

Overview

Biblical Passage Matthew 1:18-25

Supporting Passages John 1:1-14

Memory Verse Matthew 1:21

Biblical Truth Joseph faithfully obeyed the Lord's leading, paving the way for Jesus' birth.

Context Joseph was a committed fiancée. His lineage was full of both sinners and saints. And, his lineage was evidence that a baby named Jesus had been the plan all along. Matthew 1:1-16 represents thousands of verses worth of stories about those whose lives were redirected onto the restorative purposes of a loving God long before He would come alive among them through an infant. The setup done, God, the Heavenly Father and Joseph, the earthly dad would witness the birth of a Messiah, and a son. A long-awaited coming had now come.

Learning Goals

- Your students will examine Joseph's faithfulness and obedience leading up to the birth of Christ.
- Your students will understand how their own faithfulness and obedience to God paves the way for them to be used by Him in this world.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.

- Pray that your students will understand the need for obedience to God's commands.
- Pray that your students will appreciate Joseph's own obedience amidst times of confusion.
- Pray that your students will be inspired to be obedient in sharing God's redemptive plan with others.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

Jesus' coming was no surprise. The Old Testament foretold throughout, from beginning to end, that a deliverer would come through an actual delivery. God longed to do all that it would take to restore a people whom He loved into the relationship that He had desired all along.

We can only imagine what was going through Joseph's mind. The bond between Joseph and his young wife must have been stronger than ever. They had endured critical speculation, potential ridicule, interrupted plans, and unfair hardship, as a result of believing in and obeyed God's will. In this moment, holding the Immanuel, Jesus, all they endured surely would have been forgotten.

Importance

This passage supports two essential truths: **God Is** and **Jesus is God and Savior**. Simply stated, the plan God had all along to come to be among us and restore us into that relationship came to pass through the womb of a virgin girl upon the birth of Jesus. That simple occurrence had profound implications on all that preceded it as well as upon all that would follow. All that God would do to carry the message of His love into all the world made sense because of the mission that Jesus established for the people He would call His church.

Interpretation

Matthew 1:18-19: Matthew set up the birth of Jesus by reminding his readers of the lineage of Jesus, which was the lineage of Joseph. Joseph had nothing to do with the conception of Jesus. But, in a patriarchal culture that regarded the mother simply as a conduit for the child, that lineage was important. Joseph's heritage mattered. This element from the cultural background is helpful in understanding how significant it was when Jesus would later teach that those who followed Him would become "children of God" (Mt. 5), since this implied their lives would take on God's characteristics.

Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. A serious and binding commitment in Jewish culture, being engaged was not breakable. In the eyes of the Jewish law, an engagement represented marriage, with a lifelong commitment. The wedding feast made it official and offered the chance to consummate the marriage sexually. That feast was yet to come, and then Mary became pregnant. This would have been a disgrace to her, to her family, and to Joseph in Jewish culture. Speculation, even in Joseph's mind, would certainly have included an adulterous affair. Joseph was clearly troubled, but also clearly loved Mary. He committed to make it a private matter.

Matthew 1:20-23: Joseph was trying to devise a plan to privately break off the marriage. In the process, God stepped into the strategy room to ensure that Joseph would show up in the labor and delivery room. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, assuring him of Mary's faithfulness. She had not cheated on Joseph. Instead, she had been chosen.

How did the Holy Spirit conceive a child in Mary? Suffice it to say that the God who created Adam from dirt could also do whatever needed to be done to conceive a child inside of Mary.

Joseph's excitement of being a father with Mary was reassured, too. The significant task of the father naming the child was handed to Joseph to fulfill. Jewish dads carried this responsibility. Joseph was instructed to name the baby *Jesus*, meaning "God saves." God let Joseph in on the significance of this baby to be born, just as He had let Mary know. Jesus would save the world from their sins. This promise would have carried with it implications that this was the Messiah. Joseph had to be overcome with the significance of this moment and this birth.

To put this into historical significance for his readers, Matthew reminded them of a prophecy he suggested was fulfilled in Jesus. Matthew pulled together promises from Isaiah about the coming "Immanuel" (Isa. 7-9). The name "Immanuel," meaning "God with us," may be the most basic and most accurate summary of the Gospel. This "good news" was the first of many prophecy references that Matthew included. Demonstrating Jesus as the promised Messiah established who was really in the delivery room of the Deliverer. God the Father and Joseph the father, both, were there. And, Joseph was now reassured to follow through and marry Mary. Their love was secure.

Matthew 1:24-25: Joseph did what God commanded him to do. He stayed with Mary. He married her. They did not have sexual relations, even though newlyweds, until after Jesus was born. And, Joseph named the baby Jesus.

Joseph's obedience to the heavenly Father was crucial in order for the plan, birthed before time began, to culminate in the day of the birth of Christ. The earthly father's obedience to the heavenly Father's commands helped paved the way for Jesus to be born.

Implications

We can only imagine the moment the overwhelming feelings at the Bethlehem stable. Joseph held the Messiah in his hands. Was he overwhelmed with the responsibility of being the God-child's dad? Intimate relationship with God and abundant life here and now, as well as eternally, would be available to all people as a result of this birth.

How can you help your students begin to consider their own emotions caused by Jesus' birth? Teenagers need to consider how they personally feel in response to God's plan to send His Son. Do they understand their redemption? If so, have they ever considered how they might personally respond to God as a result? Consider how you might challenge them to truly express their feelings and emotions to God for sending His Son, Jesus, to this world to redeem all humankind.

Teaching Plan

Connect Activity

Drama: Matt's World

(5 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will watch Matt, a chronic disobeyer, stumble through life.

(5 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the drama. Enlist at least three students to perform the drama.

Allow the students to perform the drama for your class. Once the drama is over remind students that although it's easy to laugh at Matt, each of them (and you) are guilty of disobeying. Say: **Today we're going to look at an individual and how obeying God may have seemed like the hardest thing for this person to do.**

Explore Activity

Master Teacher Key Study: Obedience Is Key

(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Matthew 1:18-25 to see Joseph's obedience to God's plan.

(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the Master Teacher Key Study. Print one copy for your own use. Also download the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Print a copy for each learner. Also provide pens.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Matthew 1:18-25.

Transform Activity

Deeper Discussion

(10-12 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss how obedience affects their witness.

(10-12 minutes, easy set-up)

Lead a discussion by using the following questions:

- **Describe how you are convicted personally about disobedience to God. How do you react to this?**
- **Why does the idea of obedience bring up such negative connotations? What is it about our nature that desires to live according to our own rules?**
- **How does disobedience affect your relationship with Christ?**
- **How does disobedience to God's commands affect how others see Christ in you?**

Creative Prayer

(5-10 minutes, moderate set-up)

Students will write short expressions of prayer or confession to God.

(5-10 minutes, east set-up)

Provide slips of paper for students to write on and something with which to write. Provide a trashcan.

Distribute a slip of paper and a writing utensil for each student. Say: **There are many of us who have been disobedient lately. Maybe we have even led someone away from Christ through our disobedience. For others, God has been putting something on our hearts we have yet to respond to. Still, others of us might need to confess something to God and set our hearts right so we might draw closer to Him this Christmas. For any of you, this is the time to do those things.** Inform students that you are going to open a time of silent reflection. Encourage students to take a moment to seek God in prayer. Then, instruct them to write on their strips what God has put in their heart. Maybe this is a confession to God, a prayer of forgiveness, a promise to follow through, or an appeal for a fresh start. Have students write this out, pray over it, then come to the trashcan and tear up their slip and throw it away. Close the time of prayer by assuring students that God has heard their prayer and will meet their needs.

Christmas
Obedience Paves the Way

Matt's World

Characters:

Matt
Narrator
Worker
Dog Walker
Fisherman

Props:

If you want to use the same character(s) to play the parts of the Worker, Dog Walker, and Fisherman, make placards with the different names on them to hang around their neck as they change parts.

If you choose, you could have a construction worker's hat, a small stuffed dog, and a toy fishing rod. If you wanted to go all out, you could have a canoe for Matt to ride in in the final scene.

Costumes:

None, or you could costume for the construction worker, dog walker, or fisherman.

*(Scene opens with MATT facing crowd.
NARRATOR is off stage.)*

NARRATOR: This is Matt

(MATT waves.)

NARRATOR: Matt is a pretty good guy. *(MATT looks pleased with himself.)* He makes pretty good grades. He's a pretty good friend. *(MATT agreeing earnestly.)* And he's pretty good at baseball and at the drums. *(MATT fakes a very serious baseball swing.)* However, Matt is absolutely terrible at obeying. *(MATT nods head sheepishly.)* Like the other day . . .

(MATT pantomimes walking down the street, looking up at the sky, maybe whistling a tune to himself.)

WORKER: Whoa, buddy! I wouldn't go any further. A manure truck ran off the road and hit a power line. There's two feet of doodie covering the road. And the power lines are down. Go any further and you'll get electrocuted!

(MATT gives the worker a big high five, then, thumbs up. MATT then continues right on walking in the same direction. Fakes stepping in manure, maybe wading through manure, making gross face, but keeps walking. Then, MATT fakes getting electrocuted.)

NARRATOR: Yup, that day was a shocking experience. And a stinky one. Or, how about that one time . . .

(MATT pantomiming eating an ice-cream cone or drinking a soft drink.)

DOG WALKER: *(DOG WALKER pantomimes leaning over and petting dog, loving on them, etc. Then proceeds to walk dog in front of MATT. MATT bends over as if to pet dog.)* Oh, no! Stop! *(Nervously laughing)* Sorry to be so excitable, it's just that Snicker Doodle here is kind of a biter. She was trained to herd lions on the Serengeti. I just recently adopted her. She hasn't quite gotten used to people. So, I wouldn't pet her if I were you.

(MATT, smiles, stares at the woman, then bends down to pet the dog. MATT pantomimes getting attacked by little dog.)

NARRATOR: See what I mean? Snicker Doodle made a big impression on Matt that day. Quite a few impressions, actually. And then there was that one time . . .

(MATT is pantomiming fishing from a boat. He is casting his line, maybe wobbling a bit as the boat rocks, then reeling his line in.)

FISHERMAN: *(FISHERMAN from shore calls out MATT as MATT floats on past him.)* Hey, buddy! Nice

morning. Caught anything.
(MATT pantomimes a huge fish.) Yeah, sure. Well, good luck. Oh, and you might want to turn around. You know there is a raging waterfall just around the bend. Have a great day!

(MATT waves frantically. He casts his line, then pantomimes hearing an unusual sound. Looks over and sees waterfall. Freaks out. Throws fishing pole. Drops to knees and starts paddling in the water away from the water fall. Pantomimes falling down waterfall.)

NARRATOR: The big one got away that day, for sure. *(MATT comes back center stage.)* Like I said, Matt is a pretty good guy *(MATT smiling)*, just maybe not so smart. *(MATT frowns and looks at narrator)* I mean, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to obey, does it? *(MATT shakes head)* So, do yourself a favor. Don't be Matt. *(MATT sheepishly nods head.)*

The End

**MASTER TEACHER
KEY STUDY**

Obedience Is Key

Outline

Intro: We can never understand God's plan or how our lives will ultimately fit into it.

1. Trusting in our own understanding will always lead us astray (Matthew 1:18-19).

Use any of these activities you choose as you teach the outline to your students. The activities correspond to the points in the outline. If you plan to use the Illustration for the third point, you will need to provide a bar of soap.

Activities

Description: Because of our finite, human understanding, we can never fully grasp the complexity of God's plan. Isaiah 55:9 says "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Our role in God's plan is to simply be obedient to His leading and His ways. He will lovingly use us at His pleasure.

Illustration: According to a website, quantum physics is defined as: "a branch of science that deals with discrete, indivisible units of energy called quanta as described by the Quantum Theory."

There are five main ideas represented in Quantum Theory:

1. Energy is not continuous, but comes in small but discrete units.
2. The elementary particles behave both like particles and like waves.
3. The movement of these particles is inherently random.
4. It is physically impossible to know both the position and the momentum of a particle at the same time. The more precisely one is known, the less precise the measurement of the other is.
5. The atomic world is nothing like the world we live in."

Try explaining quantum physics to an infant. Do you think she or he will understand it? Of course not. It's impossible. Yet, it is equally impossible for us to try and comprehend the intricacies of God's plan for His creation. It is quite literally not meant to be achieved. (<http://library.thinkquest.org/3487/qp.html>)

Description: Joseph was a good man. And when he found out Mary was pregnant, he used his best judgment in planning how to deal with it. He wanted to "divorce her quietly." Even his solution proved his goodness. Joseph didn't want Mary to have to undergo any public trial. However, Joseph was looking at the situation through human understanding. We will see that his ways were counter to God's ways.

Illustration: Google a picture of the *Actaea pachypoda* plant and see how beautiful its berries are. They look like yogurt covered treats. Yet, eat one, and you will be in a world of hurt: "The cardiogenic toxins in these berries have a sedative effect on the cardiac muscle tissues. Therefore consuming these berries can lead to cardiac arrest, and eventually death of a person." Sometimes, what looks like a good thing can actually be quite harmful. Sometimes, we may think we know what's best for us, when in reality God has a much better plan.

(<http://www.organichealthblog.com/2009/5-poisonous-berries/>)

Application: Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." We must acknowledge that God's ways are infinitely better than our ways.

2. Obedience to God's ways always leads to good (Matthew 1:20-25).

Description: God revealed through the angel that He had different plans for Mary and Joseph. God revealed the baby in Mary's womb was the Immanuel, the promised Messiah, and had been conceived not by man but by the Holy Spirit. God's plan for Joseph and Mary was for them to marry. God's plan was different than Joseph's plan.

Illustration: Hiker Ross Mason got lost in the woods. Really, really lost. What was supposed to be a two or three-day hike turned into an almost eight-day ordeal that nearly caused him his life. Luckily, a search party rescued him. A news story reported this about his trial: "[Mason] said it was a combination of things that led to his situation, from the wrong turn at the trail, to not consulting the map, to his filtration system failing to his boot blowing out." Despite our best intentions, we are capable of leading ourselves astray. (http://www.scsun-news.com/ci_13848541)

Application: We must first seek out God's will in prayer and Scripture reading when we are trying to make decisions. Then, we must act in accordance with His leading. We must never make a decision without allowing for God's will to influence our choices.

Conclusion: Obedience is key to living according to God's plan.

Description: Joseph ultimately obeyed God's leading, thus, making himself available to be used by God.

Application: God's plan has been in motion since before Creation. God is eternal, therefore, so are His ways. We can't thwart God's plan by our disobedience. For instance, had Joseph decided not to marry Mary, Jesus would still have been born. Joseph was not going to thwart God's plans. However, because Joseph was obedient, he put himself in a position to be used in a powerful way by God. Our goal should be the same.



Christmas Lesson

OBEDIENCE PAVES THE WAY

biblical passage: Matthew 1:18-25

memory verse: Matthew 1:21 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.

TEACHING POINTS

1. Trusting in our own understanding sometimes _____ _ _____.
2. Obedience to God's ways always _____ _ _____.

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe how you are convicted personally about disobedience to God. How do you react to this?
- Why does the idea of obedience bring up such negative connotations? What is it about our nature that desires to live according to our own rules?
- How does disobedience affect your relationship with Christ?
- How does disobedience to God's commands affect how others see Christ in you?

