

Called a Nazarene

Call to Worship: Isaiah 12

1st Scripture: Isaiah 11

2nd Scripture: Matthew 2:19-23

Hymn #678- *Christ Shall Have Dominion*

Hymn #664- *Jesus is All the World to Me*

Hymn Insert- *O Church Arise*

Introduction

We left off, considering the terrible tragedy that had struck Bethlehem (and its surrounding districts) because of the decree of King Herod. Since the wisemen had not gone back to Herod to tell him of the location of the child Jesus, Herod had decided to have every male child, two and under, killed in Bethlehem and its surrounding districts. Meanwhile, having been warned in a dream, Joseph had already fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus.

This morning, as we continue on with the narrative, Matthew fasts forward to the time when they return to Israel, following the death of King Herod. Once again, an angel had appeared to Joseph in a dream, informing him of Herod's death, and gave him the order to return. And so, we will pick up with the narrative here, which will, in turn, lead us to consider another OT prophecy as well, that speaks of the primary place of our Lord's upbringing in Nazareth.

Now, just for a quick moment, it is worth noting the fact that King Herod had died, when Jesus was still a child. Why do I mention this? He took pains to secure his throne indefinitely, being fearfully paranoid that Jesus would be a threat to his throne. What he didn't realize was that his days were already numbered by God, such that, his demise would take place before Jesus would even be of an eligible age for reigning on the throne, if it were the intention of God to place Jesus on an earthly throne at that time. All of those children killed, and at the end of the day, Herod's time was up, when God gave the word. Now, Herod might seem ridiculously foolish to us, were it not for the fact that most in our day, live in the same way, assuming that tomorrow will continue where today has left off. Friends, we don't know what a day will bring. Who knows if this is not your last day? Time is just not in your hands. Herod, plagued with the constant fear of losing his throne, tried to control his destiny on that throne, but he came to learn the hard way, that that type of control is just not given to mankind. And when God punched his

time card, he was not ready to stand before God. Are you? Not unless you have subjected yourself to the authority and reign of the same Christ whom Herod had sought to kill.

I. Matthew 2:19-23 Summary

And so, again, following the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord had, by dream, ordered Joseph and his family to return to Israel. And, of course, they did so. That said, Joseph was afraid to return to Judea, because Herod's son, Archelaus, was reigning in place of his father, and he thought that he might still run into trouble there. And furthermore, God also warned Joseph in a dream, which led Joseph to return (with his family) to Galilee. And here, they settle into the town of Nazareth, which is where Jesus will spend the remainder of His years, until He begins His public ministry, when he turns thirty. For this reason, Jesus is called a "Nazarene." And Matthew states that this, as well, is a fulfillment of OT prophecy.

Now, before we trek back to find the prophecy, which this text fulfills, it is important that we recognize a few things about this label given to Jesus:

In general, the Jews could never have imagined that the Messiah would come from Nazareth. For one, Nazareth was in Galilee, where, as we've considered in the past, gentiles had a significant presence, especially in its northern regions. And furthermore, Nazareth, itself, was considered insignificant, dirty and full of criminals and swindlers. And so, to come from Nazareth, welcomed all manner of insults from the Jews, and especially from those who had any sense of a moral compass. You get a little taste of this from Nathaniel, one of our Lord's twelve Apostles, when he first hears of Jesus. You might recall in John's gospel, Chapter 1:46, when Philip comes to Nathaniel and tells him that they have found the Messiah, and that He is, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," Nathaniel (probably with an expression on his face akin to a response to the smell of rotten fish) responds, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Such was the reputation that Nazareth had, even among other Galileans, let alone those who lived in Judea or Jerusalem!

And in fact, it is documented that, following the life of Christ, many Jews who rejected Him, called Him, "Ben Netzer," referring to His Nazarene background. And this was considered a strong insult, indicating that Jesus was a lowdown swindler and thief, among other wicked

things. Needless to say, to be called anything *from Nazareth* was not a label that anyone would have naturally coveted. But, the Lord welcomed this label, as it represented something far more glorious in the sight of God, relating to the nature of Christ's Person and work. To this end, what man considers significant is often irrelevant to God, and what man considers irrelevant is often significant to God. That's a paradox that has been revealed all throughout history!

All of that said, let's go to the one place in the OT, where we will find Jesus being labeled as the "Netzer," which Matthew alludes to here in our main text.

II. Isaiah 11:1-5

Now, let me give you a quick contextual overview, which will help prepare us to appreciate what we are told here in Isaiah 11. Remember, Isaiah is writing during the time when the Assyrians are the great national power, which is conquering many nations, and is about to conquer and exile the Northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria/Ephraim). And furthermore, the Assyrians will conquer many of the fortified cities of Judah, for that matter, right up to the point of surrounding Jerusalem. And then, of course, in response to the intercession of Hezekiah and Isaiah, God removes the Assyrian threat and ultimately has the Assyrians, later overcome by the Babylonians. Following this, while Isaiah is not around during the time of the exile of the Southern kingdom of Judah, he does prophesy about their coming judgment, as well, throughout his Book.

But, what's significant about the context of chapter 11, and that which will help set the stage for what we are told here, is that God uses "tree" language to speak about the mighty nations that will defeat the Jews, and which in turn, God will ultimately defeat. He speaks of them as being "rods" and as having boughs and branches...etc, especially as they conquer and expand outward, throughout the world. And so, for example, he will speak of the Assyrian empire as being the "rod of *His* anger," whom He has used to bring judgment upon other nations, including Israel (Read 10:5, 24, 12&15-19, 33-34). This kind of language is used to describe Babylon, and Israel for that matter, as well (9:14). And often times, Lebanon, which was a nation that was then known for its large, dense, stately forests, would be used to describe kings and nations, as well. The idea conveyed by the "tree analogy" then, is that these nations, in

accordance with God's sovereign will, were often grown from small seeds, until they reached up to the sky and spread out. There's a sense of grandeur, majesty, firmness, strength and power that is implied by this illustration (Ex: we've seen the damage that even a relatively small branch can do, during hurricanes, strong winds...etc).

But sadly, there is often the implication of pride that comes from the "tree analogy," as well, as these nations often denied the Lord who planted them, and saw *themselves* as the reason for their growth and expansion. When they grew high, they forgot their roots and saw themselves as gods, as it were. And so, God would speak of cutting them down or breaking the rod of His judgment.

Now, this is where Isaiah 11 comes into play. God is going to deal with these other large, exalted "trees" (nations), after He has finished using them to lop down Israel and Judah, which would become a stump, as it were, picturing their destruction and exile. But something interesting would happen to the nearly dead, dried out stump of Israel, which would ultimately serve to glorify God, who is the true Ruler over all "trees/nations." [Read Isaiah 11:1-5]

You see, Jesse's stem (or stump) was itself, once a stately tree, spread out into the heavens, as it were, probably at its peak during the reign of King Solomon. But ultimately, because of the ongoing rebellion and idolatry of the people, it was utterly cut down by God's instrument/axe (the Babylonians), during the reign of King Zedekiah. And it were as if God's promise to David, to maintain his seed on the throne forever, had fallen short. But, just when it seemed like God's plan had failed, and His people were without hope, God yet, brought the Messiah out of this dry stem/stump (Ex: when a tree is cut down and the stump is left, at times, you will find a tiny branch beginning to grow out of some portion of the freshly cut stump).

Well here, God will show His power and glory by bringing a Rod (here, literally a small twig or sprout) out of the stump of Israel, and more specifically, Jesse (David's Father). And this tiny, seemingly useless and harmless twig, will actually grow and grow, and expand outward into the whole world! It will begin in Israel, but it will make its way into every nation, building and securing God's glorious kingdom, which will supersede and rise above every other kingdom in the entire world! You see, while ethnic Israel would return to the land and rebuild, following the Babylonian captivity (under Zerubbabel...etc), which certainly finds some lesser fulfillment here,

on a much larger scale, this is speaking about the building of Christ's church, which would spring out of the "cut off" Israel (whose fiercest judgment comes in 70AD). It is out of National Israel's stump, that the Messiah springs, as a small twig, leading to the glorious building of His church, following His death and resurrection. [See also Isaiah 11:5-10 and Isaiah 53]

Now, what does this have to do with Jesus being called a "Nazarene?" What does this have to do with Jesus being called "Netzer?" Well, we actually read the word in verse 1. Only, you have to read it in Hebrew to realize it. "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a 'Netzer' shall grow out of his roots." That word "Branch" in your English Bibles is a translation of the Hebrew word, "Netzer." And so, when Matthew speaks of Jesus being called a "Nazarene," he is alluding to what the word Nazarene means, which is "Branch." From the standpoint of the world, a harmless, little, unthreatening twig; nothing significant, nothing to brag about; nothing that could ever compete with even the shadows of the great empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome...etc. But, God will manifest His power and glory by lopping down all of those mighty oaks (which He has already done), and He will glorify His Name by building His own Tree (which has been happening for over 2000 years now!), which will spread out to every nation under the sun; all growing out of this seemingly insignificant, "Netzer" (Branch/twig/Nazarene).

What good could ever possibly come out of Nazareth? What building of great stature, worth and glory could ever rise out of that ghetto? He; God's glorious Messiah; His Majestic Son; His appointed King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to which every knee will bow, will be called a "Nazarene!" Again, God's paradoxes are His means of glorifying His Name! Who could know the mind of God? Who can offer Him counsel or say, "I think you might be doing this wrong, or maybe you should try something different."

And so, this is why Jesus gladly embraced the label, "Nazarene," and spent the great majority of His years, living in Nazareth (note: a region that had many trees and plants) in fulfillment of the Scriptures. And this is why Matthew makes mention of this connection to OT prophecy, as another critical portion to the glorious compilation of his testimony to the reality of Jesus's Messianic office and calling.

III. Conclusion

1) Brethren, again behold and marvel over the glorious wisdom and power of God. Great empires have come and gone, and great nations will continue to come and go, but the Word of our God stands forever. And He cannot fail. He built His kingdom and His church, out of a single Branch, protruding out of a nearly dead stump, and it is spreading to all nations. And that Branch not only reigns in the present (and will continue to reign forever), but He Himself had to first die to secure that reign, having the desire to cleanse us, to wash and purify us, so that we could live with Him forever! He conquered, in humility, for our sake, so that what has separated us from God has been forever removed! And He is still building His glorious church today, throughout the whole world. We are witnessing the fulfillment of this reality, thousands of years after it was first proclaimed! Will that not affect the way that we live here and now? This world, and this state, and this town, desperately need to see the light of the glory of Christ, as they are caught up in a kingdom that is dying, fading and growing obsolete. We have the light that can reveal the truth to them. Our unity, our profession of faith, our testimony, our holiness, our ideals and desires, our Gospel, can and ought to point people to the Branch, out of which, we have sprung. In what specific ways are we going to make Christ known this year, before we quickly move into the next one, should the Lord continue to tarry?

2) Brethren, as we continue to work through the narrative of Christ's life, as revealed by Matthew, while we don't have every detail of His life (it's not meant to be a biography), can we not see all throughout, the sovereignty of God ordering all things? His entire life is directed by providence, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. But brethren, it is also important to realize that God is doing the same thing with each and every one of us. He is ordering every event and detail and circumstance surrounding our lives. Nothing is by chance. Knowing this, ought to bring us great comfort! The devil and his minions have absolutely no control over your life. The world has no control over your life. The government and world powers, ultimately have no control over your life. God is at the helm, directing all things. And while our paths will be rocky and shaky and painful at times, let us remember that it is all ordained by God, for our good and for His glory!

3) Finally, if you are an unbeliever (if you are not a Christian) this morning, recognize that the God who created you for His own glory, is not impressed by outward show, greatness and appearance. He looks at the heart. And He often uses the weak and despised things of the world to glorify His Name and to accomplish His will. His Son was born in an animal's feeding trough in Bethlehem. His Son was raised in Galilee, and was called a "Nazarene." From the world's standpoint, Jesus was not impressive in His upbringing or appearance. Indeed, in His years of ministry, He had hardly a place to rest His head. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He had no earthly or material possessions. When He was crucified, they cast lots for the one asset He had, a one piece undergarment!

Don't get swept away in the world's lies, that tell you that life is bound up in the amount of possessions and worth and popularity, that you mount up. None of these things matter, and none of these things will pass through the great filter of the grave, toward which, we are all heading! Invest in eternal riches! Seek the Kingdom of God first, and He will provide you with the things that you need to survive here. Seek the Branch! [The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25