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Pursuing Peace
Matthew 1:18–2:23
December 6th, 2015, Jeff Germs
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Matthew 1:18–2:23 (NLT)

18This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

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20As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

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22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: 23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’ ” 24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

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1Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, 2“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

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3King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. 4He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

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5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: 6‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’ ”

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7Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. 8Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

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9After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

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11They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold,

frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

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¹³After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” ¹⁴That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”

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¹⁶Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. ¹⁷Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸“A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”

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¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰“Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

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²¹So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²²But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

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This morning we are going to take a look at Joseph, the step-father of Jesus. We don’t have very much information about him. There are a few snippets, though, so we can put together a bit of a character study of what kind of a man he was.

We are going to try to step into Joseph’s shoes. What would it have been like to be him in first century Israel? Joseph and his little family were refugees. They were on the run from a a crazy, paranoid king who wanted to kill their little baby. You have to wonder how Joseph could have maintained any semblance of peace in the middle of everything he went through.

First of all, going back to where he first enters the stage of biblical history, he was engaged to who he thought was an upright moral young Jewish girl and he finds out she is pregnant. To a Jew in that era this was very serious. In that social milieu engagement was a legally binding contract that needed a certificate of divorce to break.

And according to Old Testament Mosaic law if someone committed adultery the penalty was death by stoning (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:23-24). So, Joseph faced a dilemma here. Try to get into his head. How would he have felt? We can only guess, of course, but I would imagine he was filled with all kinds of emotions.

You see, Joseph was raised in a religious system filled with teachers and leaders who held themselves up as purveyors of the truth and guardians and arbiters of the law. These were

people who had stopped learning because, in their eyes, they already had all the answers. They were studied in the Scriptures. A good number of them did not listen to learn. They listened to judge and criticize. And as soon as you think you have learned something you stop growing. So, what would it have been like to be Joseph in that setting?

Add to all of that the fact that Joseph would have felt cheated by his fiancé. If you have ever been jilted or hurt by someone you love you would understand some of the emotions Joseph might have been dealing with. Put yourself in his shoes for a bit.

Matthew called Joseph a good man in the NLT. Other translations call him just, or righteous. I would imagine his emotions were pulled in a lot of directions. Because he was a good man he wanted to do the thing that would honour God. He knew if he followed through on his marriage to Mary people would talk. They would point their fingers. They would judge, because that's what people do. They would make his and Mary's life miserable. They would be relegated to second class citizens, at best, in a religious system that did not give second chances. They would carry a stigma around wherever they went.

And as we saw from the passage that we read, Joseph had decided it was best to quietly divorce Mary so she was not publicly shamed. He was not going to follow through on his commitment to marry her.

How could Joseph have peace when he knew there would be consequences?

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Well, of course, we know from the story that Joseph was reassured by an angel in a dream (Matthew 1:20) that Mary had not actually been unfaithful to him. And not only that, but she was carrying God incarnate. Try and take in the weight of that for a minute. If he went ahead with the marriage there would be consequences, not only would he be in danger of being marginalized by society, but little did he know, he would be running for the life of his family as refugees for several years.

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From Nazareth to Bethlehem, from Bethlehem to Egypt, from Egypt back to Nazareth. These were not just quick day trips, and they did not have Airmiles. On all of those trips, several hundred kilometres, on foot, or riding a donkey, Mary would have either been very pregnant or carrying a young child. You have to wonder what it would have been like to be them.

Now, when Joseph agreed to go ahead with the marriage he wouldn't have known the dangers that lay ahead with Herod chasing them down, but he would have had this word from the Lord to fall back on.

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“do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Now, angels are messengers from God. So, what Joseph received in this dream was a word from God. ***“Do not be afraid...”*** I would imagine he would have looked back to this word from God every time he was afraid and tempted to give up. Every time someone pointed their long judgemental finger at them he would have gone back to this word from the Lord for reassurance. ***“Do not be afraid...”***

Every time he was tempted give in to the shame others wanted him to feel he would have gone back to this word from the Lord. **"Do not be afraid..."** Every time the road forward looked impossible he would have looked back to this word from the Lord for courage to continue the journey. **"Do not be afraid..."** Every time his peace was disturbed by thoughts of inadequacy, or injustice, or fear of failure, or people who stood in judgement over him he would go back to this word from the Lord. **"Do not be afraid..."**

That is the same thing we need to do when we are tempted to give in to fear or shame. Go back to what God's Word says about himself, and about us. How many of you are tempted at times by some of these same things that Joseph may have been tempted with? Are you tempted to give up on someone? Are you tempted to give in to fear? Are you tempted to give in to shame. We have God's Word to go back to. Look at what he says about us.

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1 John 4:16-19 (NLT)

16We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. 17And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

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18Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. 19We love each other because he loved us first.

We need to, and it is possible, to get to the place where we believe from our hearts that it is God who is our judge and not other people. And it is God, because of his perfect love for us, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus. So, because of Jesus' death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, we have peace with God, and nobody can take this away. The old has gone the new has come. We have been made new in the past perfect tense. We already have peace with God. We simply need to live in the truth of that peace. We always have a choice. We may not feel like we do at times, but we do.

You are perfectly loved by God. Nothing you do will make him love you any more and nothing you do will make him love you any less. He loves you completely and unconditionally and that changes everything. All fear is driven away when we fully comprehend that. The peace God follows.

Last week Dylan shared a very brief snapshot of his life with me. The story covered just a few short hours, but as I listened to him tell it and how he responded to his circumstances, I was sitting on the edge of my seat. It was a rollercoaster of emotions and I was actually very proud of how he responded to his circumstances. I felt compelled to ask him to share it with you because Dylan has grown in the Lord quite a bit in the last while. And if these circumstances would have happened just a few short months prior to this he likely would not have responded as he did.

Dylan Sawatsky

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2 Corinthians 4 says - **16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

While I've read this verse and many like it for so long, its often hard to directly connect it to my own experiences.

Recently over a cup of coffee, I shared a story with Jeff. It was a fairly trivial story as it wasn't about people or relationship or spirituality. It was about hopes, frustrations, and a ridiculous motorcycle.

Before i get into the tale I told Jeff, let me fill you in on who I really am so that we have some more context. I am broken. I struggle deeply with anxiety and fear. It's hard for me to expose my vulnerabilities in a setting like this in front of all of you, but I feel like my continuing central struggle is with my shame.

I know that the eternal consequence of my sin was paid for when Jesus was crucified and that he has forgiven me, but so often, I fail to forgive me. So many times in my life I've seen pain and disappointment and I know I didn't respond how 2 Corinthians tells us to. I could show you countless patterns where: I experience the disappointments // I feel I must deserve disappointment and pain because every way i've fallen short // I wrestle with depression and hopelessness in a perceived life of consequence and pain and consequence and pain. -Not so much fun, but you know what is fun ? Motorcycles!

When I think back to life when I was growing up, many of the fun times involved motorcycles. My parents were gracious enough to teach me and my brother to ride dirt bikes while we were very young and had bikes for us to ride throughout our childhood. To a kid, theres nothing quite like the freedom and excitement that comes from blasting through a field on a motorcycle.

Since I refuse to grow up, I recently purchased a motorcycle. it's a little quicker than the old ones but the joy while riding is still the same. To experience full freedom without extra stipulations though, you need a motorcycle license.

So I had taken a written test and skills test but I needed to take a road test. Due to buying a bike so late in the season, there was only one date available for me to test before spring and it was in Courtenay. I booked an afternoon off work to make the appointment. I practiced hand signals, shoulder checks, and driving not a km/h over the posted limit. Finally the day came and set off on my quest to Courtenay to seize my motorcycle license freedom.

At this time theres two things to note. 1) I am terrible at processing disappointment and consequence 2) a consequence of my shortcomings is that i could only afford the cheapest used motorcycle on craigslist.

So I set off on the highway enjoying the wind in my helmet and my imminent success. As I rode, I mentally went over all the things a fastidious, law abiding motorcyclist does. While visualizing success, I hear my engine change tone as it begins to stall, one cylinder at a time. I thought I had repaired this particular issue as the bike has run fine for commuting to work for the previous month. But the bike has completely stalled now and I'm not even close to Courtenay.

The battery may be dead but my hopes are still high so I frantically manage to bump start the 450 lb motorcycle. I end up push starting the bike twice more over the next 10 minutes as my hopes started to sink. I found that if I kept the speed down to 60 or so, it would keep running, however as I was going slow near the shoulder of the HWY, my rear tire popped.and the bike is dead.

My hopes come crashing down. I start calling tire shops who apparently don't rescue stranded motorcyclists. However, I call a motorcycle shop 2 miles away that finally agrees to rescue me AND repair my bike but there's only 30 min before my road test.

once I arrive at the motorcycle shop, I find out that after paperwork and insurance, they will lend me a motorcycle to do the road test. My hopes are restored if I can make it in time. As it happens, the only available loaner motorcycle looks like harley and is over twice the size of any motorcycle I've ever ridden. I think it's heavier than my first car. As I struggle to maneuver this iron beast with only MPH on its gauges though every missed traffic light en route. I arrive 10 minutes late to the access centre and miss my opportunity to take the test. It looks like I won't be able to get my license this year after all.

As I was walking back to return this oversized motorcycle, the examiner approaches me and the next motorist that was to take the test has an expired license and I can take his test slot. We have to hurry though as we are already well into the last time slot. Hope are restored.

The examiners have me rigged up with a radio and a visi-vest as we do a pre trip on the hog. I'm trying to figure out where 50 km/h is on my MPH speedometer when all of the sudden the examiner says that my headlight is out. I search all over the foreign feeling motorcycle for some switch to turn it on but there is none. I was given 18min to return with fully functional motorcycle before the time had run out.

As I attempted to go from Cliff Ave. to Courtenay motorsports, have a bulb changed (nope, a fuse changed), and return; my hope was yet again waning. I can neither confirm nor deny the speed or manner of road safety on that particular leg of the journey but regardless I was too slow to make the test window.

The examiners had gone home and I would not be leaving with a complete license. I made my way back both to pay for my unbudgeted motorcycle repairs and return home empty-handed. It was hard to ponder the experiences of the day due to push starting the bike 8-9 more times before it had completely died in Merville (about 40 minutes from home). I would like to think I would have continued to push start it and press on but unfortunately the sun had gone down. You see, If you have a full motorcycle license, you're allowed to ride home at night.

I don't have one....

So, what happened next? There you are standing at the side of road, a broken man on a broken motorcycle, and even if your bike was working you couldn't have ridden it because it was past sundown. How did you feel at that moment?

If this had happened a few months ago how would you have responded and felt?

What was different this time?

This motorcycle experience is a microcosm of your life and at each step along the way you had a choice to make in how you would respond. You were a broken man on a broken motorcycle.

Before we celebrate communion together I would like read Ephesians 3:14-21 over us. This is how much God wants us to know we are loved. And then Dylan is going to sing a song written by Shane and Shane called ***Tho You Slay Me***.

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Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV)

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

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And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

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20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

When we are tempted to give in to fear, or shame, or to believe lies that come from the enemy of our souls we need to go back to God's word and meditate on it. We need to get rooted and established in his love. Marinate in the love of God. Meditate on **Ephesians 3:14-21**. Meditate on **1 John 4:16-19**. There is nothing more important than knowing how much you are loved by the God who is sovereign over everything. There is nothing more important than knowing that you cannot make God love you any more than he already does and there is nothing you can do to make him love you any less. He just completely and unconditionally loves you. His love is what matters and knowing that truth at a heart level changes everything.

**Tho You Slay Me
Shane and Shane**

[25]

**I come, God, I come
Return to the Lord
The one who's broken
The one who's torn me apart
You strike down to bind me up
You say You do it all in love
That I might know You in Your suffering**

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**Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the One who's all I need**

[27]

**My heart and flesh may fail
The earth below give way
But with my eyes, with my eyes I'll see the Lord
Lifted high on that day
Behold, the Lamb that was slain
And I'll know every tear was worth it all**

[28]

**Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the One who's all I need**

[29]

**Though tonight I'm crying out
Let this cup pass from me now
You're still all that I need
You're enough for me
You're enough for me**

[30]

**Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship**

[31]

Sing a song to the One who's all I need
Sing a song to the One who's all I need