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Sermon 528 - Matthew 1:18-25

## Hope for a Better Day

Where were you 10 years ago? What was your life like and what were you doing? 10 years ago or December 2009 we as a nation were coming off of the great recession. I remember moving to the area, and in my call packet it was listed that New Lenox would build a mall that would rival the mall of America. I remember the hubbub of Frankfort/New Lenox exploding like the next Naperville. It's why both Lincoln-way West and North were built. This place was going to boom. Until. December 2009 was still the middle of the great recession. Consumer confidence was very low, the housing bubble had burst and home values were dropping like crazy. No one wanted to buy houses because then they too would be stuck. It's an era when many college kids started working at Starbucks because their expensive degrees didn't land them a job. But here's the deal. 10 years later, and it is the great recession. Things have changed. The housing market is strong and it is a seller's market, the stock market has recovered and been on a quite a 10 year run. And as we look back at life 10 years ago. We can say four very simple but profound words. *This too shall pass*. The previous 10 had. You are not exactly the same person you were in the same circumstances. This is the nature of things - they come and go.

We are in a series called the thrill of Hope and looking for God to restore our hope. With hope you can do almost anything, and have everything. And today in particular we are looking at hope for a better day. That if you are in a crisis, if you are in intense pain, if you're in the type of situation that drives you to a panic attack every time you consider it - there is hope. *Hope is found in the understanding that this too shall pass*. I consider the ushering in of a new year and a new 10 years. It will be 2020. Best joke I've heard so far is that instead of Ryan Seacrest for the ball drop they should get Barbara Walters so she can say this is 2020. But it's a whole new opportunity and season. A new decade. Things do not stay the same. And actually this is good and bad. Because if you had a really good decade this too has passed. If you wanted to stay young this too shall pass. If you really like the car you are driving or if you don't this too shall pass.

One of the great passages of Scripture that remind us of the nature of the passing times is a psalm that says, "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Ps 30:5). The writer of this psalm is David, and the occasion for writing this psalm is the dedication of the temple. And when I read that I had to pause. Why because David didn't dedicate the temple. He was not allowed to build it, but his son Solomon would. So David so confident that his days would end - he too would pass. But he knew that this bright day would come because of the passing of time and the promises of God. God had promised his son Solomon's reign and God had promised the temple would be built by him it was a please plan - so he knew bright days were ahead. So he wrote a psalm about a time he would not be alive to see.

What are the great promises God has for us about brighter days ahead? Welcome by the way if you are not a Christian so glad you are here to consider the bright days because of God. But God has promised us many things. Jesus said I am going to prepare a place for you. I love

the prophet Isaiah says about that place, “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.” (Is 25:5-7). So we have a feast to look forward to better than any New Years or Christmas Eve celebration. And we have happiness - to the extent there is no more sadness or tears! *If you are in Christ you are assured of brighter days ahead.* And the thing about eternity is that it is eternal, and those days will not pass!

But if there was anyone who needed to know a struggle would pass. A dark night would turn into morning of rejoicing it is the man we get to consider today. Our lesson tells us the story of Joseph the earthly Father for the Son of God. And he was going to find out that one of his biggest decisions which was to marry a gal named Mary seems like the biggest mistake. What a blow. He was going to find out that she was pregnant and he knew it wasn't by him. But that day and that feeling would pass through the revelation of an angel. We get to hear his story now. There it is. Can you turn to your neighbor and say, “Times they are a changin'”

We are in the season of gift giving. Anyone finished with their shopping? Talk about times changing I like how 10 years ago we had to run out and get things if there were a few days away, and now they run to us via delivery Amazon Prime. But when it comes to giving there is a bit of mystique and mystery surrounding in the boxes and bows. You may have discussed what someone wants - but usually you don't go shopping with them put it in cart and they watch. You don't have them wrap the gift with you so on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day they are like. We'll of course. No there is work going on behind the scenes. They don't know if you got it or not, what present it is there are other presents that are just mysterious under the tree - and it's the surprise that makes it fairly marvelous.

Just as parents work behind the scenes for the kids, so also God does. Consider Joseph on this day. He is having a tough one. He finds out and Scripture doesn't say how. Perhaps rumors just going around 'til they finally get to him. Did you hear about Mary's pregnancy test - yep - poor Joseph. He finds out and what doesn't he know. He doesn't know about the activity of God working behind the scenes. Doesn't know that the angel showed up to Mary first and told her about this. Doesn't know that this child is the fulfillment of the greatest promise ever given. But we who know the story know this. *Even when we don't see God working, He is.* You might know Romans 8:28, “And in all things God works for the good of those who are called according to his purpose.” But I also love this passage from Ecclesiastes, “He also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” (3:11). Like a parent hiding those presents and going incognito for the great reveal we won't always know what God is up to.

One of my favorite illustrations of this is that of the backside of a tapestry. On the back side of the weaver's loom you see knots and snarls. And you're like why does that go there, and it's tangled and tied off here. This is a mess. But then you look to the other side, and it's pristine, ever string makes sense to give you a wonderful picture. God is in on the other side of the weaver's loom, and we on earth are behind it. Even when it seems a mess, he is making his own masterpiece that is at this time beyond us.

But what happens to your faith and my faith when we don't see what God is doing and it's just the mess? Do you ever accuse God for being unfair, unkind, or absent because you cannot see his activity. Does your faith ever limp because maybe you think God is out to get you. You know your sins and finally the bill has come around. You wonder where Joseph's faith life is at before the angel appears. Is he living his best life now, probably not. Does he have the faith of Job to say the Lord gave and the Lord took away, or does he have the doubt of the disciples after the crucifixion sweating in fear because it seems life is just chaotic and hard and there is no Messiah. Maybe he believes God is punishing him for past sins.

But what is the reality? God is working for Joseph and he has worked for us. When we can't see what he's doing he's still tying it together for us. So we repent of our doubt and disbelief. And we look to the cross of Christ. And we realize that on the cross was paid in full our punishment. So that now God is not trying to punish us for past or future sins if we are having a bad day. Yes, he might discipline us but this too is for our good. Rather he is the God of grace in all situations. He is the God who picked a nobody like Joseph to be a somebody for Him and His Kingdom. He would know this Jesus and exactly what this name means and what he came to do. That he would save us from the penalty of our sins. He is the same God who chooses us nobodies to become somebodies - the sons and daughters of the most High God. To know the greatest someday in Jesus, who saves us from our sins.

The activity of God reminds me of the gift of Baptism. How great we get to celebrate the baptism of Molly Mae Payer. And think. What does Molly know/logically about the activity of God today? I know babies are operating at genius levels, but we will never know what thoughts are firing in the synapsis of her mind. But it doesn't matter. All that does matter is this is the washing of rebirth and renewal for her soul. Perception and experience take a back seat to the powerful working of God which is all that matters. Taking simple water and Word to bring life to her soul. No one can fathom all that God has done or is doing - but regardless of our understanding he is working for our good just the same.

But there is more we can learn about Joseph's better day. Do you know what IPO stands for? Where are my investors IPO is initial public offering. That when a company is about to sell shares you have a chance to get in right away, the ground floor, before it takes off. And I wonder what it would be like to have gotten in on the ground floor of some stocks. Like Amazon - what if you had a phone call discussion and they were like online sales, shipped right to your door. We're going to start with mainly books but it will expand. I'm I the only one who only used Amazon for books? Imagine if you got in on the ground floor of Amazon. Or Google. Yeah, the internet is a thing now. But people need to find stuff and aol and yahoo just isn't cutting it. Google. And if you knew these things were going to be as successful as they turned out to be, how much greater the joy.

Joseph is receiving from an angel the greatest IPO. It's not about a share in stock, it's about a share in salvation and you Joseph are in on the ground floor of this, before everyone else. I considered what the angel says to Joseph, v. 22, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (22-23). And yes some of this would still be difficult for him, he hears the whispers. But he could be walking around. I got a secret, I got a secret. Better than a sure thing IPO, I know how salvation's going to happen. I'm in on the ground

floor. And when it comes to the revealing of God's plan this is a better than getting a good stock tip. Peter talks about those who had investigated the exact times and places the Messiah would be born and suffer and die - and those who searched intently didn't find it - but Joseph has a secret. About which Peter says, "Even angels long to look into these things." (1 Peter 1:12). *And a better day is possible through the revelation of God.*

Which reminds me of one of the most disturbing things as a pastor. It's when people lose their sense of wonder over the revelation of Jesus Christ. You ever see a child lose their wonder. You took them to the Zoo or to Disneyworld or to see Santa, and for a time you could see their eyes light up and the excitement was so palpable you could feel it. You lived vicariously through their thrill. But somewhere along the way they learn the dead eyes. Oh. Seen that before. And soon they've seen so much that nothing wows them.

I've seen Christians get dead eyes when it comes to the Gospel. Oh, I'm forgiven. Oh that's how God feels about me. Oh, it's all for free. That's great pastor, can we move on what's next. It actually doesn't matter what's next if you don't dwell deeply in that. It's something that is common so that in the book of Revelation there was this warning, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first." (Rev 2:4). You've lost the sense of wonder for the reality is this. The Creator God placed himself in human flesh as a helpless baby. The author of love loved in a way unfathomable. For those who were his enemies, he gave his life. This Jesus born in Bethlehem died on a hill Called Golgotha. So that the punishment for each and every sin would be paid. And though he died he conquered death. Rising from the dead 3 days later. Assuring us there is a better day ahead. A better eternity. And because of this though weeping lasts for the night here on earth, rejoicing comes in that morning with him and will remain going on and on for an eternal praise party. And the knowledge of this is better than knowing Amazon back in the day. Angels longed to know what has been revealed and may we never lose our sense of wonder. May we also look for the further revelations of God found in Scripture.

You ever have one of those Bible moments struck by something new? Colossians study we hear God referred to as a mystery. I love that God revealed to us is a mystery. Means there are things we will and won't know when it comes to him. Or I was struck by something that never really stuck as when I read it. I was reading about how Paul preached, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." (Acts 20:20). So I remember that preaching is to pass on what is beneficial and helpful. The greatest of which is a Savior from sin, who loves you even more than you know right now. *You too can have better days exploring more of God's revelation.* As we do this we'll be walking around with the secret knowledge of God.

But before we leave the story of Joseph something I am struck by is his obedience and his goodness. Like Mary he simply get's up to do what God told him to do. Maybe unlike Mary and true to being a man he isn't verbose. Doesn't ask questions, scripture doesn't record him saying anything, but he goes to do. Yet before this I was struck by something and maybe you too - when he is having his worst day ever, receiving the worst news ever, what's it say, "Yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." (1:19).

What this reminds me of is all the people who choose to do good by others. Like Bears Kahlil Mack. He made the news because he did the Walmart Layway payoff in his hometown of Ft. Pierce, FL. Or a trend is those leaving cookies and snacks for delivery drivers. Or maybe

you've met someone who consciously tries to breath life into others and do good by them. I've met some of you here today. And Joseph gives us marching orders. *Even if you're not having a better day, you can play a part in someone else's better day.* Joseph who was hurting in that moment and did not choose to let his hurt hurt someone else. How good he was at forgiveness, how righteous he was.

Do you think this meant something for Mary? His attitude, do you think she remembered his goodness? Or let me say it this way? Do you remember the acts of those, and the words of those who chose to make your day better by what they did or said? And you may have never known what they were going through. But their words and what they did stuck. In a world where this too shall pass, some things remain and it's the acts of love when we choose to play a part so someone else can have a better day. May God give you a vision of what that looks like for you now, and how this might be accomplished. May he remind you that as you do for others, and even if you don't - he still works for you. And may you gather in just couple days, ready to experience the wonder of the message of Christmas and celebrate with all you got. The revelation of God that Jesus the Savior is born. Amen.