



Study of Matthew

The Way of the Kingdom of Heaven

Table 2

Season 4 Episode 3

Title: Joseph and the Way of the Kingdom: When God Interrupts Your Plans

Welcome to the table!

Matthew 1:18-25,

I'm a bit of a planner. So when my carefully laid-out plans start to *unravel*, I don't usually handle it well. Honestly, it's fair to say I start to *unravel* right along with them.

At least, that's been my typical response for most of my life. But last week, I was on FaceTime with a close friend, catching her up on some pretty big life updates, and she just stared at me in disbelief. I told her, 'I'm not even calling this a season anymore—this is just my life.'

It's taken me a long time to get here. I didn't arrive at this place easily—it's taken decades. And I certainly didn't get here on my own. The Lord, His Word, along with His people, has been both the foundation beneath me and the surrounding presence beside me as I raise my Ebenezer and say, 'Thus far the Lord has helped.'

This brings me to Joseph. He's young, engaged, faithful, and just. And like any man stepping toward marriage, he probably had a picture in his mind of how life would unfold once the betrothal period ended.

Then Joseph discovers something he never *expected*—something that completely *interrupts* the life he had planned. His carefully held expectations begin to *unravel*.

Unexpected. Interrupted. Unraveling. Can you relate?

I have had a lot of thoughts and emotions swirling around these words. I want to encourage you not to rush past your thoughts, memories, and emotions which these words bring to the surface. This might be a good place to spend some time in reflection, in prayer, or perhaps writing.

Compassion

From the information we have it seems Joseph was doing pretty much everything right.

He had to be a pretty good guy for God to choose him for this parental role for *His Son*. He wasn't just a good, law-abiding Jewish man—there was compassion within him. A compassion that sought the quiet way out, a way to end things with Mary without demanding to be vindicated for the wrong he believed had been done to him.

I'm incredibly grateful for his compassionate response. I'm not simply grateful...I'm impressed and I'm humbled.

For too much of my life, I withheld compassionate responses from people in messy situations. Two groups of people I struggled to have compassion for in the past, I'm embarrassed to say, were single moms and undocumented immigrants.

I have learned that my responses were rooted in a religious system whose message was, "You broke the law and now you must bear the consequences."

When it came to **single moms—specifically unmarried mothers—the typical responses I saw in my faith context were often steeped in shame**. So much of that shame was rooted in a heavy purity-culture framework that elevated sexual purity above the women and children. While I agree the will of God is for all to maintain sexual integrity outside of marriage, I now recognize how damaging the rigid, punitive approach can be—especially for women and children who are already in vulnerable situations.

Over time, I began to see the difference that **grace over judgment** can make. The transformation isn't theoretical—it's visible, tangible, and healing. And when you look to Scripture, responding with compassion isn't a softening or a compromise; it's actually a return to the heart of God. Throughout the Old Testament, the call to protect the vulnerable—widows, orphans, foreigners, the poor—is a consistently woven thread.

It was that thread that flipped the table for me.

Once you see it, you can't unsee it.

Grace didn't begin with Jesus. It's been a part of the story from the beginning.

When it came to undocumented immigrants the same: "*You broke the law and now you must bear the consequences*" was also applied. There was a very rigid application of Romans 13. The same table flipping thread emphasizing compassion from the rest of the Bible was disregarded. In fact, if you slow down while reading Romans 13—especially verses 8-10—you begin to see that Paul is actually pushing us *toward* love as the fulfillment of the law, not toward legalism as the measure of righteousness.

I won't go further here, because Twila and I dive into this more in next week's episode. But the shift in my own perspective began when I realized that **the Bible consistently prioritizes mercy, protection, and compassion—especially for the marginalized**. Once that truth took root, the old "law-and-consequence" responses no longer matched the Jesus I see in Scripture.

Joseph leaning into compassion didn't necessarily cause his life plan to fall back into place. His life plan was still interrupted. (By the way it wasn't just a season, it was his life.) Instead, it invited him into a table-flipping, world-altering story he never expected to be part of.

Sometimes compassion doesn't return us to our plan. It ushers us into God's.

Is there an interruption in your life that feels disruptive or frustrating, but could actually be God's invitation to lean into compassion?

What do you think would happen if you stopped trying to survive unexpected seasons, but instead embraced them as an invitation to lean into God's adoptive love?

Maybe instead of gasping for breath...you might finally be able to exhale.

Relax.

Stop trying to perform your way into being accepted—because you already are.

The way of the Kingdom of Heaven offers far more grace than religious expectations ever have. We're not earning our way into the Kingdom with our religious effort, so why not embrace the way of extending grace and compassion—to ourselves and to others?

I've discovered this is the good way.

And I'm choosing to walk in it.

One final thought.

Joseph beautifully reflects the adoptive love of God.

Adoptive love says: **“You belong. You’re wanted. You’re held—even here.”**

That’s the heart of God—meeting us in the unexpected, the interrupted, the undeserved places of our lives, and calling us beloved right in the middle of them.

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Julie

Keep following the Table Flipper, and leave the table flipping to Jesus.