

# Obedience and Blessing

## Mathew 1:18-25

December 15, 2019  
Garth Myers

What is the result of obedience? By the title that you see in the bulletin, you can tell where I would like to take the conversation this morning. "Obedience & Blessing". Who decides what the blessing is? Who decides when the blessing is given?

If you turn on Christian television, it seems that "blessing" is guaranteed. If you "sow a seed of faith" by giving to a certain ministry, God will bless you. Really? Will He do that? If you pray a certain prayer or buy a certain trinket to support a ministry, God will bless you. Can someone show me that in the Bible? If we obey God, is "blessing" immediate?

This morning, I want to look at the Christmas story from a different perspective. Yes. We celebrate the angels singing, the wise men giving, and the shepherds rejoicing. The atmosphere is warm and cheery. Is everything in the Christmas story really that upbeat? Or, is the Christmas story about people who faced difficult choices that resulted in difficult circumstances?

Let's look at the Christmas story and see the consequences for those who obeyed the Lord.

### 1. CRISIS

**Matthew 1:18—Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she (Mary) was found to be with child.**

"Mary was betrothed to Joseph and she was with child".

We hear the same words today and it means almost nothing. The world is so different now. In Mary's time, this was a tragedy. We'll talk about that in just a bit. According to statistics from...

[nmhealth.org](http://nmhealth.org),

"More than half (51.1%) of 2016 New Mexico births were to single mothers, compared to 40.3% nationally in 2015."

Wow. In 2016, more than half the babies born in New Mexico were not born in a traditional family setting.

In Mary's day this was a crisis because Mary lived under the Law. I think that one of the most profound verses in the Bible is John 1:17

**John 1:17—For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.**

When you live under law, everything is black and white. Everything is right or wrong. There is no empathy. There is no compassion nor understanding. You know the laws. You better obey them. There are rules. You better follow them. There are social expectations. You better live up to them.

The Pharisees help us see a danger of living under law. When you live under law, everything can become an external show. God knows what is on the inside. God knows your heart. God cares about the reality of your inner being. But under law, the only thing that matters is what can be seen on the outside. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 23:27...

**Matthew 23:27—Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.**

According to Luke, once Mary had submitted to the Lord’s will – once she had said “yes” to becoming the mother of the Messiah – she went to stay with Elizabeth for 3 months (Luke 1:56). We don’t know when the baby Jesus was conceived. We don’t know if the pregnancy began at Mary’s home or at the home of Zacharias & Elizabeth. We do know that when Mary returned to Nazareth, she was pregnant.

".... and Mary was found to be with child".

**A. Mary faced danger.**

Mary faced danger when she returned to Nazareth. This is what the Law says...

**Deuteronomy 22:23—If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor’s wife. Thus, you shall purge the evil from among you.**

She could have been stoned.

**B. Mary faced ridicule.**

Only 3 people knew the truth.... Mary, Elizabeth and Zacharias. Joseph would find out very soon. Imagine Mary’s predicament when the only explanation that she could offer was, "God did it".

Imagine this situation: You are out for the evening. You come home. A man stands before your house with a gasoline can in one hand and a Bic lighter in the other. Your house is ablaze. The firemen arrive. The police arrive. When questioned, the man responds, "God did it". All the evidence points to a different conclusion.

The same would be true for Mary. Who would believe "God did it"? God had never become a man. God had never taken on human flesh. Even today, who can fully comprehend the Incarnation? Who can explain the Virgin birth?

**C. Mary faced rejection.**

Do you remember the woman by the well in John 4? Why was she drawing water at noon?

**John 4:5-7—So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob’s well was there. So, Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.”**

I am told that the women of the town would have gone to the well in the morning when the day was still cool. Why would one woman go to the well...alone...at noon...in the heat of the day?

**John 4:16-18—He said to her, “Go, call your husband and come here.” The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.”**

The woman of Samaria was an outcast. Mary probably faced the same treatment. She lived under the Law. Not only would she be marginalized by the women in town, she faced rejection from Joseph.

#### **D. Mary faced divorce.**

What was Joseph's response.

#### **Matthew 1:19—...(he) desired to put her away.**

In those days, "betrothal" was very serious. Legally, they were already married. Since we are looking at a situation which was affected by Jewish culture, I made an effort to find a Jewish point of view.

[MyJewishLearning.Com](http://MyJewishLearning.Com)

Until late in the Middle Ages, marriage consisted of two ceremonies that were marked by celebrations at two separate times, with an interval between. First came the betrothal [erusin]; and later, the wedding [nissuin]. At the betrothal the woman was legally married, although she still remained in her father's house. She could not belong to another man unless she was divorced from her betrothed. The wedding meant only that the betrothed woman, accompanied by a colorful procession, was brought from her father's house to the house of her groom, and the legal tie with him was consummated. In those days the betrothal was the more important of these two events and maintained its importance as long as marriage was actually based upon a purchase.

Joseph was going to divorce her. I can't speak to what is in the mind of a young lady who is engaged to be married. I'm sure there are dreams and expectations. Whatever you women dream about, for Mary that is now gone. Joseph was walking away. Mary now finds herself young, pregnant, and alone.

Mary was obedient. In Luke 1:38 Mary responded to the angel....

#### **Luke 1:38—Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.**

Mary faced danger, ridicule, rejection and divorce. At this point, I want the television preacher who poses blessing, that I am having a hard time finding the blessing.

Fortunately, for Mary...

## **2. Joseph was a man of CHARACTER**

Now, as I share this with you, there are lessons for 2 groups....

- 1. Men: He is an example of the way men of faith should live**
- 2. Ladies: Here is a model for any woman seeking to marry a man**

You have probably never heard anyone discuss marriage while going through a Christmas passage. But...we read the passage. We are going through the passage. I simply want to share what I see in the passage. I would be negligent if I fail to present what is in the passage.

I am also aware that any time I give a presentation at CBC, I am talking to more than the group that is present this morning. David posts the notes. Anyone can read them on-line. David makes the audio available to anyone who wants to listen. So – in these verses – there is a good message and a challenge for all men. There is good advice for women.

Not all the Jews who lived in the first century were shackled by the Law. Yes - they lived under the Law of Moses. But some rose above the restrictions of the Law and lived on a different level. They did not need to live behind a mask because faith was about pleasing God. Their hearts were in tune with God. Their faith was their strength. Their distinctive lifestyle was evidence of an inner relationship with "the living God". Joseph didn't talk the talk. Joseph walked the walk.

Faith allows us to escape the trap of living to satisfy others. When we live by faith, we live to please the Lord. I find it interesting that the man who would be known as the “earthly father” of Jesus was an example of grace.

Remember...

**John 1:17—For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.**

**A. Joseph was righteous.**

**Matthew 1:19—And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man**

"Righteous" - "(of a person or conduct) morally right or justifiable; virtuous.

"Rightly" - (in accordance with justice or what is morally right.)

According to the dictionary, righteous means, “(of a person or conduct) morally right or justifiable; virtuous.”

A righteous person is one who lives rightly - (in accordance with justice or what is morally right.)

For the men, I remind you of Paul's admonition to a young pastor in 2 Timothy 2:22...

**2 Timothy 2:22—Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.**

The word for "pursue" in the Greek is dioko (to put to flight, pursue). Timothy was supposed to "dioko" (pursue) righteousness.

We see the intensity of this word if we go to Acts 22. In Acts 22, Paul is defending himself to a Jewish mob. He uses the same word when he declares....

**Acts 22:4—I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons**

Paul said, I "dioko'd" the Way. Paul's words were directed to Timothy. But they serve as an admonishing to all Christian men. If pastors are to held to the highest standards, why wouldn't all men want to live to the same standard? Men are to pursue righteousness the same way that Paul pursued the early Church.

For the ladies...

Look for a man who is righteous. He may not be named the sexiest man of the year in 2019. But if he truly loves God, he will love you. Look for a man who loves God with all his heart soul, mind and strength.

Let's continue to read verse 19...

**Matthew 1:19—and being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her...**

**B. Joseph was compassionate.**

**Matthew 1:19—He did not want “to disgrace her”.**

Keep in mind, this is Joseph before God spoke to him in a dream. This is Joseph before he knew the story from God's perspective. Was he hurt? Probably. Was he disappointed? For sure. But his feelings and emotions did not get the best of him. While dealing with a very difficult situation, he was still tender. He responded to a difficult situation with compassion.

When you live according to law, the last thing you see is compassion. Everything is black and white. Everything is right or wrong. Life is reduced to laws—rules—and expectations. Joseph is an example for men to follow. Joseph is the kind of guy who would make a good husband.

### **C. Joseph was forgiving.**

“Magnanimous”—“generous in forgiving an insult or injury—free from petty resentment or vindictiveness”.

I came up with another descriptive word. Joseph was “magnanimous”. No - You won't find "magnanimous" in the Bible. I chose the word because it means—“generous in forgiving an insult or injury—free from petty resentment or vindictiveness”. Things get nasty when people couples break up. I am so impressed with Joseph's character. Jesus hadn't even come yet. The Church was still way off in the future. But here was a man living out Ephesians 4:32...

**Ephesians 4:32—Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**

Do you find this interesting? I do. I find it very interesting that the man that God chose to be the “earthly father” of Jesus possessed some of the same qualities that would mark the life of Jesus—righteousness, compassion, forgiveness.

I can't cover the whole Christmas story. But I do want you to see one more thing.

**Matthew 1:20-24—But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife.**

God speaks to Joseph in a dream. He rises from his sleep and marries Mary. Now we're going to get the blessing, right?

Let's see...

Eventually, the wise men arrive. We're no longer at the manger scene. We know that because Matthew 2:11 tells us that the magi “came into the house”. I think that Jesus was probably between 12 and 18 months old. What evidence do I have?

**Matthew 2:7—Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.**

The wise men were supposed to return to Herod. They didn't, God warned them to go another way.

**Matthew 2:16—Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi.**

When the magi did not return to Herod. He began to count back. The magi told him exactly when the star appeared. The star probably appeared the night He was born. Herod knew the exact date. If he counts back 12 months to maybe 18 months, an evil monster like Herod would add a few extra months just to make sure they got this "newborn king".

I guess we can now see a blessing. We know the story. The magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Mary and Joseph are rich! And they lived happily ever after.

But, wait...

### 3. They faced A CLOSE CALL

**Matthew 2:13-15—When they (the magi) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So, he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”**

God warns Joseph—“Get out! Now!”

EX: We have seen footage of forest fires that get out of control. The fires can move so quickly that people are told to evacuate. Sometimes they have 15 minutes. Sometimes they leave with the clothes on their backs. In June, 2017 a wildfire in Portugal killed 62 people. Some were burned alive in their cars.

This is the level of urgency that Joseph and Mary faced. “Get out! Now!”. Joseph and Mary rise in the middle of the night. And they run for their lives. What do you pack? They throw things together as quickly as possible, and they’re off to Egypt. Joseph could probably find work as a carpenter. The gifts from the magi would support them and carry them through the time they spent in Egypt.

Can you put yourself in Mary's place?

In Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary had settled down. Life had a routine. I think most women like routine. As a carpenter Joseph probably made their home comfortable. And they had their baby, Jesus. And, in one night, everything was turned upside-down.

EX: I was thrilled to be in Spain when our plane landed in Madrid on September 3, 1982. Joyce will tell you a different story. She said “good-bye” to the people we loved in Wisconsin. She said “good-bye” to family. We landed in a new country. The language was different. The food was different. The customs were different. It was a hard time for her.

And even after when Herod died, they were not safe...

**Matthew 2:21-23—So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.**

They're back home. They're back in Nazareth. They return to the rumors. They return to the stares. The truth is..., Mary never escapes this treatment. Mary never escapes the abuse. How do I know?

In John 8 we find Jesus embroiled in a heated discussion with the Pharisees. The topic—His divinity. He proclaims it. They reject it.

**John 8: 39-40—They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus \*said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”**

It was 33 years later, and Mary was still the victim of misunderstanding. What happens in Nazareth evidently didn't stay in Nazareth. When you live under law, people can be very cruel and have very long memories.

#### **4. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I want to conclude by offering a few thoughts about Mary. Today there is teaching about Mary that simply has no biblical basis. Luke records two statements about Mary.

First, when Mary entered Elizabeth's home, Elizabeth said...

**Luke 1—And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”**

In response, Mary said,

**Luke 1: 47-48—And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. “For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.**

These statements have been twisted to mean something that Luke never intended. They are used to teach doctrines that God never intended. These statements have been used to lift Mary to a position that she does not hold. These verses have been used to grant Mary authority that she does not have.

Do these statements make Mary extra-special? I suppose we could say that she was special. She gave birth to the Messiah. She gave birth to our Savior. But Mary was no more special than other biblical characters who obeyed the Lord. Some lead armies. Some prophesied of things to come. Others proclaimed the good news of the Gospel. Mary's part in God's plan of redemption was simply to loan her womb to God for 9 months. Then, like any mother, she raised her Son, Jesus and her other children.

Following the birth of Jesus and all that happened (shepherds, angels, wise man, Egypt, etc.) Joseph and Mary enjoyed a normal marriage. How do I know?

**Matthew 1:23-25—“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.**

We all understand the word “until”. “Until” means “that up to a moment in time, one set of circumstances exists. Then something happens. And when that event occurs, the circumstances change.”

EX: I didn't talk to David this morning until I arrived here at Canyon Bible Church. The first circumstance—I didn't talk to David. Something happened—I arrived. A new circumstance was initiated—I talked to David. “Until” separates 2 distinct circumstances.

EX: I never ate paella until I went to Spain.

"Joseph kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son". From that point on, Joseph and Mary were a normal, married couple. They raised a first-century Jewish family. They had other children. And we see those children several times in the Gospel accounts.

I could say more. If you are interested, I would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about the false teachings about Mary. This morning, I want to focus on the original question, "What is the result of obedience?"

Let's go back to a situation that I raised in the beginning;-- the television preacher that promises blessing if/when you contribute to his/her ministry. Under these circumstances, any contribution is not obedience. This cheapens the word "obedience" and lowers the gift to a religious version of "Let's Make a Deal". Obedience asks nothing. Obedience demands nothing. Obedience expects nothing. Obedience is the result of one's submission to the Lordship of Jesus. Obedience is an expression of one's deep love for Jesus. The goal of true obedience is to glorify God.

EX: During the week I deal with lots of customers. While helping one customer, I felt compelled to talk to him about the Lord. We talked about Christmas. We talked about the Lord. I offered him a copy of the movie "Jesus". He took it. He said that he would watch it with his wife. I think that in that moment I was being obedient. In that moment my only desire was that the customer and his wife would one day believe in Jesus.

Here is part of hymn that we used to sing in the church where I grew up. It talks about obedience.

#### **I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go**

**It may not be on the mountain height  
Or over the stormy sea  
It may not be at the battle's front  
My Lord will have need of me  
But if, by a still, small voice he calls  
To paths that I do not know  
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine  
I'll go where you want me to go  
I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord  
Over mountain or plain or sea  
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord  
I'll be what you want me to be**

I hold Mary in high esteem. I value Mary for what she did. I admire her even more because of all that she endured. She suffered greatly. She endured a lot. The remarkable thing was her attitude.

**Luke 1:38—And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."**

What does God call you to do? Share your faith? Help a neighbor? Visit someone in the hospital? Stop to help someone with a flat tire?

Whatever you decide to do in the name of Jesus...when you are convinced that God wants you to do something for Him, then you have to be "all in". Obedience means...No doubts. No regrets. Faithful to the end.