

December 1, 2013 - 11:00 a.m.

Pastor Jonathan Falwell

Christmas Cares...About Your Dreams!

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25, Matthew 2:13-14, 19-23

Summary: Pastor Jonathan Falwell talks about how the Christmas story shows how God cares about us and our dreams.

Christmas is all about the fact that God sent His Son Jesus to come to this earth for us when we didn't deserve it, when we had no reason whatsoever to expect that God would do anything for us, but He sent His Son anyway, and He came and was born in that manger, He lived among us, walked among us, and then He did exactly what He was intended to do. He came and He walked up to Calvary and He died for us. But the story doesn't end there, and you know the rest of the story—at least I hope you do. Three days later, He came out of that tomb, victorious over sin, to give us victory over sin, Satan, death, the tomb. He conquered it all so that we might have life in His name. That is really what Christmas is all about.

Now we are at a time of the year right now when people love to talk about Christmas. Even people who aren't spiritual whatsoever, they still love to talk about Christmas. It is amazing that at this time of year people who have no use for Christianity, no use for the Church, no use for anything spiritual, at Christmastime everything changes. You know why? Because there are gifts involved. You notice it on TV, all the commercials, all the movies that are coming out right now. It's a story, a magical story. All the TV commercials, it's amazing. They can put horses going through the snow. I saw one where a horse was going through the snow and there was a snowman there feeding the horse carrots as it ran by. Oh, the story of the season. It's special, it's magical. It's amazing how things like that, this time of year it's all these different things that they can use to talk about the story of why this time of year is so special, and all along miss the whole reason and purpose for Christmas to begin with.

The story of Christmas has nothing to do with giving of gifts except for one gift. The story of Christmas has nothing to do with snow, although I hope we get a ton this year. Whatever it takes to close school, I'm in. Christmas is all about Jesus Christ. It's all about Him coming to this earth, being born, about Him dying on the cross, about Him rising again. That is the story of Christmas. And so today, as we begin this Christmas Cares season here at Thomas Road, as we begin talking about what Christmas is all about and why Christmas is so important and why we are involved in reaching out and ministering to our community, we are going to spend some time looking at the Christmas story through the eyes of the people who actually were here, who saw it

with their own eyes; people who witnessed the things that we read about, the things that we talk about, the things that we sing about. We're going to talk about what Christmas looks like and why Christmas is so important in today's world.

Today we're going to look at the story of a man named Joseph. I know you know his story. I know you know about him and who he is and why he has such an important, pivotal role in the story. But today we're going to look through his eyes in a little bit different way as we talk about Christmas Cares, and we're going to answer the question: Does God really care about our dreams? We all have dreams. We all have ideas and visions of what we want our life to look like, of what we want to accomplish and what we want to do.

I remember when I was a kid, I had it all figured out. I had it planned, and I knew I was going to grow up and be a cop. I was going to be a cop and it was going to be cool. Don Sloan over here is a deputy sheriff in our city. I wanted to be Don, and every time I saw Don, I thought that was so cool. One time—Don, you'll remember this story—I remember my dad went out to Roswell, New Mexico, to preach, and when he went out there to preach, there was a sheriff of that county that attended that church. As dad was speaking at that church in Roswell, that sheriff decided he was going to do something neat for my dad, so he actually, at that service, made my dad an honorary deputy sheriff of Roswell, New Mexico. He gave him a plaque and an honorary badge and I.D. card. My dad didn't care anything about that at all. In fact, I'm surprised he didn't throw the badge away before he got home, but he didn't. He brought it home, and guess who he gave it to? He gave it to me. Dude, I was bad. I was a kid and I had a badge and I let people know it. Dad gave it to me, so therefore if the deputy sheriff gave it to him, that means I'm a deputy sheriff, so right now I'm a deputy sheriff in Roswell, New Mexico. I have never been to Roswell, New Mexico, but they better watch out for me! I've got the badge. I remember, as a kid, when I would get out of bed in the morning first thing, before I got dressed, I would put on a holster and plastic gun and put that badge on and walk around the house, and I was a bad dude. Don't mess with me.

But then I grew up and matured, and then I went from wanting to be a cop to wanting to be a fireman. Then I wanted to be a Secret Service agent. I thought that was cool. Then I decided I wanted to be President of the United States. Then I decided why not be both? I wanted to be the Secret Service agent and the President of the United States. How cool would it be to protect yourself? A president who walked around with an Uzi? Come on! That's what I wanted to be. I had dreams. I had a vision. That's who I wanted to be. And God changed everything. We all have a vision, don't we?

We all have dreams of what we want to be and what we want to accomplish. Today I want to talk about does Christmas really care about our dreams. Does God really care about what we envision for our lives? Does He really care about what we want our lives to look like?

I want you to open your Bibles with me and we're going to look at this passage in Matthew 1, then we'll read a couple of passages in Matthew chapter 2, and we're going to look at the life of Joseph. We're going to look through the eyes of Joseph. There are some specific dreams that he had, and we'll use his story to answer that question: Does God care about my dreams?

Let's look together at Matthew 1, beginning with verse 18,

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man [that means a good man, an honorable man], and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. [Now that doesn't mean to shoot her and kill her. He wanted to put her away secretly.] But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

This is the story of the first dream that Joseph had, but it's not the dream where God appeared; it was a different dream. We get the story here that sometimes our dreams and God's plans don't always line up, they don't always agree with each other. It's like the story I told you a few moments ago of me wanting to be a cop/fireman/Secret Service agent/President of the United States, and I became none of them, because sometimes our dreams and God's plan don't really match up.

Look at the life of Joseph. he had a plan. He had a vision of what he wanted his life to look like. We know from the story of Joseph that he was a carpenter, and if he's a carpenter, he probably works with his hands, he probably has big muscles, he's probably like a mean dude and has big arms and all that kind of stuff. He's probably a good-looking guy, and he had found this beautiful girl, this young lady that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, his dream girl, the girl that he just knew had to be his and they got engaged. I can imagine he had a perfect plan for the rest of his life. he was going to marry this girl and they would have their little white picket fence (if they had such a thing back 2,000 years ago) and the perfect little family and perfect little life, and everything was going to turn out just beautifully.

That was Joseph's dream until God showed up, and when God showed up, everything changed. He had to be wondering, "Why in the world are all my dreams shattering? Why are they crumbling to the ground? Why is my life falling apart?"

You might say, "Wait a minute. It doesn't say that Joseph thought his dreams were crumbling, that his life was falling apart." Actually it does, because if you read in this passage, it says about Joseph that when he found out that his fiancée, the woman that he loved, the woman that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, was expecting a child and it was not his, what does the Scripture say? He was a good man, and he sought to try to figure out a way to put her away privately. In other words, he was trying to find a way to break up the engagement. In other

words, the dreams have crumbled, the vision that he had is all over. The woman that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, now he's got to find a way to honor her but break up that engagement because of what was now happening.

You see, sometimes our dreams and God's plan don't line up. But the thing we've got to recognize, that we've got to realize is that when God sent Jesus to this earth as that little baby in the manger, He sent Jesus to make all of our dreams come true. The problem is: what do we dream? What is it, exactly, that we want to happen?

You see, Joseph's dream was one thing, and God changed it completely all around. When we read this story and we talk about what Joseph went through, talking about how he was a good man and how he wanted to do the honorable thing by breaking up that engagement in a way that would not embarrass her, that would not put her out as a public example, would not make people ridicule her and make fun of her. It proves he was a good man, but even that good man was ready to stop that dream and go a different direction.

But then that dream happened where God showed up and said, "Wait, wait, wait. I've got a plan, and this is a good plan, and what is happening with your fiancée is something that will not only change your life, it will change the lives of millions of people because He is coming to save you from your sins."

I love what it says Joseph did next. It doesn't say Joseph said, "Well, let me think about it." It didn't say that Joseph went and got some counsel from some friends to talk about what he should do. No. You know what he did? As soon as he woke up, he went, verse 24, "and he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." He did exactly what God said to do.

Now if we continue reading the story over in Matthew chapter 2 verse 13, let's continue reading in this passage to get a passage of whether God cares about our dreams. Verse 13 says,

Now when they had departed [that's the wise men, the shepherds and all that we'll talk about in a couple of weeks], behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he [Joseph] arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

Here we get the story that God's plan for us is orchestrated long before we were ever even thought of. Long before you can ever even imagine, God's plan was put in motion for you. Now that's an important thing to think about, because when you think about the life of Joseph, Joseph already had his dreams change, right? The picket fence, all the stuff that he'd envisioned changed because God showed up. Now look at the change that is taking place. Because he honored God, he did what God told him to do, and he went ahead and married Mary and they had a beautiful little child and people were coming and bowing down to this child. How cool is that, that they could have a child and people were literally coming and worshiping Him and

bowing down to Him and Joseph knew that this child was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. What an amazing story.

Now God shows up and says, “Oh, and by the way, I want you to leave your country, leave your home, leave your family and friends, leave everything that is important to you and run down to Egypt. And if you don’t, Herod is going to kill Him.” What? Can you imagine what must have been going through Joseph’s mind now? Because now not only did the story change a little bit ago, but now he’s got to run for his life. He’s got to run and hide. He’s got to go, literally in fear of his life every day—and listen, I don’t know about you, but if somebody told me that there was somebody out there who wanted to kill my child, I think I’d be a little bit paranoid, wouldn’t you? I would put my arm around that kid and hold onto him every morning and every night and never let them out of my sight. I would walk around—I don’t know what they had then—with the biggest club or sword and protect that kid as much as I could. I would keep my eyes on that kid 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and you would do the same thing.

Here Joseph, being told by God, “This is a child that is going to save the world,” now has to hide out for his life and protect this child because people want to kill this child. You see, the dreams are changing. But if you’ll notice in the passage I just read it says that the reason Joseph had to take Jesus down to Egypt, the reason that he had to protect that child and take that child down there because Herod wanted to kill him was so that the prophecy would be fulfilled that was prophesied many, many years before Joseph was even born.

Let me tell you what that tells us. It tells us that God always has our best interest in mind, and He did so before you took your first breath. Does that make you feel pretty good? Does that encourage you? It encourages me. Over in Psalm 139 you know what it tells us? It tells us that He knew us before we were ever born, that He had plans for us, that He had ordered our steps, that He knew exactly what was going to happen to us, that He laid that all out before you were even born.

Sometimes we sit here and wonder, “God, why are you doing this? God, where are you? God, why aren’t you showing up? God, why aren’t you meeting my needs? God, why aren’t you taking care of me? God, why aren’t you doing this for me?” and we sit there and complain and worry, always forgetting that God had a plan for you before you were born. Does God care about our dreams? Oh, He cares so much that before the foundation of the earth, Psalm 139:16 tells us, that our moments were laid out. That ought to be encouraging.

Now if we keep reading the story in Matthew 2:19 it says,

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.” Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream [the fourth dream], he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth,

that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Now in this passage the understanding that we get about the dreams God has for us and the plans that God has for us is that God will always lead us where we need to be, but not necessarily where we want to be. Now think about Joseph. Joseph is already hiding out in Egypt. He's protecting his kid. When somebody comes and knocks on the door, he's there at the door, the proverbial shot you see in the movies where the guy is standing behind the door, he's got the gun ready to blow away whoever is behind the door because he's fearful that that person might be coming to take his son. He's protecting his son.

But now God shows up and says, "It's time to go home." Man, it's a party, a celebration, "Now we can go home." Joseph goes to Mary, "Mary, we can go home! This is awesome! Finally the exile is over! Finally the danger is over! We can go home!" And so he immediately, the passage tells us, he gets his child, he gets Mary and they head off for the homeland. Can you imagine what that must have been like when they went out there and packed all their stuff in the back of the station wagon and took off? They're driving up there and they cross over from Egypt and into Israel, Joseph probably got out of the car and got down and kissed the sand. He was excited. Now back home in his homeland. The joy that must have brought.

He must have started thinking, "I can't wait till I see Tom, and I can't wait till I see Billy and I can't wait to see Mom. I can't wait to see Granny and have some of her mashed potatoes and Turkey and gravy." If they had that kind of thing back then. I'm taking a little bit of license, just so you know. They don't have station wagons in the Bible, okay? I don't want any letters this week saying, "I can't believe that you said they had station wagons. You are a heretic." I don't want that. I know they didn't have station wagons back then.

But can you imagine? "We're going home!" But then God shows up again and says, "Wait a minute. I don't want you to go to your home. You have to go somewhere else." It says he was warned in a dream, "Don't go home."

"Man, again?" Joseph must have said. "First of all I can't have the dream that I wanted at first. Second of all I had to run and hide out in Egypt for my son's life, and now I can't go back home?" Think about what he must have been thinking. But you see Joseph knew and understood that God will always take us where we need to be, but not necessarily where we want to be.

Now there are people in this room right now, you've got a plan and you know where you want to go. You know what you want to accomplish and you know what you want to be. You know what the rest of your life should look like and you've got it all mapped out. And maybe you're like that, but you've gotten to a place now and stepped a little bit further into it, and something has changed where you're not actually what you thought you would be. You're not the policeman, you're not the fireman, you're not the President of the United States. You're not the movie star or Hollywood celebrity. You don't have a billion dollars in the bank. And all those things that you just knew that you were going to be one day, it didn't turn out that way, and you're say, "Why?" and you feel like, "Maybe I'm a failure. I didn't accomplish what I wanted to

accomplish. I didn't accomplish what I set out to do. Am I a failure? What's wrong with me? Why am I so bad?"

Listen: God always takes you where you need to be, not where you want to be.

Now it's really cool sometimes when where you want to be and where you need to be merge. But I'll be honest with you: God is not really so concerned about where you want to be. Oh, but He is absolutely concerned about where you need to be.

I'll take you back to Matthew 1:24, and we get the picture here of "Does God care about my dreams?" Oh, absolutely. "Does God care about my vision for the future?" Oh, absolutely. "Does God care about where I'm headed?" Oh, absolutely. But there is a key, a catch here that you've got to get, that Joseph hinted at. He let us know what the answer to all this really is, and it's found back in Matthew 1:24. After God told him what he was supposed to do, after God explained to him the steps that he had to take, Joseph just simply did two basic things that God expects out of every one of us, and guess what they are. First, he obeyed. Second, he had faith. He obeyed and he had faith.

You see, making God's plans our dreams always takes obedience, always takes faith. Matthew 1:24, after Joseph heard what God wanted him to do, you know what he did? He jumped up and did exactly what God commanded him. And we look at the rest of Joseph's life, there is not a whole lot said about him, not a whole lot is written about what he did and what he experienced. Not a whole lot is written about him after this passage about all the things that he experienced in his life, but I do know this one thing: Because of his obedience and because of his faith in God, God did for Joseph exactly what He promised He would do.

Here is a question: What about you and me? What about where we need to be? What about what we need to be doing? Because the only way that we are going to find where we should be is through obedience and through faith. Does God care about you? Yes, He does. Does God care about your dreams? Oh, so much. Does He care about your future? Before time even began, God cared enough to send Jesus for you. Would you pray with me?

[Praying] Father, today we thank you for caring. We thank you for caring about us and everything we go through. We thank you that when we are in the midst of the most difficult moments of life, that you care, that you are there. God, we thank you that in the good moments of life that you are there, and that you continue to encourage us and take us higher and higher. We thank you that you loved us so much that you sent your Son Jesus to die for us when we didn't deserve it, that He paid the ultimate price, the penalty for our sins, the penalty that we should have paid, that He did it for us. And God we thank you that the Christmas story is all about God coming down to man to meet, to make our dreams come true. God, we thank you for that. I thank you that Christ rose again and that through Him and Him alone we can have life and have it eternally.

In a few minutes we're going to stand and sing "I Surrender All," and it's the story of Joseph's life; it's what he did. He surrendered his dreams, he surrendered his vision, he surrendered all of

the things that he wanted to accomplish. He surrendered it all at the feet of God. He wanted to do what God told him to do, and as a result, God blessed him immeasurably. What about you?

(Singing: "I Surrender All")

[Praying] God, we thank you that you care. We thank you that your presence is felt. We thank you, God, that you care enough to meet our every need, and I pray that today as we leave this place that you would help us walk out of here fully aware and understanding that you have a plan for us and that we would be sensitive to seeking and to listening, to hearing and to embracing your plan for our future. God, it comes through prayer, it comes through Bible study, it comes through a sensitive heart, and we pray that you would do that in every person in this room. And as we go out of this place and begin this season of Christmas Cares, ministering to our community, I pray right now that you would speak into lives of thousands of people, that people would come to know you in the days ahead because of the faithfulness and obedience of the people that are sitting here right now. We pray that you would do something miraculous in our city, that you would do something miraculous for the people whose names are on these cards, and that we would see an outpouring of the Holy Spirit unlike anything that we've seen before. We ask you for that and thank you in advance for what you're going to do. In Jesus' precious name we pray, amen.

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