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Title: When Your Dream Becomes a Nightmare

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Here are some statements I ran across recently: True or False. God is too deep to explain Himself. God is too wise to make a mistake. God is too kind to do anything cruel. I find those statements challenging. Is God deep? Is He too deep? Many of you likely know at least one person who has been or is presently angry at God. Aren't we usually angry at someone when we think they did us wrong? Or we think they have been unfair? Doesn't God sometimes get accused of doing cruel things – hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, floods are often referred to as "Acts of God." Let me ask some true or false statements. Life is good. Life is challenging. Life is so difficult. Life is fair. The way you replied to those statements was likely determined by the recent or present circumstances of your own life. Here we are on the 4th Sunday of 2019. I don't have to be too prophetic to know that a New Year is exciting to some and dreaded by others. Show of hands – How many would like to know what 2019 will hold? I need to warn you that knowing what it will hold could make you change your mind. In reflecting on the years of your life, can you think of a particularly good year? A particularly bad or difficult year? It doesn't take very much time on Facebook to see that many are going through storms and walking in valleys these first few weeks of the year. I read one comment from a young lady. She said, "I'm so ready for 2019 to be over!" She was only a couple of days into the new year! I read a pastor's comment that simply read, "I can't go on..." I have called upon nine from our church who have had surgeries already this year. I shared at five funerals in five weeks. I had two funerals in the first eight days of the year. And on and on! For some, the sorrows of 2018 have carried over into 2019. One mother posted on Facebook that she had a normal Christmas for the first time in eight years. She had sacrificed every year because of her son's addictions. Finally, a good Christmas and a little light at the end of a long tunnel. Just 24 hours after posting that – that very son committed suicide. Let me quickly state that some things are beyond my ability to explain. Much of life is NOT explained with EASY answers.

Have you ever experienced a time when your wonderful dream became a terrible nightmare? Your once grand marriage became ugly and didn't end well. Your family dynamics have gotten out of hand and have become a source of great grief. Your perfect job ended abruptly. Your health has taken a turn for the worse. Now you have to deal with your many limitations. The most important person in your life is gone. What is the obvious one-word question we ask when our dreams have crashed? "WHY?" Today I'm going to attempt to show you a better alternative than asking "Why?" I want to point you to the example of a man by the name of Joseph. The JOSEPH of the Christmas story saw his biggest dreams shatter. What happened in his life is worth noting. It may help you, as it has me, when your dreams are shattered.

1. A Shattering Discovery (vs. 18). *"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."* **A. It was a time of EXCITEMENT.** Mary and Joseph were betrothed to one another. This was the ancient Hebrew engagement period. It was as binding as a marriage. Surely they were excited about their future together as husband and wife. **B. It was a time of EXPECTATION.** The Bible tells us that this took place *"before they came together."* They didn't know each other intimately, physically, or sexually. Surely they were both counting down the days until they could be together and live together as husband and wife. **C. It was a time of EMBARRASSMENT.** During this betrothal period, both the bride and groom were to keep themselves physically pure for each other. This was during a time when both men and women were expected to go into marriage as virgins. But, it was during this time that Joseph discovered that HIS bride was pregnant. This would have been a source of great embarrassment both to Joseph and Mary, as well as their respective families. ALL the dreams Joseph had for the future had been shattered by this devastating news. Note: Isn't that just how life is at times? We make OUR plans for the future and set things up just the way WE want them to be, then some event takes place and we see our hopes, our plans and our dreams all fall apart! When these things happen, it breaks our hearts because it is so unexpected and sometimes it's exactly what we did NOT want to happen. However, like Joseph, we are often blind to the fact that GOD IS AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES. As is sometimes the case – as it was in Joseph's case – it is GOD who shatters our dreams! That may be hard to understand, but it is still how things work. The Bible is rather clear on this matter! Our God works His will in our lives in ways that we cannot begin to comprehend. Isaiah 55:8-9 – *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thought than your thoughts.'"* His plans for us are rarely what we would plan for ourselves. Job chapters 1-2 tell us that Job was the greatest man among all the people of the

East. He was blameless and without reproach. He loved God and eschewed evil. He had 7 sons and 3 daughters, 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke (1000) of oxen, 500 donkeys and a large number of servants. In very short order, he lost nearly everything including his house. His wife, who said “Curse God and die,” remained. Under such circumstances it’s mighty hard to grasp that His plans are always the best, especially when it hurts us so deeply. Romans 8:28 – “*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.*” 2 Corinthians 4:15-17 – “*All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*” When our dreams and hopes are shattered, we must hold that HIS WAYS ARE HIGHER. The Old Testament Joseph’s path led him from the place of prominence in his father’s house, through a PIT, into Potiphar’s house and through a PRISON. In the end, he wound up in the place of power. It would never have happened had God not first shattered his dreams – literally!

2. A Sobering Deliberation (vs. 19). “*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.*” **A. Joseph’s Character is Revealed.** In the midst of this most difficult of situations, Joseph’s true self is revealed. We are told that he was a “righteous” man. This simply means that he was blameless under the Law and that he walked by faith in the Lord. He was a man of God before these events befell him and what he was IN HIS HEART came to surface IN HIS TRIALS. Note: The times when life goes wrong from our perspective is the time when we can see our true selves. For what we are in the worst of times is what we REALLY are in our hearts! Again, I would call your attention to Job 1:20-22 – “*At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*” What Job was in his trouble, revealed what had always been in his heart! This is what God knew about Job BEFORE the calamities came. Job 1:8 – “*Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.’”* ANYONE can rejoice when life is good, but it takes a consecrated life to shout when life falls apart. How you respond toward God in a time of crisis reveals the depths of your commitment to God and to His will. **B. Joseph’s Choices Are Revealed.** When it all boils down to the bottom line, Joseph had but three choices: 1. He could publicly humiliate Mary because of what he perceives to be her immorality (kind of a public declaration – she’s bad; I’m good). 2. He could divorce her quietly and just walk away from her, leaving her to raise the child in shame and poverty. OR 3. He could marry her and raise the child as if it were his own. Just so you know – that last option would rarely have been chosen by a Jewish man. To Joseph, NONE of the choices were appealing, but those were the three options. He had to choose one of them. Often life presents us with choices that are less than appealing to our human nature. Our duty in those times is to LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD and seek to do that ONE THING that He wants us to do in our situation. **C. Joseph’s Compassion is Revealed.** Joseph’s decision was to react toward Mary in compassion. This was not an easy decision to reach, but it was a decision that was in the BEST INTERESTS OF MARY. (This was likely a dream turned nightmare for Mary, too. Most of us don’t struggle to see things from our own perspective – often our own SELFISH perspective – but we often miss where the other person is coming from. Instead of making a public example out of Mary, and perhaps even bringing about her death, Joseph decides to deal with her in a quiet manner. Even though he likely still held that she had been unfaithful to him, he still loves her and wants to do the right thing by her. THAT says a lot about Joseph! As I have already said, how we respond in a time of crisis reveals a great deal about the depth of our walk with God. How we respond to those who have hurt us is another indicator of the depth of our spiritual walk. If we can learn anything from the example of Joseph, it is that we should never let the hurt others inflict upon us cause us to retaliate in an effort to hurt them in return. A hard word here: We need to deal with those around us, who hurt us, with compassion. In fact, the Lord Jesus told us to go farther than that! He said that we are to forgive those who offended us without reservation (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17:1-5). This is also the command from the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul. Ephesians 4:32 – “*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*”

3. A Satisfying Declaration (vs. 20-23). Note: I find it interesting to note here that the Lord did not send Joseph the answer for direction he was looking for UNTIL AFTER he had reached a decision on his own. Sometimes the Lord will allow us to exhaust all our human reasoning before He gives us divine insight into the situation we are facing in life. **A. It was a Declaration of Divine Providence.** “*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’*” (vs. 20). As these thoughts troubled the mind of Joseph, the Lord sent an angel to speak to him in a dream.

The angel brought Joseph a word of Explanation, of Exaltation, and of Exhilaration. Joseph was made to understand the origin of the child his bride carried. He was made to understand that this DREAM of his that had turned into a NIGHTMARE in his heart and mind was really A MIRACULOUS WORK OF GOD. Sometimes our vantage point works against us! Joseph jumped to the ONLY explanation he knew, but it was still a WRONG conclusion. I recently heard it put this way: The way we look at life is like watching a parade go by while standing between two buildings. All you are able to see of the parade is that portion that is passing directly in front of you at any given moment. You have a memory of what has already passed, but you have no idea as to what is coming down the street. You just have to WAIT until it gets to you. However, if you were to take the stairs to the rooftop of the building, you would be able to see the parade in its entirety. You could see the beginning, the middle, and the end ALL AT THE SAME TIME. There would be no surprises! TAKE NOTE! LIFE IS NOT LIKE THAT FOR US! ALL we can really see is that part that is passing before our eyes at the present time. We have a vague memory of that which has gone before, but we have no idea about what is coming our way. However, God sits above it all. To HIM, there are NO surprises! He knows the end from the beginning. The best thing we can ever learn to do is to simply TRUST HIM to bring the best into our lives day by day. Even when our dreams are shattered, we need to trust the 2-fold truth that – Our Father God is still in control AND He WILL take care of His children! Despite what you and I may think at times, our Heavenly Father knows best! **B. It was a Declaration of Divine Provisions.** *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”* (vs. 21). Joseph is given details of a miracle that much of the world still hasn’t grasped: God entered this world through the womb of a Jewish virgin! Joseph is told that Mary will have a son and that this son is to be named Jesus. He is also told that this son will be the Savior of the Jews. That is quite a revelation! In a nutshell, Joseph is made aware that this child is no ordinary baby. He is, IN FACT, the Son of God. His name will reflect that because the name Jesus means “Jehovah is Salvation.” His life will reflect this because He will be responsible for the salvation of the lost. This He will accomplish through – His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension back into Heaven. Surely Joseph doesn’t know ALL the details about this miracle child his bride carries in her womb, but he KNOWS ENOUGH to be sure that this child is a divine provision for the sins of the world. Note: May we never forget that it is from the wreckage of our greatest hurts that God often builds for us the greatest blessings! Just because the way is dark, do not stop holding to His hand. That is especially WHEN you need to hold His hand! He may lead you through some desolate places, but He will never forsake you in any of them. Psalm 23:4-5 – *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* Wherever His path leads you, you can count on His provisions to be sufficient for the need of the hour. 2 Corinthians 12:9 – *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”* Philippians 4:19 – *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”* **C. It was a Declaration of Divine Presentations.** *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us’”* (vs. 22-23). Joseph is shown that the child Mary carries in her womb is none other than the Deliverer whom the world has waited on since man sinned in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). This baby is to be the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is to be the end of the Law. He will flesh out all the types of the Old Testament. Not only is He to be the fulfillment of prophecy, He is to be GOD IN HUMAN FLESH. Joseph is allowed to see that his HURT, his ANGER and his CONFUSION were necessary to bring about the greatest miracle the world has ever known: GOD BECOMING FLESH & ENTERING THE WORLD TO DIE AS A MAN. John 1:14 – *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Note: When your dreams are shattered, your plans are derailed and your hopes are all destroyed, remember that while it may look bleak from our perspective, God is working out His perfect will in your life and mine. Therefore, let us walk confidently with our hand held safely in His grasp, even when we cannot see the way or understand the why. He will bring us to the place where it all makes sense someday – maybe here – maybe there. From where I stand right now, I cannot see what God has placed in my future. I, too, am facing some challenging events in my life at the present, but I trust that down the road, in a place I have not arrived at yet, my questions will be answered and my needs will be met. That is how God operates! Our duty to Him is to walk with Him humbly by faith until He brings us to the place where He has already placed our provisions. You see, while we are toiling here today, He has already gone into tomorrow and arranged our path AND supplied our need. The enemy wants us to read it: God is NO WHERE. The truth is: **God is NOW HERE!** Therefore, just walk, one step at a time – BABY STEPS. You will arrive at the place where your questions are answered and your needs are met, in His time!*

4. A Shocking Decision (vs. 24-25). *“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”*

A. Joseph's Quick Reaction. As soon as Joseph understands what is happening in his life, he reacts in faith. He goes and takes Mary into his home and his heart as his wife. His is a response of pure faith. He still does NOT know how things will work out, BUT HE DOES KNOW that God is working and that is ENOUGH for Joseph. Joseph's decision must have shocked the whole community. Everyone probably assumed that Joseph and Mary had not been able to wait for the wedding. He was willing to bear the shame of Mary's pregnancy because he knew it was the work of God. TRUE faith does not shrink from the call of God just because others do not understand. TRUE faith hears the voice of the Lord and simply does as it is told.

B. Joseph's Qualified Restraint. Wherein Joseph took Mary into his home, he refrained from having sexual relations with her. He respects the plan of God. He knows that she is to be a virgin when Jesus is born. This, too, is a response of faith. Instead of demanding what was rightfully, or should I say legally, his as her husband, he willingly lays aside his rights so that GOD'S WILL might be accomplished! Note: TRUE faith willingly puts aside its own desires to do the will of God. Often, God's call on our lives will be hard to accept and hard to do, but faith doesn't seek the easier road. Faith knows that God has already surveyed the way and knows where He wants His servants. Faith says, "*Here am I, send me!*" (Isaiah 6:8).

C. Joseph's Quiet Resolve. Joseph waited patiently until Mary gave birth to her son. No doubt Joseph cared for the expectant mother as best he could. When the time came and the baby was born, Joseph did the job of the father, HE NAMED the boy Jesus. Naming the child was the responsibility of the father. (Luke 1:63 - Zachariah named his son John.) Joseph is saying that he is willing to embrace the plan of God for his life, even though he doesn't fully understand it. He is willing to raise this child as his own, even though he knows the baby is NOT his son. Joseph is saying this: "I had my life all planned out! Mary and I were to be married and we were going to do life together. We were going to have lots of children and be very happy. THEN, I found out she was pregnant. I knew the baby wasn't mine, but I did not know who's it was. I was hurt! All my plans and dreams were shattered. Then the Lord showed me that HE had a BETTER plan for my life! He called me to be the surrogate human father to the Messiah! What I thought was a great TRAGEDY was, in fact, the greatest BLESSING of my life!" If you don't get anything else out of this message, PLEASE GET THIS: What you think is the worst thing that has ever happened to you COULD turn out to be your greatest blessing! I think the difference between those who experience God's best in the tragedies of life and those who do not – all comes down to simple faith. Some people simply will NOT trust God for ANYTHING and as a result they are always defeated and never able to rise above their circumstances. Others DO trust Him, knowing that HE KNOWS BEST. These people experience His best – even in the most difficult moments of life.

Conclusion. Have you ever had a dream turn into a nightmare? We all have at one time or another. You will likely face it again before life is through with you. I just want to ask you this question: Should your dreams turn into nightmares, what will you do about it? Some people try to FIX IT THEMSELVES. That rarely works. Often it only makes it worse. Some people just QUIT. That won't work either, because whether you participate or not, life goes on. Still others BECOME ANGRY AT GOD and their fellow man and try to make others pay for their own hurts. That attitude is no good! Ultimately the person you really hurt is yourself. Of course, there are a precious few who are able to take the pieces of their broken dreams, LAY THEM AT THE FEET OF THE LORD and say, "Lord, I don't understand why this has happened to me. I never wanted this, but it has happened nonetheless. I am here before You now to ask for Your help. Even though I cannot see it, I know that you have something better for me than I had planned for myself. Please give me grace to believe it and faith to see it." Those are the people who walk in victory, even in the midst of their worst nightmare. What kind of person are you? What are you doing with your broken dreams? I invite you to bring your life to Jesus – mess and all. Let Him have it and let Him do with it what HE WANTS to do. He does have something better planned for you. The way to receive it is to react to Him in faith.

STORY: Maria and her daughter, Christina, lived in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of a Brazilian village. Maria's husband had died when Christina was an infant and Maria had never remarried. Times were tough, but at last Christina was old enough to get a job to help out. Christina spoke often of going to the city. She dreamed of trading her dirty neighborhood for the excitement of city life. Just the thought of that horrified her mother, who knew exactly what Christina would have to do for a living. That's why her heart broke. That's why she couldn't believe it when she awoke one morning to find her daughter's bed empty. Knowing where her daughter was headed, she quickly threw some clothes in a bag, gathered up all of her money, and ran out of the house. On her way to the bus stop, she entered a drugstore and got one last thing. Photos. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all the time she could making photos of herself. With her purse full of small black and white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro. Maria knew Christina had no decent way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human being will do things that before were unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place, Maria left her photo – taped to a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner telephone booth – and on the back of EVERY photo she wrote a note. When her money and the photos ran

out, Maria went home. A few weeks later young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her dreams had become a nightmare. But, as she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on a lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was a compelling invitation, "Whatever you've done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home." And she did. If your dreams are lying in shattered pieces around you right now, and have turned into nightmares, PLEASE BRING THEM TO JESUS and let Him turn them into a source of glory and rejoicing. Regardless of what has become of your life, you can bring it to Jesus right now.