

Title: The King from Looserville.
Text: Matthew 2.19-23
Theme: The Messiah you never saw coming.
Series: Matthew #6
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus is the King you never imagined.

Many years ago when we were looking for a theme to summarize our message to the community, we came up with the phrase, "You Belong Here." Although that phrase appears on the front doors, it primarily does not refer to a building, but to a people. We are people who have become a people. Once we were not part of God's people, because we had not yet come to faith in Christ. But, when God opened our eyes of understanding to the gospel of Jesus Christ and we believed, we, at that moment, were transferred from being someone who did not belong, to someone who was now in the very people of God. That is a promise that is available to every single person who will trust in Christ. And when you trust in Christ, you become part of a people to whom you belong forever and ever.

Now, the funny thing is that this theme is on one of the front doors that, throughout the week is generally locked. So, the message of "you belong here" does not really work when the door won't open, does it? This exposes a personal fear in each of us. We fear rejection. Why? I am convinced that one of the scars of sin upon the human soul is the sense of isolation. This sense of isolation is not simply a feeling to overcome; it is a reality. Our sin actually isolates us from God and from each other. This started in Genesis 3. We go to enormous lengths in order to attempt to belong, or to show that we are important. To complicate matters, the media bombards us with people whom we supposedly want to emulate. For example, tonight are the Oscars. The very people who are considered to have reached the very top are at the same time subject to relentless criticism and cruel comments. Listen, the ultimate insiders still do not belong! It is a message that is so hard to wrap our minds around, which is why Jesus was able to live about 90% of his life virtually unnoticed. He was the King that no one ever imagined. He was the Messiah that no one saw coming. Why? We were looking for someone who belonged, but he was someone whose life made it appear, that he did not. Who wants a King like that?

Read Text:

We are at the end of chapter 2, which concludes the account of the events of the birth of Christ. Each account is intentionally chosen by Matthew to demonstrate to his reader that Jesus is the King who came in fulfillment of the prophecies of old and who came to take that which rightfully belongs to him. Matthew has chosen five prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Each prophecy tells us a little more about Christ and prepares us for the type of ministry that is going to have. This last one seems to, at least initially, be a bit puzzling because there is no prophet who ever said that, "He shall be called a Nazarene." But notice that Matthew did not say a particular prophet, like he does elsewhere. He said, "That what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled." Matthew is stating that the fact that Christ was raised in and eventually came from Nazareth fulfilled the prediction

of the prophets. In other words, there was a theme that the prophets reflected in their writings that this Messiah was going to come from “the other side of the tracks.”

1. **Our Savior did not lead a charmed life.** (19-22)

When you contemplate raising a child in this world, you tend to think of what you can do to provide a safe, stable, secure, and affirming environment for your child. We look back at how we were raised and remember the things that disappointed us, or caused us great sorrow and determine that we are not going to put our child through that. We also look back and reflect on the things that were a delight and we want to give our child experiences like that.

Can you imagine the responsibility that Joseph felt for the life of Christ? An angel had appeared to him before Christ was born and told him that his wife to be was expecting a child who had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and that this child was going to save his people from their sins. There is no doubt in Joseph’s mind who this child is. Talk about a mission from God! This is the Messiah. And he is going to be born to this non-descript and seemingly unimportant couple. After Christ is born, Magi show up. The weight on Joseph’s shoulders just increased. Then the angel appears to him again and tells him that he has to get Mary and Christ to Egypt, immediately, and he does. Now, after a few months, probably less than a year, Joseph is told to go back to Israel, and he does. But, once he gets back, his plan of settling down in Bethlehem seems too risky. Archelaus rules like his father, so Joseph is concerned and rightly so because he receives another warning in a dream, presumably from the same angel, and he goes back to the city where he and Mary were from originally, Nazareth.

You really get the sense from this account, that Joseph is really doing all that he can to provide the best possible upbringing for Jesus. I am speculating a bit here, but I think that I can support this. I take the fact that Joseph intended to settle down in Bethlehem, instead of in Nazareth was because he thought that Bethlehem, and its proximity to Jerusalem, all that would come with that, to be a better place to raise Jesus than in Nazareth. I will say a bit more about that in the next point. But, up until this point, Jesus does not have an idyllic childhood. He is born in a barn. Has to flee for his life. Is uprooted from his life in Egypt, only to go back to a city, where his parents have to start all over in life. This is not what Joseph wanted to do for his child. His child should have better and I have no doubt that Joseph often felt like a failure when what he wanted to do for Jesus, was hijacked by things that were beyond his control.

Yet, everything that happened was part of a plan that God had orchestrated hundreds and hundreds of years before and this text is another example of that. In the midst of life’s plans being completely turned upside down, God was carrying out multiple purposes all at the same time. No, Christ did not lead a charmed life; rather he lived a life of rejection and isolation. But, this is how he identified with his people, and with us.

A. He was a prophet like Moses

Deut. 18.15

Well, God did, just like he said.

Matthew 2.19

Exodus 4.19a

Matthew 2.20

Exodus 4.19b

Matthew 2.21

Exodus 4.20

B. He was protected from death, but not from trouble.

Herod died not long after Joseph, Mary and Christ were in Egypt. Upon his death, his kingdom was divided up among his three sons. Antipas became tetrarch over Galilee and Perea. Philip II was named tetrarch over the region north and east of the Sea of Galilee and Archelaus was named ethnarch (a title slightly higher than tetrarch) over Judea, Samaria and Idumea. Augustus was the Caesar in Rome and had the final say over who ruled in these regions. He allowed Archelaus to rule, provided he did a good job, which he did not. Augustus sacked Archelaus and sent him to Gaul in exile around AD 6.

The gospels allude to these things, but they do not focus on all of the political chaos. But Christ was raised in the middle of this. His country was occupied by a foreign power that ruled through kings and governors who were extremely abusive to their own people. Life was oppressive. In addition to that, the last time Joseph is mentioned alive, was when Christ was twelve. Christ apparently lost his father when he was still young. We do not know of the details of that, or what impact that had on him and the responsibilities that he had for his mother and siblings. We know very little of the actual childhood of Christ, other than to know that he did not have an easy life. He knew poverty. For our sakes he became poor (2 Cor. 8.9). This poverty was on purpose. Who would have looked in the slums of Nazareth, at a semi-orphaned boy to be the King?

It reminds me of the ancient Indian story of a man who was traveling with a precious gem. Another man offered to travel with him who was hoping to steal the gem. Every night, the second man would look through the first man's belongings and could never find where the gem was kept. When they got to the end of the journey, the first man told the second man that he knew what this man's intentions were all along. The second man confessed but then asked where he the gem had been hidden. The first man told him that every night, he hid it under the second man's pillow, knowing that he would look every where but there.

C. He fulfilled God's promises.

Isaiah 9.1

When Christ launched his public ministry (Matthew 4.15-17) he did from the region around Nazareth, which is ironically, called "Galilee of the Gentiles (or nations)" by

Isaiah. In other words, the very place where he was raised protected him from scrutiny and suspicion as a boy, identified him with the needy, and gave him an audience of ethnic variety. Matthew includes all of these details in his gospel in a way that reflects Matthew's discovery process. He sees how even in his birth, Christ fulfilled the promises of the OT and at the same time, laid the groundwork for what was yet to come, not only in his life, but through the church that founded. The next stage in God's plan was the forming of one people out of many nations. Here was another step toward that. Joseph did not have this entire road map. He did not see all that Matthew discovered. Joseph just followed God in the process. You do not have to know how God is working out every detail in order to be obedient. You only need to know that He knows and He is.

2. Our King came from Looserville. (23)

Nazareth was one of the most unimpressive places in the region. It was a village that was only about three times the size of our church property. Archeological and historical records indicate that at the time of Christ there were about 480 people who lived there, who, for the most part were involved with agriculture. Nazareth was marked by silos, olive presses and millstones. People from Nazareth were viewed with scorn. They were uneducated, uncouth, backwoods hayseeds. In the early days of Christ's ministry, Philip realizes that Jesus is the Christ and he excitedly tells Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael responds with a "you've got to be kidding me" attitude when he says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That was the prevailing view of the day. Jesus was never called, Jesus of Bethlehem, which would have carried a tone of royalty. He was always called, Jesus of Nazareth. To his detractors, it was a term of derision.

Early in Christ's ministry a man possessed by a demon confronted Christ in a synagogue (Mark 1.24) and said, "*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?*" And throughout his life, this is what he was known as. He was the King that no one saw coming. He was the Messiah from Looserville, which is why broken people and despised people and hurting people and outcasts identified with him. It is also why the powerful treated him with such arrogant contempt. He was from Nazareth! He was from Galilee. Everyone knows that Judea and Jerusalem is where all of the important people are. Nazareth? But this is exactly what Isaiah had said about him in Isaiah 53.3. "*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*" Psalm 22, which begins with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" says in verse 6, "*But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.*"

And this is exactly what happened with Christ. On one occasion (John 7.32 and ff), the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest Christ. But, they were so impacted by what Christ was teaching that they couldn't do it. When they tried to explain that, the Pharisees were apoplectic and when Nicodemus tried to defend Christ, the Pharisees said, "*Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.*" They could not imagine that the Messiah would come from outside of their system. And yet, this is a title, that even Jesus used of himself. (Acts 22.8)

A. Christ is so unexpected.

One of the reasons why I am convinced of the absolute reliability and divine origin of the Bible is not so much the historical evidence, which is solid, but because of the message of the Bible. Look at how Christ is presented. He is so counterintuitive. No one would have imagined a king like this. He didn't come from the right family. He didn't grow up in the right city. He didn't train at the right schools. He didn't live in the right neighborhood. He did not look like a king. Meaning, he did not look like what we think a king should be like. But, in reality, he is exactly the king that we need. He is humble. He is merciful. He is gracious. He is kind. He is faithful. He is unassuming. If the Bible were simply made up by man, man would never have presented Christ this way.

B. Christ is still so misunderstood.

The King from Looserville is not the Jesus that we, the followers of Christ like to portray. But, when Christ is misunderstood, then the church and our view of Christianity are deformed. Christians in the west have been drinking the cool aid. The message of the church is basically, this: Jesus and the Bible will help you live the life that you deserve. Become a better you. Live the life you were meant for. The message is extremely appealing because it makes so much of me and fuels the very thoughts that my self-worshipping heart wants to hear. If you preach a message like that, you will draw a crowd. But drawing a crowd and building a church are two different things. Do not confuse popularity before man with success before God.

A church recently promoted an "Awesome Worship Experience" because on this particular occasion, a finalist from American Idol was going to be leading the service. You cannot do that to your people without doing serious damage to the message. Since when does the opinion of Nikki Minaj become a standard of success for the church? Celebrity Christianity is killing us because it is not Christianity. Christ humbled himself. Christ lived in the shadows for 30 years, during which time he deliberately veiled who he was because it was all part of what he needed to do to live in our place. Paul spoke about this humility in Philippians 2 when he said that Christ "*made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*" Is it possible that Christ actually was for a while a servant in the house of someone else? If Joseph died when Christ was a young adult and Christ, as the oldest son, took over the responsibility to earn money for his mother and siblings, could Paul be referring to an actual position, an actual job that Christ had? Paul appeals to the humiliation of Christ as something for us to emulate. In Christ's case, he deliberately chose to be viewed and treated as being at a level that was definitely beneath us. In our case, when we humble ourselves, we are choosing to be viewed and treated as being at a level that reflects what is indeed true. If you think that you have a servant attitude, just examine how you react when you are treated as one.

But, here is my point. We hear from many popular teachers on TV, that Jesus wants you rich. Jesus wants you to be successful. Jesus wants you to be healthy. Where do they get this? Phil. 1:29 says, "*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you*

should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.” Our idea of struggle in the Christian life is what we go through to fit into our designer jeans after we’ve gained a couple of pounds.

Christianity in the west has been so Americanized by this success syndrome that serves my elitism and entitlement mentality, that the Christ that is presented is the not the Christ that the Scriptures reflect. Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer present a Jesus that undermines and deforms the gospel, because they are guilty of doing exactly what the Pharisees were doing. They present a Messiah that fits their desire for glory, instead of a King who exposes our true need. This not only deforms the message, but it says to all of the “unsuccessful people” that something is wrong with you. You do not belong, when the truth is, something is wrong with all of us, and Jesus knows that. Jesus lived that. Jesus died for that. Jesus rose again for that. Jesus fixes that! People attempt to change him into the king they want, rather than the king that he is and in so doing, they corrupt the gospel. But, he is not the king we imagine, he is the king that we need. That is why...

1) He is so repulsive to the arrogant.

It is difficult for us to imagine what Christ was so hated. Most people do not want to be honest about their sin and confess their need of a Savior. Most of us just need someone to help us look a little more respectable. Christ is not willing to go along with our goal of looking good. He exposes our self-righteousness for what it is; nothing! That is devastating to the one who has not yet admitted his need. We see a taste of this.

Tim Tebow cannot stay out of the news. But why? Why are reporters so fascinated with him, when he sat almost all season for the NY Jets? Tim will be the first to tell you that he is a sinner. And yet, because this guy is a professional athlete and is an unmarried virgin, has a squeaky clean reputation, is about as nice and humble as they come, he is hated by so many who just want to see him fall. The amount of abuse that is heaped on him is incredible. If he falls, then all of his critics can breathe a sigh of relief because they can rest assured that he is just like the rest of us. Tim’s life, though not perfect is certainly intimidating to others because his example exposes the sins of others. That is how Israel responded to Christ. They would rather condemn a perfectly innocent man, than allow his righteousness to reveal their sin. But ...

2) He is so compelling to the humble.

This week, Forbes magazine ranked Detroit as the most miserable major city in the country. Flint was #2 and the city I live in, Warren, was #7. When I heard about the study I smiled, not because it is good news, but because I’ve been thinking about this text and I realized, this is the kind of town Jesus would come from. The only thing worse than being a broken sinner, is not realizing it. If you realize it, and are willing to admit it, without excuses, I want to introduce you to Jesus. He takes the broken and makes them whole. Only sinners need apply. Perfect people do not need a Savior.