

## Matthew 2.19-23 'Jesus the Nazarene' Transcript

Date: 22/09/2024

Preaching: Rhys Lamont

Series: Matthews Gospel

Sermon Title: Jesus the Nazarene

--

*The following is an AI generated audio transcript and may contain errors. Please do not republish or quote any part of this sermon without the authors permission.*

--

Well, we come this morning to our next passage in Matthew's Gospel in this series through Matthew's Gospel, and I want to bring before you a message I have entitled "Jesus the Nazarene" for obvious reasons.

I thought it might be helpful to briefly remind ourselves of all that Matthew has sought to accomplish so far in his Gospel. He is simply trying to prove, and successfully doing so, that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jewish hope, the Messiah of the world. This is Matthew's goal. This is his purpose.

Matthew began his Gospel by establishing that Jesus is the greatest Son of the Davidic King. We saw that in verse 1 of chapter 1, and also that he is Abraham's greatest Son whose seed would bless all the nations in the preaching of the Gospel. We have seen how Matthew reaches his hands into the Old Testament and begins to draw out the Old Testament expectations of the coming Messiah and applies them to Jesus.

The first one we saw in verse 23 of chapter 1 in reference to the immaculate conception of Christ as foretold in the prophet Isaiah. The second one, Matthew 2 verse 6, we saw that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem as recorded by the prophet Micah. The third we saw in verse 15 of chapter 2, where Matthew links the royal family's flight and escape down into Egypt as a recapitulation of the story of Israel, who also went down into Egypt and were thus called out: "Out of Egypt, I called my son."

Fourthly, as we considered two weeks ago, verse 18 of chapter 2, Matthew recalls the wailing and mourning in Bethlehem after Herod sent and had the young boys under two years of age slaughtered. This wailing is a reminiscence of a previous time in Israel in exile, as the women would wail as the nation was led off to Babylon in exile. It's a story of Israel under foreign oppression and yet awaiting the hope of the new covenant which the Messiah brings, and Matthew is drawing this out.

So we come this morning to the last of the infancy narrative, so-called, section at the end of Matthew 2, and we find another Old Testament connection to establish the rightful title of Messiah for Jesus. If you're looking at this morning's passage and wondering what on earth Matthew could find of any significance that Jesus was raised in Nazareth, surely this is a fact that really doesn't matter too much, or we would be greatly mistaken by that.

What is the significance of Nazareth? Well, you simply need to know a little something about Nazareth, and what you need to know is that there's really nothing to know about Nazareth, and now you know everything about Nazareth. This was an obscure, despised, and almost laughable town. No one from any prominent standing came from Nazareth; no high flyers in society were raised in Nazareth.

In the first chapter of John's Gospel, we read these words: "Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses and the law and all the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' Nathaniel said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'" You see, this was the local understanding of this forgotten town, the common perspective of Nazareth.

So what's the big idea for this morning's passage? Here's a simple illustration. If you have a push mower at home, I presume that ride-on lawn mowers don't have this, but if you have a push mower at home, certainly the older push mowers, I'm not sure if the new ones do or not, but I remember when I used to have to mow the lawns at home on the weekends, there would be a wee primer on the motor, and you would prime the motor before pulling the pull start and starting the mower.

Matthew is doing something like that for us here. He's pumping the primer by referring to Jesus as being raised in Nazareth. He's preparing us to see that the despised town was symbolic of the despised man. From the disregard of Nazareth came the disregarded man, even to the point that he would be cursed and hung upon that awful tree in crucifixion. The place of God's choosing for Jesus' upbringing,

where he spent the best part of 30 years of his life, was symbolic of the fact that Jesus was to become, as we sing, "man of sorrows," the one bearing shame and scoffing rude, that he would be despised and abandoned by men as the prophets predicted.

That's the big idea of what Matthew is doing here this morning. What's the application for us? The text is questioning us as to whether we are willing to go outside the camp, outside of popularity, outside of prestige, outside of good favour with the world, and find ourselves in despised Nazareth with our despised Saviour.

The early church, you know, in the book of Acts, you will read, early Christians were called followers of the sect of Nazarenes. It was a derogatory way of referring to Christians, the sect of Nazarenes. We are disciples of the one from Nazareth. Let us be willing to be humbled by the world and despised for his namesake to carry his cross in life and then in death.

Let's move into the biblical text now. Draw your attention first of all to verse 19. The beginning of verse 19, and the first heading I have for you is Herod's demise. If there is any truth so clearly established in all scripture, it is that God rules, God reigns, and no plan formed against him shall prosper. Thus, the demise of a man such as Herod is inevitable.

Proverbs 5:21 says, "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he watches all his paths. His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin." This describes a man such as the wicked King Herod of Judea at this time. As we have seen in an earlier passage, Herod sought to destroy the born King Jesus. The Magi came seeking to worship, and Herod is greedy for his power, and so he sins that Christ might be destroyed. He has stood in the way of our sovereign God and held up his fist to the heavens.

But Matthew 2:19 was always coming for Herod. So we read these words again: "But when Herod died." You see, all men who stand in the way of God, these words become true for them: "But when they died." And God's plans move on, and his divine prerogative continues. Herod's death was anything but peaceful or ordinary. It's a documented history through Josephus, and we won't go into it now, but Herod endured intense agony and pain during his final months.

The account of Matthew recording his command for the slaughter of the boys under two years old in Bethlehem is perfectly fitting with what we know from history of his

final outbursts and madness. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote this of Herod: "He was a man of great barbarity towards all men, equally, and a slave of his passion." What a way to be remembered. What a tragedy.

So there is Herod's demise. The second heading is this: God's direction. I've emphasised in Matthew so far the providential dealings of God with this royal family in particular. He is watching over, he's worried to perform it by guiding the family and protecting them that the Christ might not be cut off. I hope you're beginning to realise that if you belong to Christ, the providence that we see operating in scripture is the same providence operating in your life.

This is the mystery of life as we know it, that God is working in and through human lives, and yet we are entirely responsible for our actions. God is working in the midst all the time. So might you know that God is in control as Joseph is learning, and might you trust him just as Joseph. He first fled Bethlehem, you'll remember, in the night, warned by the Lord: "Get up, Joseph, flee," and he trusts God even in the darkness, following him wherever the Lord calls him to go, and that should be our attitude too.

With the death of Herod, the angel of the Lord appears again to Joseph and commands him to return in Exodus, to return from Egypt to the land of Israel, that's what we learn in verse 19. Interestingly, this language establishes another Old Testament connection for us; this has been the great goal of Matthew, to connect Christ to the Old Testament. We see this again here, and notice this phrase here in verse 20: "For those who sought the child's life are dead."

We think, well, yeah, Herod has died. Well, this is another Moses-Jesus link that Matthew is trying to show us, that Christ is the new Moses. We saw a parallel earlier in Matthew between Moses, whom Pharaoh sought to kill, and now Jesus, whom Herod sought to kill. Here again, this language draws up the narrative of Exodus and shows Jesus as the new Moses.

You don't have to look there, but in Exodus 4:19 it says, "And now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.'" The language there is a match for what we find here in Matthew. So Joseph can return, and in obedience to the Lord, he follows his direction and comes into the land of Israel at a time when Egypt was short-lived.

Here Joseph comes to a further conundrum when he will need the Lord's guidance and direction to help him. We remember earlier in the narrative when the Lord came to Joseph as he was pondering in his heart what to do about Mary. Remember how he first found out that while he was betrothed to Mary, she was found pregnant, and he was pondering in his heart what to do.

Here we find Joseph pondering again because he comes back to Israel and finds that Herod's son, Archelaus, has taken power in his place, and Archelaus was every bit as cruel as his father. So Joseph is wondering, where should I go? Where am I going to raise my family? That's what we find in verse 22: "But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there."

Then, after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee. The question is, what reason did Joseph have to be afraid of Archelaus? A little bit of history here won't go astray. As the saying goes, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Well, it was certainly the case for Archelaus, one of Herod's sons, one of his surviving sons. Herod had killed another couple of them. Archelaus, it seemed, was every bit as cruel as his father and inherited his father's barbarity.

Rome quickly disposed of Archelaus, not recognizing him as a king, and Pontius Pilate was put in Archelaus' place. Now, you'll be familiar with Pontius Pilate, of course, who features in the gospels. So Pontius would come after Archelaus. Herod the Great, prior to his death, commanded the installation of this massive golden eagle over the Jewish temple, clearly an abominable act just to rake them up.

There were two non-well-respected Jewish teachers at this time. Judas was one of them and Matthias another; don't confuse those with other biblical characters. Two well-respected Jewish teachers, they were considered experts in the law of God, and some of their students got riled up one day and climbed onto the roof of the temple and destroyed that golden eagle that Herod had erected over the Jewish temple. They pulled it down and cut it to pieces, and obviously, they had to face consequences for their action.

They were taken away to Jericho for trial, and the young men escaped with only mild punishment, but their two teachers, Judas and Matthias, were put to death and given a dishonorable burial as a punishment. A massive rebellion broke out that Passover, massive rebellion among the Jews, and to quell the rebellion, Archelaus killed as many

as 3,000 people, many of them who were pilgrim Jews visiting the Passover, and he slaughtered them.

All of this is happening shortly after Herod's death and would contribute to the fear that Joseph had to settle his family under such a tyrant. This is when the Lord intervenes and instructs him that he is not to settle in Judea but rather in the regions of Galilee. In the Lord's providence, he directs the royal family to Galilee, the governor of which was a man by the name of Philip, who was, as we understand, a man of gentle disposition and lived a private life, far different from Archelaus.

So God was working, and you can take comfort in that, Christian; he is ordering the steps of those who love him. Our third heading is this: Jesus' destiny, verse 23, Jesus' destiny. Then we can make some application. Matthew says, verse 23, "And he came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"

As we consider this text, what is striking about Matthew's reference to the prophets here, "He shall be called a Nazarene," is that Matthew is not referring to any particular text. In fact, if you try to find a text in the Old Testament which says, "Of the Messiah he shall be called a Nazarene," you won't find it anywhere. You won't even find reference to the town of Nazareth in the Old Testament. So obscure it was.

It's interesting what Matthew is doing here, as he refers to the prophetic voice as expecting Jesus to be called a Nazarene. He's quoted already from a passage in Isaiah earlier, he's quoted from Micah, he's quoted from Hosea, he's quoted from Jeremiah, but here he's doing something quite different in the text. He's not quoting from anywhere in particular; rather, the plural of the prophets here denotes what he was doing.

He says, "Was spoken through the prophets," plural. It indicates what he's doing. The prophetic eye of scripture, anticipating the Messiah's coming, saw that he was going to be one who was despised and forsaken of men. As Matthew watches as the royal family settles in Nazareth, this town which was known to be despised, Matthew says, "Aha, it all makes sense." The Messiah was to be one who was to be despised and rejected, and so now that he is living in Nazareth, truly he shall be called the Nazarene, indicating that the Messiah was to be one who was to be rejected and cut off.

A prophetic theme is in view here in verse 23. The Old Testament predicted the Messiah's low estate in this world and his rejection by men. There's no greater proof of this than the Lord Jesus' crucifixion. This rejection of the Messiah is clear in numerous passages. Take for one Isaiah 49:7: "Thus says the Lord, the redeemer of Israel and its holy one, to the despised one, to the abhorred one by the nation." Isaiah 53: "He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of parched ground. He had no stately form or majesty that we should look upon, nor appearance that should attract us to him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we did not esteem him."

There are other passages too. You see, this is the Nazarene. Matthew, with his divinely inspired understanding of the Old Testament, considers those passages that showed when the Messiah was to come, he would not be held in high esteem as we might expect. Rather, he was despised, he was rejected, he was laid low, he was scorned, became as a servant. It connects us to the simple fact that for the first 30 years of Jesus' short life, the Saviour, as J.C. Ryle said, passed among the poor of this world. For some four-fifths of Jesus' life, it's mostly unknown to us. He was in Nazareth among common peoples in his father's workshop, likely Joseph being a carpenter, obscurity for the Messiah before the time of his public ministry began.

He shall be called the Nazarene. Let's make some application here on this point. The first one is this: Can you see the shadow of the cross in Nazareth? Can you see the shadow of the cross in Nazareth? In the Roman mind, there is no more forsaken or despised man than one who was crucified and nailed to a cross. In the Jewish mind, to be crucified was to suffer under a curse of God, to be truly despised. To the modern mind, the cross and symbol of salvation is foolishness. It too is despised.

But how God silences the wise by the means that he has brought salvation to man. So behold the crucified Nazarene. Behold the Son of God, the Lamb who is slain. Paul spoke of Jesus' humiliation pictured in Nazareth this way: "Although he existed in the form of God," Philippians 2, "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Can you see the connection between Jesus being raised in Nazareth and his ultimate destiny of the cross, the ultimate scorn, the ultimate shame, the ultimate lowering of

oneself? Though being in equality with God, humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, humbled himself even to the point of being raised, not in Jerusalem, not in Bethlehem, but in Nazareth, a nowhere place, such is the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This was all part of the process he underwent as a man, taking on the sins of his people, facing judgement in their place, becoming a curse for us, and facing despising and forsakenness from God and man. Remember the way Pilate mocked the Jews when Jesus was crucified? In John 19:19, we've preached through this text together, Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross; it was written, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews." See, he's mocking the Jews: "Ha! Your King from Nazareth, here he is. Look at him." Nazareth was a nowhere place.

I want you to know that the only way that you and I can have peace with God is to look upon Jesus the Nazarene and see in him the fullness of God, the fullness of deity dwelt among us, and he was raised and lifted up to die for us. As you look upon him, forget yourself. Realise that there is no good worthy of God's acceptance in you; there is nothing in you of credit or merit to earn eternal life. It is only in that Nazarene man, Jesus, who was crucified in your place. He took upon himself our guilt, our fallenness before God's law, our lies, our covetedness as we learnt before, and he bore it fully so that through him we could receive forgiveness and regain right relationship with God. That's the gospel; that's the good news.

A second application is this: Are you identified with the Nazarene? Are we identified with the Nazarene? At the time of Peter's betrayal of the Lord Jesus, you remember when Peter denied Jesus? Jesus said, "When the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." The text of scripture in Mark 14 describes a young girl seeing Peter warming himself. Jesus has begun his trial at this point. Mark 14 says she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene." What did Peter respond with? Did he say, "Yeah, I follow that Nazarene man?" No, he denied knowing the Nazarene.

To be identified with Jesus the Nazarene was self-deprecation; it was to be publicly shamed. It was the abandonment of intellect; it was the betrayal of Judaism. In their minds, it was to dishonour one's family to follow Jesus. You're considered part of a strange cult, the sect of Nazarenes. As in Acts chapter 24, the Apostle Paul says, "For we have found this man a real pest and fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world and a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes."



Where do you stand this morning in relation to Christ? As a follower of him, I ask you, are you associated with him? Are you known to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to speak his name and stand with him and count the cost of bearing that name? Will you suffer the scorn with him? I tell you, his name is worth every amount of suffering. He is worth every tear. The martyrs will tell you in heaven someday he was worth every drop of blood that they spilt for his name. Upon the foundation of the church was built on the blood of the martyrs, and every drop is worth it, such is his great name.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me," Matthew 5:11. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, Matthew tells us in Matthew 27 that those passing by were hurling abuse at him, wagging their heads, and it will be no different for us. I learned that when I was 13 years old, coming into the changing rooms after gym PE at school, overhearing my name: "That Bible basher." That's what it's like. That's what we accept, and we bear it all for his name, his great name, his beautiful name, Jesus the Nazarene.

Your identification with Christ will do the same for you. You will be mocked, possibly behind your back, but you must pray for them and not revile them. You must turn the other cheek. You must cry out as did our Lord: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." You see, when our God came to this earth as a man, he came as not Jesus of Bethlehem, not Jesus of Jerusalem, but Jesus of Nazareth, denoting his humble low estate. May we be found there with him. Might we be willing to bear his reproach and partake in the splendours that await all who have loved his coming. Stand with Jesus the Nazarene, love him, and worship him. Shall we pray?