous...*

In other words, Joseph was a man who did the right thing...

And we understand that Joseph was not perfect but Joseph walked with God — Joseph wanted to do the things that God wanted him to do...

***LESSON — Walking with God and doing the things that God wants you to do DOES NOT keep you from difficult situations...***

In fact, in some ways it will make your life much more challenging...

- [ex. leaving Aggie football games in college — going back through the crowd would be very difficult...]

As we think about this subject, the Lord Jesus is the most obvious example of the fact that a righteous life is a life of challenges and opposition...[expand]

- [expand — believers who lived in OT times, believers who lived in NT times and believers who have lived since NT times — the story is always the same — a life of obedience will be challenging...]

Now, as we continue in vs 19 we see that since Joseph is a just man, he doesn't want to expose Mary to public shame — he doesn't want to divorce her publicly...

- We must remember — as far as Joseph knows, Mary — his betrothed — has cheated on him...

But Joseph is not vindictive — he simply wants to get out of the situation...

- Joseph wanted to put her away secretly — he wanted to privately give her a certificate of divorce (only two witnesses were needed)...

*And Joseph was right about not wanting to publicly shame Mary...*

**Proverbs 17:9 (NKJV)**

**He who covers a transgression seeks love,  
But he who repeats a matter separates friends.**

*With that said, I would argue that Joseph's response is still lacking because ultimately Joseph is doing what we normally do when things get difficult...*

***Joseph wants to remove himself from the situation...***

And this is the normal response to a difficult situation — *for both believers and unbelievers* — to simply withdraw from the situation...

- Sometimes, withdrawal from the situation is the right thing to do — there are certain life-threatening or otherwise harmful situations that we should withdraw from...

***With that said, in our fallenness we have a tendency to leave situations too easily — we tend to abandon ship at the first sign of trouble...***

And we must understand that trouble is coming — because **God is going to bring a change of plans** — God is going to rock the boat — God is going challenge you and He is going to challenge me...

- And if our primary goal is *self-preservation* then we will make a habit of leaving — ***when the going gets tough we will leave...***

It seems clear to me that we leave difficult situations too easily — ***that I leave difficult situations too easily...***

- [expand — be willing to seek the counsel of 2 or 3 mature believers before you choose to leave a situation...]

*Now, as we move into vs 20, we see that Joseph did not rush into making a decision on these difficult matters...*

## **20 But while he thought about these things,**

**thought** — *to process information by thinking about it carefully, reflect (on), consider...*

To his credit, Joseph did not simply divorce Mary as quickly as possible — he thought carefully about what he should do...

- And we have already seen that he was a **just man** — Joseph was someone who was walking with God and who wanted to do what God wanted Him to do...

But now things were getting a little crazy — there had been a massive ***change of plans*** — and Joseph was unsure of what to do next...

*And this is the sort of place that we are going to find ourselves in over and over again in this life...*

***We want to do what the Lord wants us to do — but we are not sure what the Lord wants us to do...***

*When we find ourselves in this position, I believe we should obey the instruction of...*

**Proverbs 3:5-8 (NKJV) [please turn there]**

**5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;**

**6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.**

**7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.**

**8 It will be health to your flesh,  
And strength to your bones.**

This passage is incredibly helpful and I believe that we will not go wrong if we simply obey these principles every day...[expand]

- In fact, I would encourage you to memorize this passage and meditate on it often...[expand]

Now, whether or not Joseph had this passage in mind we don't know — but we do know that this passage was fulfilled in Joseph's life...

- ***Because as Joseph considered what to do in obedience to the Lord, the Lord directed Joseph's path...***

*We see this as we turn back Matthew 1 and continue on in vs 20...*

**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.**

The Lord honors Joseph by sending an angel to him in a dream...

- And please notice that the angel addresses Joseph *by name* — and further refers to Joseph as **son of David**...

This reminds Joseph that ***his story is bigger than himself*** — Joseph is part of a larger story — Joseph is a part of the work that God is doing through the line of David...[expand]

***REMINDER — As a believer you are part of a larger story — your life is not simply about you — it is primarily about the Lord and what He is doing in and through you as He writes His larger story...***

This is a wonderful truth that gives us perspective and encourages us to keep walking with the Lord, knowing that He is going to weave that larger story together for the good of all who love Him...

*Continuing on in vs 20, the angel says...*

**"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.**

*Here the angel gives **direction** and **explanation**...*

***The direction*** is straightforward — take Mary as your wife, don't be afraid, keep on with your plan to marry her...

***The explanation*** — Mary has not cheated on you — her conception is supernatural — the Holy Spirit has conceived this new life in her womb...

***ENCOURAGEMENT — As disciples we should seek both direction and explanation...[expand]***

- [ex. Saul on the road to Damascus — “Who are you, Lord?” (explanation) — “What do you want me to do?” (direction)...]

[expand — the Bible is a book of explanation and direction...]

*The angel gives further explanation in vs...*

**21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”**

The angel explains that the child of Mary will be a boy — a **Son** — and His name is to be **Jesus**...

- [expand — Jesus — Greek translation of Joshua — “Yahweh is Salvation”...]

***REMINDER — Jesus came to save people from their sins — this is the greatest need of mankind — there is nothing more important than this issue...***

- [ex. you are in a car accident and you have a severe head wound and a broken arm — the broken arm needs to be dealt with — but not before the head wound — the head wound takes priority...]

Likewise, there are many things that *can* and *should* be dealt with **after** a person is saved — but salvation must come first — it is the priority...

*Moving on to vs 22-23...*

**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."**

This is very interesting — the apparent ***change of plans*** for Mary and Joseph was simply a ***change of their plans***...

- It was ***not a change of God's plans*** — it was ***always God's plan*** to bring the Messiah into the world through a virgin — as the Prophet Isaiah had foretold...[expand]

*This reminds me of what James said in...*

**Acts 15:18 (NKJV)**

**"Known to God from eternity are all His works."**

This truth should give us confidence whenever we experience a difficult ***change of plans***...

Though we have to adjust to a ***change of plans***, ***God has always known what He was going to do*** — God is never taken off-guard...[expand]

- We also see here in vs 23 that this Son of Mary will have a second name besides the name Jesus — He will also be called **Immanuel** which means ***“God with us”***...

[expand — Jesus — Truly God and Truly Man — Second Person of the Trinity took on the fullness of humanity, except for sin...]

**John 1:14 (NKJV)**

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us...**

***This helps us understand why God created us — He created us to be with Him...***

- [expand — God walking with Adam and Eve in the garden / God with the Israelites in the wilderness / Jesus choosing disciples to be with Him / New Jerusalem — God will be with them and be their God...]

A life lived apart from God cannot be a good life — it is a life that must end in ruin...

- On the other hand, a life lived with God — no matter the change of plans — will be a life that counts — it will be good life — both for now and for eternity...

*Let's move into our final two verses...*

**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.**

Please do not miss the beautiful simplicity of these verses and what they communicate...

- Joseph accepted God's ***change of plans*** and Joseph obeyed God's direction...

Joseph chose to take Mary as his wife and he chose to name Mary's Son, **Jesus**...

- We also learn from vs 25 that after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had a normal marital relationship and we know from the gospels that they had children together...

*We will stop here for today and Lord-willing, pick up in Matthew 2 next week...*

## **Conclusion**

And as we close I will share quotes from my two favorite authors — and both of these quotes relate to **our resistance to God changing our plans**...

*The first quote is from the book *The Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard...*

***“Those are surely right who have recognized in pride the root of all disobedience. We think we are ‘big enough’ to take our lives into our own hands and disobey, instead of [humbling ourselves] under the mighty hand of God’ (1 Peter 5:6). And this will certainly be driven by the thought that if we do not take things into our own hands, we will not get what we want—another blow to our pride. Our attitude should be, to the contrary, that there is no particular reason why I should get what I want, because I am not in charge of the universe.”***

- [expand — God is in charge of the universe — I should adjust my plans to fit His plans...]

*The second quote is from *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis...*

***“...if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”***

The Lord wants to change our plans because He is tired of us making mud pies in a slum — He is inviting us into ***true life*** — a life of ever-increasing meaning and purpose — an abundant life lived in intimacy with Him — and we can have that sort of life if we will submit to ***His change of plans...***

*Let's pray...*