

2025 12 21/ Matthew 1:18-25
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Mercy Over Law



The gospel of Matthew starts the story with Joseph, who just learned that his young betrothed was pregnant. God didn't reveal the truth about Mary's pregnancy to him yet. We have here a question. Why didn't God give him a clear message with the dream regarding the supernatural baby on the day that the angel Gabriel visited Mary? What do you think? God was watching over him in how to deal with Mary's pregnancy.

What does the Bible say about him? It describes him as a righteous man. Let's see what the word means. The word Righteous in the Greek language **Dikaios** means, in a broad sense, “**virtuous, upright, keeping the commands of God.**” In a narrower sense, it means “**thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God.**” To be conformed to the will of God is a far higher level of righteousness than keeping the commands of God because the heart is the place that rules the rest of the life; thoughts, feelings, and actions of keeping commandments.

Mary and Joseph were in a state of engagement. The idea of **engagement** is different from our modern-day. It means that their relationship was legally bound. In Israel's culture, it was **more like they were legally married and waiting for the official ceremony, honeymoon, which typically happened a year after the engagement.** During this in-between time, Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant. Adultery should have been stoned to death according to the law.

Who could believe Mary's story about an angel and that her baby is a virginal conception? In human history, it never happened. He must have thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him. Joseph must have been in emotional turbulence, and felt betrayed, dishonored, humiliated, and hurt by Mary and the other man.

Matthew says that Joseph, “being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.” Behind this short sentence, there were many sacrifices on the side of Joseph.

When he breaks the engagement, everyone soon discovers that Mary is pregnant. If Joseph opens the truth that the baby is not from Mary and Joseph, Mary will be stoned to death. If not, they would naturally assume that Joseph was the father, and he slept with her and now broke the engagement! The shame will be his, not Mary's. Mary's life would be spared. Mary's family will keep the dowry that had already been paid, and Joseph will provide the agreed-upon additional dowry that would have been at his wedding. He would provide for the child, too. On Joseph's side, it was a considerable sacrifice after being hurt so much by Mary.

Imagine Joseph. He had gone through a time that was the worst of his life. It was the darkest moment of his life. He didn't anticipate it and didn't want to take it. He was there! He can't see anything but darkness, sacrifice, hurt, or wound.

God was watching Joseph quietly.

Joseph was willing to make all sacrifices. We understand the word ‘*righteous*’ means not that he keeps the Law literally by stoning Mary; instead, he acts in the heart of God, in mercy and grace.

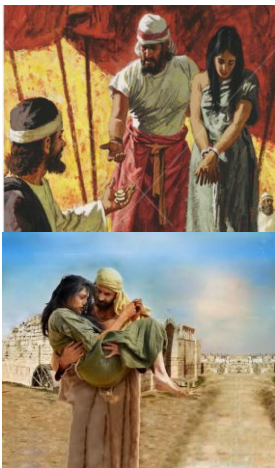
Law gives an alarm to keep us from the fire that will hurt us. When Law is broken, we know God's heart through the Old Testament. God calls us to return to him. God wants to provide a remedy for the broken situation with mercy, grace, and forgiveness because our God is merciful, gracious, and compassionate God!

He was in the heart of God; **mercy is over judgment**. For what is mercy if there is no judgment? **Mercy is a far higher law than justice**, law. Joseph chose mercy rather than judgment of law.

God was with Joseph in his darkness. God understood Joseph's pain perfectly because God had the same pain but in far more significant way than Joseph's. God is Jesus' Father; Joseph will be Jesus' human father, too. Joseph had to pass the test as the human father of Jesus.

Did God have pain because of God's spouse? Yes? Or No? Yes! Hear the story of God's unbelievable love story through Hosea. Do you know that God in the Old Testament treated Israel as a lover and wife spiritually? The betrayal and love story of Hosea depicts God's love story toward his wayward, rebellious people.

God chose Hosea and talked to him. "Hosea, I want to show my love for the Israelites through your marriage life. Marry Gomer, a prostitute." "What? What did you say, Lord? I am a prophet; how can I marry a prostitute? What other people would talk about me?" However, he obeyed. He had married a woman God had chosen, Gomer!



The woman soon started to have another man and bore a baby from another man. Hosea's heart was broken, and he named the baby Lo-Ruhamah, "Forsaken child." And soon, she delivered another baby from another man. Hosea names it Lo-Ammi, "Not my baby." Hosea was a human being, not God. He had to endure a painful relationship. To be God's prophet is a challenging job. It was not enough. Gomer followed another man wholly and was eventually sold as an enslaved person. God let him go to her and redeem and love her again. He found her dirty, destitute, and chained in a slave market. Hosea paid the ransom for her slavery for fifteen shekels of silver and thirteen bushels of barley (Hosea 3:2).

How many times can you forgive your spouse who betrayed you? How great pain God must have endured? God knew the pain of betrayal of the spouse. God let Hosea love her continuously. Then Hosea said to her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you." (Hosea 3:3).

Joseph didn't know yet what was the truth of Mary's pregnancy. Instead of stoning her, accusing her, or disgracing her, he chose to be merciful in all his sacrifice. Joseph was in the heart of God. He had to pass the test to be the father of Jesus. He did. And he joined the glorious salvation story by becoming the father of Jesus.

Why did God put Joseph to the test before he became the father of Jesus? He had to prove himself to be worthy as the Father of Jesus. We remember that God also tested Jesus, who was a perfect human and a perfect God. Jesus had to prove to be worthy to be Messiah before his public ministry. The Holy Spirit led him into the desert, into the hunger and pain of humanity. The Devil worked hard to tempt and to ruin the salvation story prepared by God. Jesus passed the test. And Jesus became the perfect Messiah through the test of God. God knew Jesus would pass the test.

And God knew Joseph would pass the test from his all-knowing knowledge. An Angel said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit, you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” So, Joseph became the man who will name the baby “Jesus”.

What do we learn from Joseph? We must remember that God's watching over us in times like death. God never leaves you or forsakes you. It is never changing truth. God is with you to bless you! It is right to think that something incredible is waiting for us. **When the pain is deep, the blessing is even more amazing.** We might need help to do this. **Turn them over to God and receive the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.** And we turn to the word of Paul. “All things work together for good for those who love God.” (Romans 8:28). And the fulfilled promise will not be compared to the pain you went through. Hosea’s love was God’s love for us, and Jesus’ love for us.

In Christmas, Love came to us.

The Bible says that **Jesus’ Love is as strong as death. Its sparks are fiery flames, the fiercest blaze of all. Mighty waters cannot quench Love; rivers cannot sweep it away.**

This Love came to us, as Love incarnated.