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Have you ever wondered if God has a plan for your life? A plan for your life, personally? I remember watching the talk show host Bill Maher on one of his shows where he was interviewing a person who claimed to be religious, and in fact a Christian, which Bill Maher is strongly not, and he asked him in a very convicting way, "You don't really believe that God has a plan for your life, do you?" And then he went on and on railing on how Christians believe so many things that don't have any evidence and that it's preposterous to believe in such wild tales as a virgin birth, or walking on water, or turning water into wine. And he went on and made the argument sound so absurd that God would have such an active role in someone's life that he got his guest to give in and say that even though he does believe in God, he didn't really think that God actually had a plan for him.

Well I'm here to tell you today, that God does have a plan for your life today, just as certain as God has a plan for mine. God has a plan that we must individually discover through Jesus Christ, in a personal relationship with "Emmanuel", God with us.

Now there have been many times that we all may have claimed that following God's way seems difficult. Time and time again we seem to be "blowing it", and we may ask God, "If I just had a little more faith, then things would be better." So let me ask you, "How much faith does it take to be a Christian?" ...

Only enough to believe that God would not lie to us. And if that is our problem, well, it was Joseph's problem too.

As we hear the text for today about Joseph, we hear how Joseph was engaged to this woman, a woman he no doubt considered to be the perfect one for him. He was making plans for his marriage only to discover that Mary, the one he was engaged to, was already pregnant. Can you imagine how disappointed he must have been, for the one he loved had been unfaithful?

Now being open to God's supreme law to love others, is one way to understanding God, and Joseph must have been open in that way, for our text says that Joseph, being a just and righteous man, considered not to humiliate the girl he loved, but instead to quietly put her away. Apparently, Joseph had not closed his mind to the possibility that God had a plan in all this confusion. Then the text says, he lay down in his state of confusion to rest, when suddenly he was confronted with a dream. In this dream an angel of God came to him and said, "Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for the child that has been conceived inside her is the very Son of God and has been conceived by the Holy Spirit." For this is the fulfillment of the age-old prophecy that a

virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name, Jesus, Emmanuel, which means “God with us”.

I have tried to think how I would have reacted had I been, Joseph, and I wonder if I might not have blown it. I’m not sure as a young man whether I would have done as Joseph did. But, you know, God comes to us, God comes to us many times a day, challenging us to trust his Word, even when things seem to be falling to pieces. He asks us in our family life, when relationships are breaking, to place out trust in him and believe that his plan is going to be fulfilled in our life, if we will only give in to His control. Whatever is going in your life today, God challenges you, as He does me, each day, to be willing to trust Him, even when chaos itself seems to have broken loose – and that is exactly what Joseph did. He trusted God. How much faith does it take to be a victorious Christian? Only enough to believe that God would not lie.

A well-known theologian once defined faith as the “ultimate risk”. That’s being willing to follow the one you acknowledge as God, anywhere he leads, even though you don’t know in advance where you are being led. The Bible says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for he or she who comes to God must believe that God is, and that God is a rewarder of those who seek him.” Down through the pages of biblical history we see this pattern over and over again, where men and women of God, are called to trust God with no present evidence of the future.

Noah was called to build an ark in preparations for a flood, and was ridiculed and mocked for his apparent foolishness. Abraham was called to leave the grandeur of Ur of the Chaldees, and a position of respect among fellow citizens, to become a wandering nomad. Moses was called to challenge Pharaoh’s authority and power on behalf of a trembling, grumbling Israel. And David, no more than a child with a sling-shot, was called to fight the mighty Philistine Goliath. And the list goes on and on. Each one in their own way proclaiming, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.”

In the Christian life, the blessing of God becomes a reality after we have demonstrated, before God, our faith and willingness to trust Him. You see, God wants to know if our faith is in Him, or if it is in human logic and physical evidence. And as long as we are basing our decisions on those physical things that lead us to decide through human logic alone, there is no way we can ever claim the decision by faith, that is purely trust in the Lord. God wanted to bless the people of Israel. For ages he promised to send the Messiah, the Christ, and now because Joseph, in the face of utter confusion, is willing to trust God anyway, the promised Messiah is born, flesh and blood, into the world. The promise is fulfilled, after the exercising of faith. He shall be called “Emmanuel” which means that God has actually visited us in flesh and blood so that we don’t have to

wonder what he is like anymore. We can see for ourselves, as we look at Jesus and experience in him, exactly what God's love is like.

Just as fantastic is the fact that God wants to bless every one of us here today! But God needs to know first..."Who are we trusting?" In what have we placed our ultimate confidence? Is it in material evidence given us ahead of time? Is it in seeing gigantic problems in our life resolved, before, we come to worship? Or is it in stepping out in faith and saying to God, "I believe you...and even though I can't see where you're taking me...I praise your name anyway! I continue to worship you, God, for you are the only one worthy of my trust." And at that moment God unfolds his blessing. He unfolded that blessing to Joseph. He gave him a marvelous dream in which the angel, in a sense said, "Do not fear, Joseph, for you have been appointed by God to receive a blessing that will in turn be a blessing to all peoples."

Have you ever wondered where we'd be today if Joseph had not trusted God? The Law of Joseph's day commanded death, as the punishment for committing adultery. That means that according to Israelite justice, Mary could have literally been put to death as her pregnancy was discovered. And through that death, the child conceived would never have been born. Where would we be if Joseph had not trusted God? And where will other people be if you and I refuse to trust God?

Where will our children be...where will our husbands and wives be...where will all the people who have never heard of Jesus be if you and I, because of human logic, reject the simple message that God has done it all for us, by becoming one of us through a "virgin-birth"?

If there is one word here to remember it is the simple word "TRUST". Trust the Lord. Here is where it's all at! Here's where God breaks into our lives and makes Christmas the vital, living experience he intended it to be when Jesus was born in flesh and blood some 2000 years ago. Trust, trust him...trust him by placing everything you have in God's hands, knowing that God is the only one who is trustworthy. Trust him with the little things. Trust him with the big things. Trust him now for the plan he has for your on-going life, for God has a plan.

In any critical moment, the danger is, that you and I will by human logic, in the flesh, impose our plan upon God, instead of trusting God and allowing him to act in his faithfulness. Turn to God in prayer. Be available to him and let him do it, and I can assure you that your steps will lead to blessings. And in that walk, you will be a witness to the truth, that Jesus Christ is the meaning of Christmas; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of those who call upon his name; that Jesus is the answer. I leave you with that short word...that simple word...TRUST. In many respects the entire Christian walk can be summed up in that word. Trust the Lord! Amen.