
WHAT CHILD IS THIS: THE SON OF NAZARETH

Matthew 2:13-23

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*"A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

The Son of Nazareth. We light, today, the candle of humility and it is captured in this simple description -- that Jesus was identified as a Nazarene. It is difficult for us to grasp the import of this, because Nazareth was a despised place. It was a nothing place. In John chapter 1, Philip and Nathanael followed Jesus. There is this beautiful description of Jesus recruiting his initial apostles. Philip goes to get Nathanael and when he does, he says, "Nathanael, I have met someone that you have to meet. This is the one. This is the one that we've been looking for." Then he says, "He is from Nazareth." And Nathanael's response is, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip has a great response. He says, "Come and see."

John also carries us through the spiritual journey of Nicodemus. You remember John chapter 3 perhaps, a famous verse. Maybe you've heard it. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." That great promise that life is found in Jesus – that verse is located in the context of a conversation that Nicodemus has with Jesus. Nicodemus is a very, very powerful man. He is a leader in Israel. He comes to Jesus at night, secretly, and Jesus begins to teach him about spiritual things -- that we have to be born again, we have to be brought to life by the Spirit of God, and that happens when we trust in Jesus and we receive the gift of eternal life. It's a relationship that begins right now.

Nicodemus doesn't respond in faith at that moment. Maybe he's like some of you. You are on a journey. You are open. You are seeking. You are learning, but you are still in process. Eventually, Nicodemus comes to a place of faith. Along that journey, right in the middle, Nicodemus' heart is starting to soften. He comes into a meeting of the leadership and they are saying, "We are going to kill Jesus. We are going to execute him." Nicodemus speaks up. He says, "Wait, wait, this isn't right. We haven't even heard from this man. This isn't the way we do things. To really shut him up, they say, "Jesus is from Galilee. We know that no prophet ever comes from Galilee. What's with you, Nicodemus? Do you want to go to Galilee yourself?" They use this point of origin to really put him down and just silence him.

It kind of worked like this. You know, Jerusalem -- the center. Judea -- that region where Jerusalem was located. That was where it was happening. They looked down on the whole region of Galilee. But the people of Galilee had to have someone to look down on, so they just picked a spot called Nazareth and said, "We may be from Galilee, but at least we're not from Nazareth." This is God's way. Nazareth is God's way. Jesus comes, born to humble parents, born of a virgin; there is no room for them in the inn, he is placed in a manger, and he ends up being raised in Nazareth.

We have this same dynamic. In the early days, hundreds of years ago when the internet was created, I was there. I used to get online with AOL -- America Online. You heard the modem dial up, then what did you hear? "You've got mail!" Right? I still have that email address. Sometimes I'm in a retail store and am asked, "What's your email?" So I give them that email address: nazareth@comcast.net. And I get that look like...you know what it is? "Nazareth. You are so uncool." It's the way Adam Pizarro responds when you tell him you get your coffee from Dunkin' Donuts.

Some of you love Dunkin' Donuts, but Adam thinks that's just Nazareth. Starbucks is almost beneath a real coffee lover, right? Dunkin' Donuts is unspeakable. No offense to all you Dunkin' Donuts lovers. Adam is giving me a thumbs up in the back.

This is interesting: All of the apostles were from Galilee except one. You know which one? Judas. He was the only one from Judea. God's way is to take the things that are not. God's way is the way of humility. It's a powerful lesson, because if you catch this basic truth, this is how God works. You will discover you are on a big highway and there is all

kinds of room to move and operate. You will just flow. You will just move forward with God. God will traffic all kinds of kingdom merchandise in and through your life when you understand this basic spiritual truth. Jesus was the Son of Nazareth. This is his story. Let's break it down in three truths, three points:

I. God saves the humble.

Jesus comes in this form, in humility, to bring us to an understanding of our own spiritual need. It's impossible for us to begin with God and to move forward in relationship with God if we don't understand our own need of him. When we are broken, when we experience genuine humility and understand our need for God, God comes in and does *amazing* things. This is probably best illustrated (it was in our prayer that we all shared together in our responsive reading) when Jesus went to Nazareth, when he went to his home town.

When Luke tells us about the public ministry of Jesus, he starts in chapter 4. Jesus goes to Nazareth and preaches in his home synagogue. It's as if you grew up here at Riverside and you come back. You are standing up and you are preaching. He goes to the prophet Isaiah and pulls up these verses, puts them on the overhead 2000 years ago, puts them on the screen. Here they are. Luke 4:18-19. He is quoting the prophet Isaiah.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Look at those four groups: To the poor, to the captives, to the blind, to those who are oppressed. He is announcing his ministry. He is saying, "This is the nature of my ministry. I have come to restore broken lives. I have come to restore. I have come to heal." This is just the glory of being a part of the Christian family. We are called to a ministry of restoration.

We don't go to Haiti because we are better or, "We are going to help these poor people." No, it's because we are broken. God has restored us. And we just want to take that message everywhere we can. **We want to be a part of God's restoration wherever people are open to that message.** So, he delivers this. He reads Isaiah 61 then he says, "I am that. I am the fulfillment of that prophecy." And he announces that this is the nature of his ministry.

At first it goes great. At first they liked the sermon. They are responding well. But then something happens. They say, "Wait a minute. Isn't this Jesus? Didn't he grow up here? Isn't he Joseph and Mary's son? Who does he think he is?" They begin to reject Jesus, so he preaches a second sermon.

The first sermon is on the nature of his ministry. The second sermon is this simple truth: "No prophet is acceptable in his hometown." That's a quote right out of Luke 4. At first you think, "Alright, he is saying: 'I grew up here, so you don't respect me.'" But there is actually a deep spiritual truth that's taught here. It helps us unpack this whole idea that "God saves the humble." When he preaches this second sermon, it didn't seem like a sermon. But if you really look at it, it's a very powerful message. He goes to two Old Testament events, two great Old Testament prophets. They never wrote anything. Their books aren't in the Bible. They are Elijah and Elisha. He tells about events in their lives. He talks about Elijah proclaiming a famine, then going to a widow, and that widow assists him. He partners with that widow. She is from Zarephath. She is not an Israelite. She is not Jewish. She is a Gentile. She is an outsider.

Then the second story he tells is the story of Elisha, who heals a very powerful man who is a commander. His name is Naaman. He is a Syrian. He is an outsider. Listen very carefully. **Jesus is teaching that sometimes in order for God to find someone who will value his truth for what it is, he has to go outside those who actually have the truth.**

Sometimes growing up in the church, growing up in a Christian family, growing up around Christians – sometimes if we're not careful, it can create a real block to humility, to understanding our real, genuine need. Sometimes the most on-fire, contagiously exciting Christians are those that get saved late in life and have made such a mess of things, because there is this deep brokenness and humility. There is an appropriate wonder and marvel at what God has done.

Can I just talk to those here today who are people of faith -- is grace amazing to you? Is the gospel just unbelievable? That God would choose you? Allow me to linger here, because I've got half my kids here, so I'll just preach to the three of them for a minute. You grew up in a Christian home. You had *amazing* parents. At least an amazing mom. We have poured into you right and wrong. "Do this and don't do that," right? There is a sense in which you grow up with this understanding of morality and the importance of honoring God with your life. It's alright. We have to do it. But if you're not careful, in the end there is an attitude that takes over. You know, "I've got this. I'm on the inside. I've always been on the inside." There isn't that sense of, "Man, without..." **This is why sometimes we find such a struggle with sin, because God wants us to understand we are broken without Jesus. But we are made whole with him.**

So God saves the humble. **Could I say, if you are here and you don't know Jesus, you don't get your life put back together and then come to him? You come to him, no matter how big a mess you feel that you are, and Jesus restores.** I'd like to preach longer on that point, but I'm going to move on.

II. God uses the humble.

He saves the humble. He uses the humble. There is an interesting thing that happens in this passage that we read this morning. It's telling us that Jesus himself was an exile. Verse 18: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." When you read that, at first you are thinking, "Okay, he must be talking about the fact that Herod comes in and kills all the children two and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding region. Based on the size of Bethlehem and that region, we would say probably 20-25 children. But he is taking that event to actually point us to something that Jesus is experiencing. Here is how it works. Rachel and Leah were married to Israel, and they had 12 sons, and those 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel. Rachel was the loved, special wife. So the reference here is to Rachel as the mother of the nation, and she is weeping. She is weeping because her children are no more.

You go all the way back to Genesis, then you come hundreds of years later to Jeremiah, who makes this prophecy. Here is what he was originally prophesying about. He was saying that the children of Israel, the sons and daughters of Rachel, are going to be carried off into exile. Babylon is going to come in, discipline us, and we are going to be carried off into exile. Daniel and his three friends in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den – that's all a fulfillment of what Jeremiah prophesies. It's Jeremiah 31:15.

Now you go hundreds of years later and Matthew quotes that prophesy and says there's another fulfillment. That's Jesus going into exile, and Jesus goes to Egypt. "Out of Egypt have I called my son." If it goes too deep for you, it's about to get deeper, so just take a breath. **God is saying, "Listen, my special people Israel, my chosen people came out of Egypt. They were saved in the Exodus. They went into exile. And now I am sending my son to go on that same journey because he will save my people from their sin. Because he is a savior. He goes into exile. He suffers. He does it God's way – the way of humility. The way of brokenness.**

The Bible tells us if we follow Jesus we are all exiles. Right? We may not agree on the politics of immigration, but we care about it because we are all spiritual exiles, right? Yeah. "Yes, Brian, that's right!" Alright, stay with me. I'll give you one illustration from Scripture. Jesus sends 72 of his followers out on a preaching mission, on a ministry mission. It's recorded in Luke chapter 10. They come back and it's like their own version of the mission team, lined up, and they are giving a report to Jesus. They are like, "This is amazing! The demons are subject to your name! We have power over spiritual darkness!"

They are excited, and Jesus says this to them. He says, "Listen, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions. I have given you power over spiritual darkness." Listen very carefully, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this. Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you. Don't rejoice in the fact that

you've got power, or you've got a spiritual gift or spiritual influence. You rejoice in this: Rejoice that your names are written in heaven, that you are saved." **In your brokenness, Jesus came and went into exile so he could retrieve you and me and pay the penalty of our sin. Rejoice in the gospel. Rejoice in God's grace.**

Now, look at what Jesus does. This is one of my favorite verses in the whole bible. "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." This is our Lord and Savior, rejoicing over you. This is what he says. "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children." That's so amazing! That God loves us! Not of our own merit, not of our own morality, not of our own virtue! He loves us and Jesus comes! He says, "Lord, thank you! Thank you, Father, that you didn't pick all the snobs, but all the Nazarenes."

There is a funny story in the book of Acts, where Paul is on trial. It probably didn't seem humorous to him at the time. There were Jewish leaders, very influential people who were trying to get Rome to execute Paul, so they hired a Gentile attorney. You have Jewish leaders hiring a Gentile attorney because they wanted a Gentile to represent them in front of Rome. There's a certain irony, a certain twist there, isn't there? They are finding someone to plead their case. So this Gentile Tertullus, gets up, and he says, "This Paul is stirring things up." The most unkind thing he can say is that they are a sect of Nazarenes. This is God's way. He loves to save people from Nazareth. He loves to save people.

Jesus used the illustration of Naaman. Naaman was wealthy. Naaman was powerful. It's not about having and not having. It's about a self-awareness of your own need before God. God uses the humble. Here is our last point.

III. Brokenness bolsters dependence upon Christ.

Let me go to this passage in 1 Corinthians because it brings together all these points. It's verses 26-31. I want to start with verse 26. Paul writes, "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth." What is he saying? A bunch of Nazarenes, right? You were not the elite of society. God saves the humble.

Verse 27: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Here's what I want to put over that. God uses the humble. He saves us. He restores our lives. Then you and I become this living demonstration of how God restores, how it's not of our own merit, it's of God's mercy. It's of God's grace. It has a way of bringing a correction to those who think, "Well, wouldn't God be lucky to have me?" It brings a correction to that spiritual attitude that brings death.

Then he brings it together in this verse, verse 30: "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption..." This is what he is saying. He is saying that Jesus is your

wisdom. He is your righteousness. He is your sanctification. He is making you holy. He is your redemption. "...so that it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" He is quoting Jeremiah again.

You know, we see something here in the life of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. Our Savior is born. There is no place for them. There is no place in the inn. They are in this place where the animals are kept. He is placed in a manger. They flee to Egypt. Herod dies. They come back to Judea. They can't stay there. They go to Galilee. They go to Nazareth. Three times in that passage we read we are told that an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, then they had to move. They had to relocate. They had to run. They had to flee.

It's kind of funny if you think about it, right? You can just see Joseph getting up in the morning. "Mary, I had a dream last night." Her response: "I'll call the movers. Here we go again." If you think about it, you would say, "This is not what I would expect. This is the Son of God, fleeing to Egypt." The whole move after move reveals something that we experience, and that is that transition reveals idols. **Change exposes idols.** Just think about this for a minute. An idol spiritually is something we want to depend on other than God. We want to depend on money. We want to depend on success. We want to depend on good looks. We want to depend on a relationship – whatever it may be. We want something created that we can see that we feel we can control, that we rely on.

Most of the time they are very good things. They are gifts from God, but we want to make them God. We want to make them ultimate in our lives. It's spiritually dangerous, because what happens is, we rely on them instead of on God. We think we control them, but they end up controlling us. Transitions in life, change reveals our idols. It exposes what we are trusting in other than God.

Just imagine that someone comes home tomorrow (husband or whoever it may be) and says, "Hey, I got fired today. And I'm taking a job in New York." New York. Who wants to go to New York? I say that just in fun. Sorry. Do you know what that would do in life? Do you know how unsettled we would become in a second? Because transition reveals idols. It reveals things that we want to trust in other than the Lord.

Now, here is the great news. Here's how this works for us. When it goes well for you (because it's not going to always go bad -- that's not the message at all) when it goes well for you as a follower of Jesus, you know God is working. "It's God's grace. He is helping me. It's marvelous." But here's the great news. When it doesn't go well, when it's not a win, you say, "Wow - this is great, because this is going to create grace." The first case is the result of grace, but the second is something that manufactures grace. It creates dependence on the Lord.

If you don't know where you are going to be in six months, you can praise God for that right now, because God will use that to draw you to him. You have no choice, right? That uncertainty exposes the fragility of everything else around you.

It bolsters dependence on Christ, and that's a glorious place to be, right? I heard that theme all over the testimonies that were given today. Did you hear that? They just preached my message right there for me.

I'm going to end with this quote from John Newton. He is talking about the promises of God. He says, "We have these great promises and we live on these." He says, "Upon such unlimited sovereign promises from God, I cast my anchor and they hold me. Otherwise, I should be the sport of winds and waves. Dr. Isaac Watts' motto shall be mine. It's big enough for him. It's big enough for me. It's big enough for you. It's big enough for thousands who will accept it. Here is his motto (quoting Dr. Watts): 'In Jesus alone is my everything.' That's his motto. In him (in Jesus) I have an offering, an altar, a temple, a priest, a sun, a shield, a savior, a shepherd, a hiding place, a resting place, food, medicine, riches, honor, wisdom, righteousness, holiness – **in short, in Christ I have everything.**"

Friends, we get to rejoice when it goes well, because God is just fueling us with grace, and we get to rejoice when it doesn't because that means more grace is coming. It's going to help to be more and more dependent upon Jesus. Amen? Thank you.

Adam, if you would come up with the worship team, we are going to close out with just a brief response of worship.