

Christmas Unwrapped “The Tender Shoot” Matthew 2:19-23

Introduction

- [Slide #1] I really don't even know how this was possible. Earlier this year the women's ice hockey teams from Slovakia and Bulgaria squared off against each other in a pre-qualifying match for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. And it wasn't even close. Take a guess as to what the score was? I'll give you a few hints to help you out. The Slovaks scored more goals than minutes played. They outshot the Bulgarian team 139-0. It was the largest margin of victory for a women's International Ice Hockey Federation-sanctioned event. Any guesses? A few more hints. Bulgaria trailed 7-0 after 5 minutes, 19-0 after 10 and 31-0 at the end of the first period. Oh and the Bulgarian women had already lost a match 30-1 against Croatia and 41-0 versus Italy. Final score? The Slovaks pummeled the Bulgarians 82-0.¹
- If I were in the press conference after the game I'd have had a few questions for the Bulgarian players and coaches. For instance. “We're you wearing skates?” “Did you wear blindfolds?” “We're you holding your sticks upside down?” “Was everybody skating on one foot?”
- Seriously. What can you possibly say to explain an 82-0 loss in international competition? It's not like football where you at least get six points for a touchdown. It's hockey. In the NHL on March 3, 1920 the Montreal Canadiens beat the Quebec Bulldogs 16-3—the most lopsided victory ever. On January 17, 1962 in the IHL the Saint Paul Saints beat the Toledo Mercurys 20-3. But 82-0? Can you imagine what the other teams must think of Bulgaria? How do you show your face back home after a loss like that?

Transition

Turn to Matthew 2:19-23. Listen. *After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."*

- When Matthew says of Jesus, “*He will be called a Nazarene,*” that's not something good. It's like saying, “your team plays like the Bulgarian women's hockey team.” It's an insult. But Matthew's not trying to insult Jesus. He's trying to tell us that...[Slide #2]

Proposition

- **Jesus the promised Messiah—God with us, the shepherd ruler, the new Moses, will be despised and rejected**
- The irony of God's Christmas gift, the greatest gift ever, is that in order for the gift to have its full effect the gift needed to be despised and rejected. As Matthew has done repeatedly in

¹ Associated Press

these first two chapters, he's trying to tell us something important about Jesus. Before his gospel gets going full tilt he's trying to tell us not to be surprised by the ending. Not to be surprised by the cross. Part of what it means to unwrap Christmas means unwrapping the idea that **Jesus the promised Messiah—God with us, the shepherd ruler, the new Moses, will be despised and rejected.**

Transition

Look at [verse 19](#).

Main Points

- If you'll remember from last week, king Herod wanted Jesus dead. Jesus was *one born king of the Jews*. So he hatched a plot to murder all the male children in Bethlehem age two and under thinking that would take care of Jesus. But Joseph, warned in a dream, led Mary and the toddler Jesus to Egypt escaping Herod's wrath. They waited it out in Egypt until it was safe to return. That wait lasted probably a little more than a year. Because in about 4 BC Herod died. And with Herod dead it was then safe again for Joseph and Mary and Jesus to return the land of Israel.
- The angel came to Joseph and gave him the news. [Verse 19](#). *After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.*
- Problem was that Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born, the place where Joseph and Mary had put down some roots before the trip to Egypt, still wasn't safe. [Verse 22](#). *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.*
- See, when Herod died, his territory was split up into three sections and three of his sons were put on three thrones in his place. They were made Tetrarchs. A Tetrarch is someone who rules a divided up kingdom. So Herod Philip II ruled a region north of the Sea of Galilee called Traconitis. Another son, Herod Antipas, ruled the region of Galilee and a portion of land east of the Jordan River. And a third son, Archelaus, was put into power over the southern territory of Judea, which included the city of Bethlehem.
- The reason Joseph was afraid to resettle in Bethlehem, in Archelaus' territory, was because Archelaus was as cruel and ruthless and inefficient as a ruler as his father Herod the Great. "One of the first acts of Archelaus was to murder some three thousand people in the temple."² In fact, he was such a poor ruler that he was removed from office and banished by Caesar in 6 AD.
- And so Joseph, upon returning home, was forced to relocate, not to where he wanted, but in the despised region of Galilee, where the less cruel Antipas ruled.³ And living in Galilee was like living on the wrong side of the tracks. The ethnic majority in Galilee were the Samaritans or half-breeds. And the Jews and Samaritans didn't mix well. That's where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus settled down. In Nazareth. Smack dab in the middle of Samaritan land.

² Thomas Constable, Notes on Matthew

³ Carson, [Matthew](#), *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

- But even worse, Matthew says, *having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.* Not only did they settle on the wrong side of the tracks, they settled in the projects on the wrong side of the tracks. They settled in Nazareth. Again, not because it was a favorable place to live, which it wasn't, but most likely because it was Mary's hometown.
- If you were from Nazareth you were viewed by others as backwoodsmen or country bumpkin.⁴ Do you remember later in Jesus' life when Philip went to Nathanael to tell him he had found the Messiah? Remember what he says about Jesus? John 1:43. *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.*
- So when Matthew says in [verse 23](#), *So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."* That's not a good thing. It's not complimentary. Think Bulgarian women's hockey team. He's trying to tell us that **Jesus the promised Messiah—God with us, the shepherd ruler, the new Moses, will be despised and rejected.** In Jesus' day the word "Nazarene" was virtually synonymous with the word "despised." And it's this particular point that Matthew stresses as fulfillment of the Old Testament. *So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."*
- A few words about *what was said through the prophets.* Notice first off, it is *prophets* plural, not prophet singular. Unlike previous Old Testament quotes that Matthew refers to in chapters 1 and 2, there is no actual Old Testament passage that predicted that the Messiah would come from Nazareth or that people would call Him a Nazarene. You won't find it. The fact that Matthew uses *prophets* instead of prophet indicates he's not quoting one text directly but several texts put together.
- Among them are probably the following: Psalm 22:6-7. *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.* Isaiah 49:7 *This is what the LORD says-- the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel-- to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: Isaiah 53:2-3. He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*
- As [D.A. Carson](#) points out, "first-century Christian readers of Matthew, who had tasted their share of scorn, would have quickly caught Matthew's point. He is not saying that a particular Old Testament prophet foretold that the Messiah would live in Nazareth; he is saying that the Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be despised."⁵ Matthew is telling us that although Jesus is a King, he's a different kind of king. Although he's Immanuel—God with us, he won't come in glory. Although he's the new Moses who will lead God's people out of slavery, **he will be despised and rejected.** He won't fit the mold of what people are

⁴ Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, p. 11.

⁵ Carson, [Matthew](#), *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

looking for in a Messiah. Nobody wants a suffering Messiah. And therein lies the application for us.

- In his book *The Jesus I Never Knew* Philip Yancey writes, “When the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci went to China in the sixteenth century, he brought along samples of religious art to illustrate the Christian story for people who had never heard it. The Chinese readily adopted portraits of the Virgin Mary holding her child, but when he produced paintings of the crucifixion and tried to explain that the God-child had grown up only to be executed, the audience reacted with revulsion and horror. They much preferred the Virgin and insisted on worshipping her rather than the crucified God.
- Yancey goes on, “As I thumb...through my stack of Christmas cards, I realize that we in Christian countries do much the same thing. We observe a mellow, domesticated holiday purged of any hint of scandal. Above all, we purge from it any reminder of how the story that began in Bethlehem turned out at Calvary.”⁶
- How about you? Yancey’s line *a mellow, domesticated holiday purged of any hint of scandal* should haunt you. If, for you, for your family, for your kids, you have so sanitized and purged from your celebration of Christmas any allusion to Jesus’ suffering and death then you are doing a disservice to God’s gift.
- [Slide #3] It is impossible, if you’re really serious about unwrapping Christmas, to separate the birth of Christ from his suffering and death. Matthew doesn’t separate the two. Jesus’ rejection, his suffering and death on the cross are as much a part of the Christmas story as the Magi and the shepherds and the stable. **Jesus the promised Messiah—God with us, the shepherd ruler, the new Moses, will be despised and rejected.**

Conclusion

- Isaiah 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* Christmas unwrapped is Christ rejected, despised, punished so that we stand before God with none of those things hanging over our heads.

⁶ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 25