

## Turning the Mess into a Miracle

Life is messy. Do you agree or not? If not, you haven't lived long enough. When I was young, I thought that wasn't true. Like when I was in first year college. I was 17 at the time. My friends and I attended a play presented by a drama group in college. Well, it was a required subject and we had to go. And we needed to write a paper about the play, critique it. I remember that my primary critique of the play was that it seemed unrealistic. That the events as portrayed in the play were not common experiences of people. You see, the main character in the play suffered one difficulty after another. They came one by one and brought him to the point of despair and I thought to myself, "No, that doesn't happen in real life." I was young, life was good.

Now, I don't remember the grade I got but I remember that I was wrong with my critique a few years later. Because I went through the same experience in my life. One blow after another, one setback after another and I came to the point of despair. Only by the grace of God that I'm still standing and that's another story.

In any case, perhaps, some of you can relate to what I'm talking about. Because you've walked through it before or you're walking through it right now. Or you're about to walk through it. It may not be one blow after another because for some of us, just one blow is enough to make our life messy.

What kind of mess are you going through right now or about to go through? Is it about your health? Is it about your relationship with your spouse or children? Is it about your co-worker or boss? Is it about your job? Is it about your finances? I'm sure there's at least one mess that we wish God would fix right away. That would be a wonderful Christmas gift, right? God specializes in miracles and if he fixes it for us this season, that'll be wonderful. I cannot promise you that but I

promise you God is watching over you and he knows exactly what you're going through. That's why he sent his son Jesus so that you can find hope in him.

In the Bible, we'll find the story of Joseph, the earthly adoptive father of Jesus, who found himself in a mess big time. The Bible doesn't tell us much about the background of Joseph as he is not mentioned much in the Bible. But there are a few things we know. He is a direct descendant of David based on the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. He must be a religious guy because he observed the Holy Days and Hebrew Feast with his family as shown in **Luke 2:41-42, "Every year Jesus' parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up as they always did for the Feast."** And he must be skillful as a carpenter and must have passed on his trade to his son Jesus. But the most interesting quality we find is that he is a righteous man or a good man, according to Matthew 1:19.

So, he was a young man and just like any Jew wished to live a quiet life and build a nice family with his young fiancée named Mary. Some scholars say that Mary was as young as 14. They were engaged and for Jews being engaged is like being married already although they couldn't sleep together. So, I guess at that point in his life, he was looking forward to a bright future with his beautiful wife. He had a good occupation, his reputation was intact, you know, having royal blood because of his great, great, great, great, grandfather David. He must really feel blessed. Until something happened that messed up his life.

Sometimes, life just throws a curveball at you. It's unexpected and you're caught by surprise. It can happen to anyone. Anytime. Probably, it just happened to you. What are you going to do?

In Joseph's case, we know what it was but let's look at Scripture to see what took place and learn principles from his experience. Principles that we can apply in our own lives when we find ourselves in a mess.

Please get your Bibles and turn with me to **Matthew 1:18-25**. Now, if you remember, these are the same verses I talked about last week. Last week, I talked about Mary. This time, I'm going to talk about Joseph. Maybe, next week, the same verses, too, but I'll talk about the angel. Actually, our speaker next week is Pastor Nonoy and he'll talk about the angels. Not sure though if he's going to use the same passage.

Anyway, immediately we find something here. Something that turned the world of Joseph upside down. He discovered that Mary, his beloved fiancée, was pregnant and he was not the father. Men, what would you do if you were in the same situation?

Joseph decided to divorce Mary. But in private so as not to disgrace her. He thought it was the right thing to do. He was a good man, after all. Was that commendable. Yes? Because it protected Mary. Perhaps, he was just going to say to those who would ask, "Well, it didn't work out, I'm sorry." But, there's a but. I think there's a flip side to his action. I think he also wanted to protect himself. In the first place, he didn't want to marry Mary. I'm sure Mary tried to explain the situation to him. I'm sure she pleaded with him with tears in her eyes. Joseph, however, wouldn't buy it. And I'm not sure whether he knew of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 which says, **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."** Even if he knew, it was a mess and when you're in a mess, you couldn't think straight. So, he took the easy way out. Divorce Mary.

Folks, some of us may react the same way in a messy situation. Because the situation seems hopeless and we feel helpless, we take the easy way out. We cave in. We give up. We blame others. We do crazy things. Because we're not thinking right. Our thinking is warped.

So, what do I do when I'm in a messy situation? First,

## 1. Admit my fears.

Interestingly, when the angel appeared to Joseph, the first thing he said was, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.” (v. 20). Right there, we see the root cause of Joseph’s unwillingness to be wed to Mary. He was fearful. We don’t know exactly what he was afraid of. But we can take a guess. These are fears that we ourselves feel when we’re in a mess.

First, the fear of man. Joseph must have been conscious of the fact that they would be the talk of the town when they get married. People would discover that Mary was pregnant before they got married and there would be rumors and gossip and that was too much that he could handle. Perhaps, he knew anyway that Mary was telling the truth but he couldn’t just handle the truth. He had an image to protect. He needed God’s assurance in this situation.

The fear of man I would say is our #1 fear. We’re afraid of what others are going to say that’s why we feel anxious and insecure. Some of us are people-pleasers and don’t want to offend others. Some of us compromise in order to be politically correct. I think you’ve heard about this big, successful Christian fast-food chain that is now receiving some criticism from some Christians and evangelical leaders because it seems the company has lowered its standard. This company said just last month that they’re no longer supporting the Salvation Army and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for the reason that they want to redirect their support to other organizations. The critics, however, pointed out that this company seemed to have cut off their support because the Salvation Army and this other Christian organization were identified as “hate groups” by the LGBTQ community. Prior to this, this fast food chain, OK, I’ll mention it lest I be accused of having “the fear of man”, Chick-Fil-A, had been under fire from the LGBTQ community since 2012 because Dan Cathy, the CEO, made comments opposing same-sex marriage. From that time on, Chick-Fil-A walked into a mess. They were

widely criticized and condemned by politicians and gay rights activists and banned from college campuses, airports, cities, etc. And now, because they stopped funding two Christian organizations, they're being criticized by Christians this time. From one mess to another. That's what happens when we fear man.

You see, God doesn't want us to fear any man. The Psalmist says, "The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6) God is our defender. He will defend us against our enemies. Paul says in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Joseph's second fear must be the fear of failure. Perhaps, he thought that he made a mistake when he decided to be engaged to Mary. He thought he wouldn't be in a mess if only he was more prayerful and more patient and more wise. After all, Mary was only 14 and what could a young, innocent girl offer him? What wisdom and counsel could he expect from a young girl like her? By accepting her and the baby in her womb, it could be just another mistake. So, he would divorce her which seemed to be the only solution.

When we're in a mess, we think we are failures and so we start to ask questions. Did I make the right decision? Should have I waited first? Was it the right step? Did I commit a very grave sin? Is God punishing me? Some are legitimate questions, some are not. If you're married, and you ask, did I marry the right person? That's not a legitimate question. The fact that you're married already to that person means God wants you to be married to that person. If you're divorced and you re-married, make an effort to keep that marriage strong this time because at this point in your life God wants you to be married to that person. God is a god of second chances. He is always merciful. And so, when we make mistakes or we have failed in something, he corrects it and makes it even work for us in the end. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

We must understand that we all fail because we're not perfect. No one is perfect. But we should not be afraid of taking risks. Perhaps, Joseph knew that Mary was telling the truth but it was too risky. But we need to take risks to accomplish things for God. I read about a mother whose daughter wanted to go to a remote part of Africa as a missionary. The mother's friend told her, "I heard you let your daughter go to Africa. Isn't that dangerous?" The mother replied, "The safest place to be is in the center of God's will". Folks, if God is in it, then go for it.

Finally, Joseph's third fear must be the fear of the unknown. Fear of the unknown. He just didn't know where this would lead him. He didn't know what would happen in the future. I'm sure he had lots of sleepless nights just trying to grasp the immensity of the mess he was in. What is God's plan? How am I going to raise this child? How would his brothers and sisters treat him? Would I be able to handle the conflicts in our family and with others?

When we're fearful of the future, God's promise is this, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11) Hang on to God's promise because he is faithful.

When you don't admit your fears in a messy situation, you will tend to fix it yourself and the messy becomes messier. Better trust someone who knows better than us. Just sit back, relax, and hand over your mess to someone who can bless. Which leads us to the next principle,

## 2. Trust God even when I don't understand.

So, the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and assured him that it was God who orchestrated it all. I'm sure there were still a lot of questions in Joseph's mind. But he put this all aside and decided to trust God for his and his family's future. He didn't understand fully what was happening to him but decided to trust God.

Matthew 1:24 says, “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”

Notice that Joseph took action right away after receiving that instruction from the angel. If I were Joseph, perhaps, I’d say, “Did I really dream that dream? Did the angel really appear? Did God really speak to me through the angel? Am I awake or am I still dreaming?”

Anyway, my point is, I might ask God for another dream to confirm that he was really speaking to me. But not Joseph. He had such a close walk with God that when God appeared, he recognized him. We must walk closely with Jesus then, so that we’ll recognize his voice right away when he speaks to us. Whether he speaks to us through his Word, or in our prayer time, through another person, or through an impression by the Holy Spirit, or through a dream, we wouldn’t be left wondering whether it’s the Lord who is speaking.

I know that when we’re in a mess, it’s surely hard to trust. Nothing is working. Things seem to be getting worse. Like when your health is not improving. Or your relationships continue to deteriorate. Your children are getting rebellious. You can’t find a job. People keep on criticizing you. You’ll be at your wit’s end trying to make sense of it all but answers are not forthcoming.

What do you do? Again, just trust. Be patient. Leave everything to God because there’s a purpose in everything he does. There’s another Joseph in the Bible who trusted in God and waited on God during a very trying circumstance in his life. He was put to jail without a trial and there he could have turned his back on God. He spent 10 years in prison. He could have become bitter and blamed his brothers as well. But, in jail, he just trusted God’s ways. He knew there was a reason God put him in jail. He didn’t understand it but afterwards he found out that it was God’s way to develop his character because God had planned for him to become the second-most powerful person in Egypt.

In Isaiah 55:8, it says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD." We can't just fathom the wisdom of God. All we need to is to trust him and leave everything to him because he is in control.

Which then brings us to the third principle we can apply in our lives from the passage we read,

### 3. Realize God will bless after the mess.

As we have seen, 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.

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. 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. He didn't fear people anymore.

Another blessing was that he had the privilege of becoming the earthly father of the Savior of the world. For sure, it was a great privilege to be used by God for this purpose. No doubt, 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 or her sins will be saved. That person will not experience spiritual death which is separation from God for all eternity. In fact, when that person dies that person will go to heaven to be with Jesus forever.

As I close, let me tell you this: God is a loving God. No matter what kind of mess we're in, He is there to fix it 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 in a mess, 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."