



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **The Story of Easter**

One of the favorite tools of Christ for conveying truth was the parable. These typically began like this:

- “The Kingdom of God is like...”
- “The Kingdom of heaven can be compared to...”

Through His use of the parable, Christ enabled His disciples and the crowds to comprehend truth from a variety of angles: through their

- Sight.
- Taste.
- Touch.
- Experience.

It is one thing to say that God loves his children. But to present God's love as...

- The love of a father for a lost child- as in the Prodigal.
- The passion of a woman for her lost dowry- as in the Lost Coin.
- The longing of a shepherd for a lost animal- as in the Lost Sheep.

is to magnify and so extend the implication of God's love tenfold. Truly the parable was/is an effective

tool for conveying truth!

In the spirit of the parable, I want to look at the Story of Easter. During this time of year, pulpits abound with sermons on the suffering and death of our Lord. However, few seek to understand His death from the perspective of the Old Testament. John 5:39 says that all that was written in the Old Testament, "...bears witness to [Christ]." As that is true, to examine the Old Testament in search of The Story of Easter will, I believe, magnify and extend "The Story" tenfold.

### ***The Setting of 1 Samuel 8***

So we will look at The Story of Easter from the perspective of the Old Testament; specifically, the witness of 1 Samuel 8:1-9.

1 Samuel 8:1-2, "And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba."

As this is the later period of what is known as the Judges, we must understand the "judgeship" of Joel and Abijah in terms of the book of Judges. Most of you know that the "judge" of the Book of Judges was the cross between a military leader and a shepherd. Not only did the judges serve as...

- Spiritual leaders.
- Guides who directed God's people to undistracted devotion (cf. Gideon, Jephthah).

They also protected the people of God from foreign oppression. In the case of Samuel, his "protection" came as he reminded God's people of their responsibility to God. For it was only when the people were faithful to the covenant that they enjoyed God's protection!

And thus, as Samuel appointed his two sons as judges — and that strategically positioned in the South — what he actually did was to ordain TWO Protectors of Israel!

1 Samuel 8:3, "His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice"

In other words, far from being the men of God that their father was or the passionate and faithful judges of old who delivered God's people Samuel's sons were worthless fellows who lived *off* the people rather than *for* the people. And thus, rather than protecting Israel they adulterated the nation for the sake of dishonest gain! And thus we read of the elder's petition...

### ***The Petition***

1 Samuel 8:4-5, "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'"

In other words, listen Samuel, as you already have appointed king-like figures in the land via your sons,

do it again. But this time, appoint ones who are powerful and strong, “LIKE THE NATIONS!”

It is this latter phrase that I want you to notice this morning. The description of “...like the nations...” was not simply an illustration of the kind of protection the people wanted. Rather, it was a description of the kind of king they wanted. In fact, notice after Samuel described life under a “king like the nations” in very negative terms (1 Samuel 8:10-18) we read of the people’s response.

1 Samuel 8:19-20: “Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, 'No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.'”

The emphasis here is on a “king like the nations.” The people were tired of the constant oppression from their neighbors. And because living as the covenant people of God and so enjoying God's protection did not appeal to them they wanted to worship Baal and the many other gods of the nations. They wanted to do their own thing, free from the “tyranny” of God. So they opted for the next best thing: A Protector Like the Nations. And so they ask for a king. And yet, with this one request came the horrible rejection found in 1 Samuel 8:6-9.

### ***The Rejection***

1 Samuel 8:6, “But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the Lord.”

At first glance, the request of the people appears to have been a rejection of Samuel.

- He was the God-ordained prophet in the land, and thus...
- He was the one through whom God had led and would lead His people!

That the people asked for a king, regardless of the excuse about Samuel's sons, clearly and understandably would have been interpreted as a rejection of Samuel. In fact, put yourself in the situation here described and you can almost see and hear it. The elders of Israel have gathered to discuss a very pressing concern:

- We're tired of serving the Philistines and the Canaanites.
- The cycle over the past couple generations has got to end...
  - First freedom.
  - Then oppression.
  - Then freedom.
  - Then oppression.
- You know what is needed don't you? A king!...

The wanted a king, NOT like Samuel who simply speaks the word of the Lord all the time, or his two sons who “take and take” and give nothing in return BUT someone with strength and power: Someone who

- Wouldn't stand for the atrocities of the Philistines.
- Would interpret any foreign threat as a threat against himself and his people.
- Who could respond to the Canaanites with force!

- Who could rally the people and lead them into battle!

Now we know that this may come as quite a shock to Samuel, after all he has been “the man” all these years. However, Samuel's emotions can no longer stand in the way of our protection and welfare! WE NEED A KING!

### ***God's Answer***

And so Samuel, shocked and beside himself, goes to the Lord in prayer only to be surprised further by God's answer.

1 Samuel 8: 7-8: “And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods- so they are doing to you also.’”

Indeed, the people's request for a king was nothing less than a rejection of God! See, it wasn't Samuel who the people rejected. It wasn't even his ungodly sons. Rather, it was the Lord Himself whom the people rejected; which is quite amazing! For, while it is true that the time of the Judges was a time of lawlessness in which “Everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (cf. Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). And thus a time in which the people suffered.

However it was clear that during this time God was the king of Israel.

Judges 8:23, “And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.”

In the euphoria following his victory over the Midianites, Gideon was asked to become king. Notice his response, “But Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.’”

See, as God was the King in Israel, the people's request for a “king like the nations” was nothing less than a rejection of God! And yet in this context, notice God's amazing response.

1 Samuel 8:9, “Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them.”

This is an important command on the part of God. While, the people wanted a king in rejection of God, this request at first would prove to be quite costly and even detrimental to the nation.<sup>1</sup> The people's desire truly was for evil.

Nevertheless God instituted the monarchy and used it for good such that through the office of the king, He...

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 8:10-22

- Protected His people.
- Led and governed Israel.
- Shepherded and cared for His flock, Jeremiah 3:15.
- Encouraged the people with regard to their worship of God.
- Preserved the righteous seed.
- Established the nation.
- And ultimately saved His people from their sin through the work of the divine King, King Jesus!

### ***The Significance: How is this the Story of Easter?***

And that, Brothers and Sisters, is what The Story of Easter is all about. It is...

- A rebellious and obstinate people rejecting God to His face.
- And yet God, in His grace and mercy, working through the rejection to affect the salvation of the very ones who had refused Him!

Now to show you this more clearly, turn to Luke 23.

#### The Setting of Luke 23

Luke 23:13-16, "And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish Him and release Him.'"

By the time of this text, Christ has already been

- Betrayed by Judas.
- Arrested in the Garden.
- Falsely tried by the Sanhedrin.
- Sent to Pilate, Herod, and now back to Pilate again.

### ***The Petition and Rejection***

And here we read of Pilate's presentation of what he called "an innocent" and "good man." And with that, notice the people's Petition and Rejection.

Luke 23:17-19, "Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. But they cried out all together, saying, 'Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!' (He was one who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)"

For the sake of pacifying the Jews, Rome evidently established a practice in which they would release one time per year any criminal that the Jews requested. Now what gives the people's petition significance here is the identity of Barabbas!

According to the four Gospel accounts, we know that Barabbas was...

- A Murderer, Luke 23:19, 25.
- An Insurrectionist, Luke 23:19, 25.
- A Thief, John 18:40.

Now at first glance it would seem that Barabbas was nothing more than just another “bum” caught by Rome. However, reason through the evidence with me.

- Barabbas was a Murderer- and yet if Barabbas was guilty of murdering another Jew, there is no doubt that the chief priests and elders would NOT have asked for his release<sup>2</sup> to kill a fellow Jew was a horrible crime in Israel.
- From this we conclude that Barabbas undoubtedly was charged with the murder of a *foreigner*.
- Barabbas was an Insurrectionist- now as an insurrectionist, according to the use of this word here and in Mark 15:7, is someone who had participated in some kind of a revolt.

Again notice, because it would be unthinkable for the Sanhedrin to request the release of a criminal who had rebelled against *Jewish law*- especially when we consider that the Sanhedrin could have requested the release of any criminal. Most likely the description here referred to an uprising against Rome.

In fact, Luke records that the uprising occurred, “...in the city” (Luke 23:19). And thus, to say that the man the Sanhedrin wanted was an “insurrectionist” implies that he was someone who had rebelled

- NOT against Israel.
- BUT against Rome!

Barabbas was a thief- just like with the previous two descriptions. If Barabbas was guilty of robbing from another Jew, there is no doubt that the chief priests and elders would NOT have asked for his release<sup>3</sup> to rob from a fellow Jew, though not on the same level as murder, nevertheless was a serious crime in Israel.

From this we conclude that Barabbas undoubtedly was charged with robbing from a *foreigner*. Now all of this combined has led to the conclusion that Barabbas probably was NOT simply one of the many “bums” in Israel who broke the law for a living BUT a Zealot who had participated in an attack on Rome in which people were killed and property stolen. Truly, there could be no better candidate by which to entice the people to reject Christ! Leon Morris wrote this;

“Barabbas was evidently a member of what we would call the resistance movement, judging from the reference to insurrection. No doubt the murder (cf. Acts 3:14) had taken place in connection with this uprising.”<sup>4</sup>

And so, notice the significance of the petition in this text. When it came time for choosing between two Messianic figures; the seemingly passive and non-violent carpenter, named Jesus; and the rebellious and

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<sup>2</sup> Compare also Matthew 27:20

<sup>3</sup> Compare Matthew 27:20

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, TOTC, *Luke*, page 353

violent patriot, named Barabbas; the people, just like in the days of Samuel, chose a “savior” LIKE THE NATIONS! And yet, just like in the days of Samuel, the People's Rejection ultimately led to their salvation.

### ***The Salvation***

While there are a variety of texts that proclaim the significance of Christ's betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, death, and resurrection- many of which are from Luke notice the significance ascribed to Christ's death and resurrection in Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:14-15: “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

The Story of Easter is nothing less than a rebellious and obstinate people rejecting God to His face and yet God, in His grace and mercy, working through the rejection to effect the salvation of the very ones who had refused Him!

### ***The Prodigal Son***

I am not going to bring you through this parable or even read it in its entirety. Rather, I just want to draw your attention to verses 17-20.

Luke 15:17-20: “But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”' And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.”

As this child had been brought to the end of himself, he purposed within his heart to return to his father

- NOT as His child.
- BUT as a hired man- which was on the bottom of the social-economic scale.

And yet, while he was still a long way off, notice Luke 15:20.

Luke 15:20b, “...his father saw him, and felt compassion for him...”

In other words, in spite of the state of rebellion in which the son was, the father was seeking him with a compassionate heart!

Luke 15:20c, “...and ran...”: in Christ's day, it was generally not considered dignified for an elderly man to run; yet, this father runs!”

Luke 15:20d, "...and embraced him...": he threw his arms around his son's neck."

Luke 15:20e, "...and kissed him."

In my opinion, this is one of the greatest mistranslations in the NASB. The word in the Greek is the compound *kataphileo* (*phileo*: to kiss; *kata*: intensifying it). The father didn't just give him a peck on the cheek, he repeatedly kissed him, over and over and over again!

Now what makes the actions of the father in verse 20 so amazing is that at this point the son had yet to even confess a sin! In other words, forgiveness was granted even before confession!

Again we see The Story of Easter! It is

- God beholding us, His children, in all our sin and misery...
- And before we can even confess, He...
  - Seeks us out.
  - Runs to meet us.
  - Throws His arms around us.
  - And repeatedly kisses us!

Oh brothers and sisters, this day let us behold The Story of Easter for the miracle that it really is! And let us be changed by it! So often we relate to God on the basis of our...

- Good deeds.
- Good intentions.
- "Sinless" record.

And then when the deeds, intentions, or record fails, WE forsake God...

- We refuse to pray.
- We reject the reading of His word.
- We forsake the means of grace.

All because we fear what God must be thinking of us!

And yet, realize when the people of Samuel's day REJECTED God, God nevertheless worked their rejection unto their salvation. When the prodigal REJECTED his father, his father nevertheless sought him out; and before confession even occurred, he forgave him! When the people of Christ's day REJECTED Christ, God nevertheless worked their rejection unto their salvation.

Romans 11:15, "For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"

As we consider the Story of Easter, let us cast off the doubts and fears of God's disfavor: Easter is the Favor of God extended to a rebellious people! Bask in the light of God's grace and mercy: He Loves us, even when we sin!

And it is this truth that leads to great communion! People often ask, “Why confess if we are forgiven in Christ?” Because you are forgiven! See because in Christ I no longer fear wrath, or condemnation. I am now free to truly confess! And that is exactly the order we find with the prodigal.<sup>5</sup>

In the upper room, just hours before His arrest, Christ told His disciples, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends” (John 15:13-14). This is perhaps one of the most powerful verses in Scripture. As the disciples sat before Christ, little did they know that soon...

- They would abandon Him.
- They would forsake Him.
- They even would deny Him!

And yet Christ, knowing all of this, called them His Friends! Such is the STATUS of all this day who trust in Christ for salvation! Never again need we fear God's wrath. WE ARE HIS CHILDREN AND FRIEND!

### **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon (the last few minutes were not recorded because of a power outage during the sermon) and these notes can be found at [Who is your King?](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 12, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Luke 15:21