

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
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Key verse: Matthew 1:18-25

“Journey from Burden to Blessing”

Good morning! Welcome to Fil-Am. To our guests, I hope you are enjoying your stay so far and you’re having a wonderful time. I’m glad you came and you know what, you came just in time because we’re starting a series of messages for this month of December. We’re calling it “Christmas Journey”. Pastor Dave and I are going to talk about three different journeys that are mentioned in the Bible involving the main characters during the first Christmas. We’ll look at how the journey they took changed their perspectives, changed their directions, and ultimately changed their lives.

Today we’re going to look at the Journey from Burden to Blessing. Then, next week, we’ll look at the Journey from Worry to Worship and we’ll cap the year 2014 with our final message, Journey from Danger to Deliverance.

Each of us is in a journey too. The life we live is a journey. I hope through this series we can find inspiration and purpose in life as we go through our journey.

So, are you ready to join us in this journey for the next three weeks?
Amen?

Let me read from the Bible in Matthew 1:18-25. Please get your Bibles, your iPad, your tablet, your phone and turn Matthew 1:18-25. Then, follow

along as I read this passage.

Isn't this the most wonderful time of the year? The reason is that as Christians we're celebrating Jesus who saved us from our sins. Amen?

I hope we will not lose our focus in the midst of the commercialism of this occasion. You know, we have neighbors who are Hindus. One time, I was talking to the mother. I told her that I noticed she put up Christmas decorations on their frontyard. And I said, "Do you celebrate Christmas?"

"Not really," she replied. "It's for the kids."

Sadly, this kind of mentality is true not only for non-Christians but for some professing Christians as well. To them the true meaning of Christmas has been overshadowed by gifts, decorations, singing, and so on and so forth.

This may be the most wonderful time of the year but, sadly, not for some people. Do you know that during the Christmas season, more suicides occur than in any other time of the year? Obviously, some people because of poverty or loneliness become so burdened during this time of the year that they decide to end their lives. That's very sad.

This morning, I'd like to share with you the story of a person in the Bible who faced a truly heart-wrenching situation in his life. He carried a burden just before he was about to experience an exciting moment in his life. In fact, this burden snuffed out any excitement he might have felt. This person is Joseph, the husband of Mary, the earthly father of Jesus. It is just interesting to see how he dealt with his situation. And it is also interesting to see how God dealt with him. I believe we can learn lessons from his life as we study it.

So, let's begin by talking about the burden that Joseph carried.

According to the Bible, Joseph was engaged to Mary. But lo and behold, he found out that Mary was already carrying a child. Worse, the child was not his. What was he going to do?

Joseph must have been filled with deep anguish and indignation at this point. How could Mary do this to him? When Mary broke the news to him, she, of course, told him that God was the father of the child. Joseph didn't buy that. I don't think any man in his right mind would buy that. That simply is not possible. He must truly be confused at this point. Well, perhaps, he knew that was prophesied in the Scriptures hundreds of years before...still, it just boggles the mind.

Now, he knew Mary was a godly woman. He knew that her character was impeccable.

But her apparent unfaithfulness coupled with a lie was just too much for him to bear. Probably, he felt like his future went down the drain.

That was Joseph's burden. His burden came all too suddenly. It was a burden which I'm sure must have given him sleepless nights and troubled days. I'm sure he was wondering why this thing had to happen to him. Things were going smoothly. He had a lovely and seemingly godly wife, he was looking forward to a lifetime of bliss and happiness and then boom, the revelation.

Life, my friends, is like that. It is not smooth sailing all the time. It can go wrong anytime, without a moment's notice.

There was an airline company that was disturbed over a high percentage of accidents. So they decided to eliminate human errors by building a completely computerized plane.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” came a voice over the PA during the initial flight. “It may interest you to know that you are traveling in the world’s first completely automated and computerized plane. Now just sit back and relax because nothing can go wrong...wrong...wrong...”

Wanna bet? THINGS DO GO WRONG IN LIFE! And you don't have to live very long in this world to find this out. And for some people, things seem to go wrong more often than not.

Some of you in this room are probably carrying a burden, too. Something has just gone wrong in your life. Maybe this burden came all too suddenly.

You were caught unawares and just like in Joseph's case, the weight of the burden is just too much for you.

A burden can also come gradually. You don't mind it at first but it becomes heavier and heavier in the passage of time until you reach the point wherein you don't want to carry the burden anymore.

What is your burden? Is it a relationship that is not working? Is it a job that you don't find satisfaction in? Is it a sickness that won't heal? Is it your child who gives you troubles? Is it your parent who doesn't understand you? Is it people who criticize you and put you down?

St. Augustine said, “Each of us is fighting his own battle.” Whatever your burden is, know that God will not give you anything that you can't bear. Just hold on because help will surely come. The Bible says “*God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.*”(1 Cor. 10:13) And, of course, that goes for our burdens, too, and trials, and everything.

So, Joseph realized that the woman who was engaged to him, who was

betroted to him in marriage, his very own wife-to-be, was unfaithful. In this situation, Joseph had every right to become furious. He had every right to break the engagement and treat Mary the way she deserved to be treated. In his culture, he had every right to tell others about it and have Mary stoned to death.

But what did Joseph do? He stopped and reflected. He did not want to act rashly. He assessed the situation. And he decided he would be still before God. Folks, we must do the same when faced with a difficult situation.

I. Stop – that’s the key word. Be still before God.

Verse 19 of our passage tells us, *"because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."*

This verse tells us a lot about Joseph's character. Here was a man, gravely offended, but he did not respond in a way that would also offend the other person. How many of us can act as humbly and responsibly as Joseph did when faced with a trying circumstance? This takes a lot of character and strength of will.

So, instead of going publicly, Joseph decided to divorce her quietly. You may wonder how he could divorce her when they were not married yet.

You see, engagement in Jewish culture at that time was more serious than modern engagement. It was binding in the sense that the couple could already treat themselves as husband and wife. However, no physical contact was allowed until the day of marriage. Now, this engagement could be broken because of unfaithfulness. So, when you wanted to break the

engagement because of the unfaithfulness of your partner, you got a certificate of divorce. And the punishment for unfaithfulness was death by stoning, according to the Law.

So, now, can you just imagine the gravity of the burden that Joseph was carrying? Clearly, he felt humiliated. He felt betrayed and deceived. He had fully committed himself to Mary, announcing their engagement publicly, but it seemed that she was fooling around. But because he was a man of integrity he could not let the woman he loved suffer the same humiliation. He took the high road of forgiving her by planning to divorce her quietly so she would not suffer public shame. Joseph acted with love and compassion.

I'm certain that Joseph went to God to ask for guidance amid his troubles. If that were not the case, he could have acted in an ungodly manner. He knew that God gives grace to the humble and that's why he could act in humility.

So, after he became still before God, Joseph looked and listened. Meaning, he looked to God for guidance and listened to what God was going to say. Folks, this is what we must do as well.

2. Look and Listen – Wait on God.

We, too, must come to God whenever we're carrying a burden. We cannot carry them ourselves for our strength is not enough. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, "*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.*" We must ask God for guidance and direction whenever things just seem so confusing. And God will show us the way.

This is why we should try to not make any major decisions in the heat of the moment. Let's wait for our emotions to calm down before making any important moves. Let's make sure that our decisions are based on sound reasoning, not on shallow emotions. And we will spare ourselves a lot of trouble if we do that.

Continuing with our story, we see that Joseph was in for a surprise. The surprise was that God had other plans for him. Yes, he prayed. Yes, he considered carefully the thing he should do. But God came to him in such dramatic fashion that changed his situation and attitude entirely.

Verse 20 tells us, *“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.’”*

Joseph thought that he had only two options. To divorce Mary quietly or subject her to public shame. But God gave him another option which was... to marry her. Because of the circumstances, this had not occurred to Joseph.

You see, God often shows us that there are more options available than we think. When we rely on our own wisdom, more often than not, we make a decision based on what we know. But God knows all things. He sees the whole picture. Someone said, “I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.” Although Joseph seemed to be doing the right thing by breaking the engagement, only God's guidance helped him to make the best decision which was to marry Mary.

When we're carrying a burden we know that we need a break. We need

to get out of the rut we are in order to live normal lives again. We need God to intervene and let his light shine upon our lives. And that's what happens. God intervenes because God is a faithful God. He comes to rescue us from our desperate situation.

Throughout history, God has come through for his people. He gave them a break from the burdens they carried. He parted the Red Sea for the Israelites who were escaping from Egypt. He raised David, a shepherd boy, who defeated the giant Goliath. When the disciples of Jesus became so afraid because of the rough seas, Jesus stilled the storm.

It may seem, however, that at times God is so slow in acting. But let me tell you, friend, God's delay is not a denial of his blessings. In fact, God doesn't delay. We just think he does because we are an impatient people. We are always in a hurry. We have EZ-Pass, EZ-Photo, EZ-Check-In, EZ-This, EZ-That. But life is not easy. We have to be patient! Someone said, "Good things come to those who wait."

You see, God responds to us in his own time. We cannot hurry him up because he knows what he is doing. Oftentimes, God doesn't respond to us right away because he is doing something in our lives. He wants us to be prepared and ready when he does answer us. He wants us to be worthy of the blessing he will bestow upon us.

I believe this is what he accomplished in Joseph's life. You see, God could have given him the news about Mary's pregnancy at the same time he gave it to Mary. But God decided to withhold the news from Joseph. He let Mary break the news to him. I believe God was testing Joseph's character. He tested him, not to trip him and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to

obey God. To develop his character.

God was molding him to become the father he wanted him to be. You see, the salvation of the world was at stake. The child Jesus had to be raised by someone whose integrity and character were beyond reproach. Just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, God refines us through difficult circumstances. The same way he refined Joseph.

And I'm sure God let him go through other trials in order to extract the best out of him.

When we are tested, we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character. So, when we are tested, we can either become bitter or better. This is what God asks from each of us. To wait on him and not to complain. And as we wait on him, to do the right thing.

Oftentimes, however, we move ahead of God. Although God says in his word, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," we stubbornly do our own thing. And when we go on our own way, the result is always trouble.

For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son from whom the Messiah would come. After years of waiting the son didn't come and so Abraham slept with Sarah's maidservant, Hagar, and had a son through her. This son, Ishmael, became the ancestors of the Arabs and have made life difficult for the Israelites throughout history which continues to this day.

Yet, let me tell you this: God is a loving God. He is a God of second chances. No matter how many times we blow it, He is there to fix us up.

There was a man who brought home a model kit of an airplane as a

Christmas gift to his three-year old son. Upon seeing it, the little boy's eyes lit up in excitement and immediately took out the kit from the box and eagerly tried to put the pieces together. His dad knelt down beside him in the living room in order to help. Then, the phone rang. The boy's dad went to the kitchen to answer it. Meanwhile, the boy decided to do it by himself. But he really needed help because he was getting confused with all the parts and stuff. His dad was still on the phone and the little boy couldn't wait. And so he tried and tried. But the more he tried, the more he got frustrated.

When the boy's father came back to the living room, he saw the little boy crying while the plane didn't look like a plane at all. His son had made a mess of things. When the little boy saw him, he cried all the more, thinking he would be spanked. But his father slowly picked him up from the floor and hugged him tight. And he said to his boy, "I love you, son. Don't be afraid. I'm not angry with you. I want you to know that I'm here to help you." Then, just like before, he sat down on the floor with his son and patiently fixed what his son had messed up.

So, my friend, when you are burdened, just wait on the Lord because, like the father of the little boy, he surely will come. And fix your situation.

The psalmist says in Psalm 27:14, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

And so, Joseph had a burden, and God gave him the break that he needed. Afterwards, God gave him the blessing that wouldn't have been his if he didn't wait.

What was the blessing? The blessing was that he was given the

privilege of becoming the earthly father of the Lord. Indeed, it is a great privilege to be used by God for this purpose. For sure, he was surprised to know that God had chosen him. He had nothing to show. He had no earthly riches. He had no special abilities. He was just a carpenter.

You see, God doesn't look at our abilities or social position or physical appearance. God looks at the heart. He honors integrity. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, *"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

This is why it is important for us to guard our hearts. Are our hearts pure and totally dedicated to the Lord? We cannot hide anything from the Lord. Unless we live a life that is pleasing and honorable to him, God cannot use us and we'll miss the blessings that otherwise would have been ours.

God also blessed Joseph with a godly wife and with children who grew up to be godly themselves. In fact, James, one of Jesus' stepbrothers became a leader in the Jerusalem church.

Another blessing was that he himself became a blessing to others because the child that he raised, the child that he guided and taught became the Savior of the world. Joseph became an instrument by which God blessed the whole world. He gave the name Jesus to his child as the angel had instructed him. The name Jesus literally means "Jehovah is salvation" or "Jehovah, the Savior." Thus, the Lord Jesus was God himself who came down to earth to become a man.

God had to do this because man is sinful and he cannot save himself. As a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, he shed his own blood on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. That penalty is death. Then, he rose

from the dead, conquering sin and death forever. And so, anyone who comes to Jesus and believes that Jesus died for his sins will be saved. He will not experience spiritual death which is separation from God for all eternity. In fact, when he dies he will go to heaven to be with Jesus forever.

So, first, Joseph stopped. Then, he looked and listened, then he went. Which brings us to the third point. When God tells you something to do, just

3. **Go – Obey God.**

What's important to learn here is that blessings come as a result of obedience. Verse 24 tells us that *"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."*

Joseph was quick to obey God. There was no hesitation or dilly-dallying on his part. Almost immediately he came back to Mary and married her. He must have felt elated and greatly relieved that his loved one, Mary, was faithful to her after all. That certainly was an incredible blessing for him.

It's such a touching love story, isn't it? More touching than "Forevermore". You can watch that at TFC or The Filipino Channel.

For sure, Joseph obeyed God because he was a righteous man. He did what he knew was right and pleasing before God. Actually, by marrying Mary he was exposing himself to some ridicule. You see, word undoubtedly would go around that he was not the father of the child. Yet, he took it all in. It didn't matter what people would say. What mattered to him was what God would say.

This morning, you may have come here with a burden in your heart. I don't know what it is. But God, who can look at our hearts, knows exactly

what your burden is. My friend, remember that all you need to do is to wait on God. Ask him for guidance and he will show the way. He is your strength and refuge. A very present help in trouble. He will give you a break from all your troubles if you patiently wait on him. And when you do that, God will bless you. Yes, he can give you material blessings but more than that, he can give you emotional and spiritual blessings. The Bible says that “he...is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”

This Christmas, know that Jesus came to earth with a purpose. That purpose is to save you and to give you the life you have been longing for. This life at present is temporary, you will get burdens but trust in Jesus because he can lift those burdens and turn them into blessings. Again, let me quote Jesus, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

There is a better life coming, it's the best life you can ever have. If someone tells you that this life is “Your Best Life Now”, don't believe that person even if he writes a book. Your best life is waiting for you in heaven. And Jesus is there, waiting for you to commit your life to him now and give you a victorious life here on earth and the best you can ever have in heaven.