

“Jesus the Nazarene”

Matthew 2:13-23

In 1905, Charles Gabriel wrote one of my all time favorite hymns, whose words say:

*I stand amazed in the presence,
of Jesus the Nazarene;
And wonder how He could love me,
a sinner, condemned, unclean!
How marvelous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be,
How marvelous! How wonderful!
Is my Savior's love for me!*

The Bible gives us many wonderful titles for the Lord Jesus. Already in Matthew's gospel, we have seen Him presented as the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, and Immanuel or God With Us. Another of those titles is found in the closing verses of chapter 2, and is the title that Charles Gabriel captured in his hymn--Jesus the Nazarene.

The significance of His name and title is worth paying careful attention to. Jesus the Nazarene is the King who was rejected and scorned by the very ones He came to save.

John 1:11-13 - “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Who is Jesus the Nazarene, and what is meant by His title?

1. Jesus is the SUBJECT of great hostility (2:13-15)

“Now when they had departed, 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 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.’”

The name ‘Jesus’ has always been the subject of controversy. In casual conversation, you can find yourself talking easily with people about many things. However, when you mention the

name 'Jesus' the conversation changes. Some respond with openness while others will shut you down quick.

There is power in the name of Jesus! It confronts the human conscience and the Holy Spirit powerfully communicates its truth to the human heart.

John 15:26 - "...the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

John 16:8-11 - "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

God's Spirit testifies of the truthfulness of the name of Jesus, and this is the reason why it strikes a chord with the human heart. That the name of Jesus is the subject of hostility is not only true of our day, but was true in His day as well. In light of this, notice that Matthew shows us how:

His life was under divine PROTECTION (v. 13)

"...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, 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.'

The enemy set out to destroy Jesus from His arrival into the world.

Warren Wiersbe - "A person is identified not only by his friends, but also by his enemies."

Jesus was a threat to Herod because Herod grasped what was at stake in the birth of Jesus. If what the wise men were saying was true, than Israel's true and rightful King had been born and Herod could be dethroned.

Jesus is a real threat to anyone and everyone who wants to reserve the right to run his or her own life. The truth that Jesus is King reveals that you are not. If He is to be enthroned, I am to be dethroned. His enthronement demands my submission and obedience.

Much can be said from this text about the subject of angelic intervention. An angelic messenger from God appears to Joseph and instructs him to flee to Egypt for safety's sake.

The life of Jesus was no ordinary life, and Jesus was no ordinary man. Frequently throughout the gospels we read of how angels attended to Him.

Hebrews 1:4 - “Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

It would be difficult for us to gain an accurate understanding of Christ’s life apart from the fact that His life was surrounded by angels.

Matthew 4:11 - “Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.”

Matthew 26:53 - “Or do you think that I cannot pray now to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?”

From His birth all the way to the cross, at every point in His life, Jesus was under the protection of angelic hosts. The enemy and all of hell was opposed to His life, but nothing would thwart the plan of God and the purpose for which Jesus came into the world.

Jesus is the object of angelic worship.

From our vantage point, it would seem that Christ’s life was under perpetual threat and in constant danger. From heaven’s vantage point, He was in no danger whatsoever. Providence would have it that God was orchestrating the events of the gospel narrative, and Herod was powerless to do anything. This should be a source of great hope and confidence for Christ-followers!

Romans 8:28 - “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

Psalms 34:7 - “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”

His life was an answer to detailed PROMISES (v. 14-15)

“When he 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 through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’”

Every detail of Jesus’ life was in fulfillment of OT prophecy.

In verses 13-23, Matthew shows us how this is the case:

- “...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (v. 15)
- “Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet” (v. 17)

- "...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets" (v. 23)

All of the promises that God made in the OT find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. This is significant because it shows us how God is the original "Promise Keeper."

Deuteronomy 7:9-10 - "Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face."

Kurt DeHaan - *"The original language of the Old Testament does not have a specific word for the concept of promise, but that doesn't mean the idea isn't there. The Hebrew words (amar, dabar) that are translated by the English word 'promise' have the meaning of "to say" or "to speak." When God and others in the Bible speak about what they will do in the future, the word promise fits well. In each case, the speaker's word, honor, and integrity are at stake."*

The integrity of the one who promises is on line in the promise. Rest assured that God always stands behind what He says! He keeps His promises.

This also shows us why the enemy is in opposition of Jesus and all that He represents. In Jesus the promise of redemption is realized. The enemy wants to accuse God of being a liar, and therefore someone who cannot be trusted.

2. Jesus is the SYMPATHIZER of our hurts (2:16-18)

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'"

Herod's hostility towards Jesus in this text culminates with his decree to have all the baby boys in Bethlehem slaughtered who are ages two and under.

The TRAGEDY of sinful decisions (v. 16)

"...he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under,"

We find it hard to imagine how a ruler of people could be so ruthless, yet this very thing is ongoing in our nation today with the exception that we call it “choice.”

What about those Bethlehem moms and dads who heard a loud knock at the door that night? Can you imagine how they must have felt when a soldier barged in the house with a sword in hand with murder on the brain? And how did those parents feel when their children were torn from their arms and executed mercilessly?

The world we live in is reeling back and forth from the effects of sin. Each time someone's life is taken by another, or each time someone is raped, or each time someone is taken advantage of and made a victim by another PROVES the existence of sin in the world. We are still witnessing the effects of Adam's original sin in the world today.

Our sin even leads us to blame God when blame rests with us! God is not the One to blame with sin's consequences; the blame belongs to Adam and his descendants.

The answer to the question of God's love is found in the cross. At the cross, God's Son dealt with the tragedy and consequences of sin by becoming man's substitute.

The TRUTH that comfort can be found (v. 17-18)

“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’”

There is a greater fulfillment here than we realize. Matthew is quoting from Jeremiah 31:

Jeremiah 31:15 - “Thus says the Lord: A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”

This was spoken in reference to Israel's captivity.

Ramah was a little village that was five miles south of Jerusalem. It was through Ramah that all the captive slaves of Judah were led to Babylon into captivity. The burial place of Rachel, Jacob's wife, was not far away from Ramah. The imagery is that Rachel is weeping from her tomb for the pitiful condition of her children being led away captive.

Matthew takes this passage and applies it to the loss of children. Yet for those who were hurting, the full context of the Jeremiah passage reveals that comfort can be found:

Jeremiah 31:16-17 - “Thus says the Lord: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border.”

With the tragedy, there was a hope to be found.

David Platt - *“So when Matthew quotes from Jeremiah, it’s as if he’s saying amidst the bitter tragedy of Bethlehem, ‘Yes the pain is real, but there is hope for your future, and that hope is here. Jesus has come!’”*

Jesus the Nazarene is our hope and the solution for our problem.

3. Jesus is the SAVIOR of all humanity (2:19-23)

“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, 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.’”

Matthew shows in verse 23 us how Jesus fulfilled prophecy by being a Nazarene. A couple of things are true of this title:

It draws us to a PLACE

Nazareth was located in the hills of southern Galilee and was located near the crossroads of well traversed trade routes. The town was no more than a village, quite small compared to other towns. The people of Nazareth were frowned upon by the rest of Jewish society because of its rough associations.

This perhaps is what prompted Nathaniel’s remark:

John 1:45-46 - “Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also so the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathaniel said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’”

It refers us to a PROMISE

Interestingly enough, if you read the Old Testament frontwards and backwards, you will not find this exact statement. In fact, that Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee was a cause for stumbling for the religious leaders of His day.

John 7:52 - “They answered and said to him, ‘Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.’”

What is Matthew referring to? Notice that he says, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets,” not ‘prophet.’ He is not referring to a singular prophecy spoken by a singular prophet. He is referring to a composite of prophecies. Or, the overarching message of the prophets is that our Savior would be called a Nazarene.

“Nazareth” - comes from a Hebrew root word that means ‘branch’

Several of the OT prophets referred to coming Messiah King as the Branch:

Jeremiah 23:5 - “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”

Zechariah 3:8 - “For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the Branch.”

Isaiah 11:1 - “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”

So the word ‘Nazareth’ in Hebrew is a derivative of the Hebrew word that means ‘branch.’ Perhaps this is what Matthew is wanting us to see--that Jesus is the Branch, the King who was promised to rise from David.

Several chapters later, the prophet Isaiah continues this figure of speech:

Isaiah 53:1-3 - “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

The idea is that the Branch would be rejected. He would be despised and rejected by the very ones He came to save. He would be rejected by men, but accepted by God.

Thus, the title, 'Jesus the Nazarene,' is a title showing that He was this Branch, the promised King, who was rejected by men but approved by God.

Jesus of Nazareth knew what it meant to be rejected by men. As such, He can identify with you and me. Such a title proves Him to be the Savior of all humanity! He is the Savior of the outcast, the downtrodden, the despised, and the abandoned. He is the Savior of the one who has made a mess of his or her own life, the one whom every one else in the world has written off as a failure.

It brings us to a PERSON

So important was this title, 'Jesus the Nazarene,' that God saw to it that it was the title given to Jesus that was attached to the cross.

John 19:19 - "Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Jesus the Nazarene was rejected so that you could be accepted. He carried your sin, bore your shame, and wore your disgrace on the cross so that you could possess His life.

The cross did not conquer Jesus of Nazareth; Jesus of Nazareth conquered the cross! How do we know this?

On the road to Emmaus, two of Jesus' followers were walking and conversing about the things that had transpired in Jerusalem. A Stranger appeared on the road and walked with them a ways and asked them why they were sad:

Luke 28:18-20 - "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have not known the things which happened there in recent days? And He said to them, 'What things?' So they said to Him, 'The things concerning JESUS OF NAZARETH, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.'"

Listen to their dejected spirit and hopelessness in their words:

Luke 28:21 - "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened."

What they didn't realize was that something amazing, something truly more amazing than anything that had ever taken place before happened on that third day! The Stranger said:

Luke 28:25-27 - "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead!

Rejected by men, he was crucified. Approved by God, He was resurrected. Now, those who are despised and rejected can come to Him and find acceptance and forgiveness and eternal life.

From the passage, we learn of Jesus:

1--He is the subject of great hostility, and in following Him you will face rejection in the world.

2--He is the sympathizer of our hurts, and no matter what we face in this life, He is our strength.

3--He is the Savior of all humanity, and in Him alone can we find life and salvation.