

In the Beginning, God...

Introduction

The small and insignificant town of Nazareth teaches an important lesson that each of us would do well to remember. The gospel is not about what we do for Jesus but what He does for us.

God among men where we least expect to find Him. An ordinary shelter, a shepherd's tower for His birthplace, a brief time in a foreign land for His own safety, a despised village for His hometown and a childhood far from the center of culture and religious teachings.

We should not miss the irony of a small community that did not have a good reputation in its day, yet that same community was elevated by Jesus' upbringing. And for two thousand years, believers have looked to Nazareth as a place to visit, because it is where their savior grew up.

Nazareth was a place of rude and at times violent people (Take notice of how these people treated Jesus, when He had read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue one Sabbath).

Luke 4:28–30 (ESV) 28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

A Roman garrison was located there, and it was located in what was known as Galilee of the Gentiles. It was a small crossroads village where people of all nationalities would pass through. Before Jesus it was nothing but a waypoint, a stop and rest place before going on to somewhere greater.

From Shechem - the beginning

To Bethel - deeper faith

To Migdal Eder - protection and watchfulness

Bethlehem - the House of Bread

Nazareth - the unexpected branch

Shiloh

Jericho

Jerusalem

Nobody bragged about being from Nazareth.

Nobody planned a vacation there.

Nobody dreamed of raising the Messiah there.

Yet while the world ignored Nazareth, God was preparing redemption there.

These places matter because each points us to Christ!

Message:

700 years before Christ came, God gave to Isaiah these words of hope for the land of Judah.

Isaiah 11:1–2 (ESV) 1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a **branch** from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

1. The ‘Shoot’ - רֹשֶׁת (hō·ṭēr)

When Jesus arrives, Israel looked like a stump. A tree that had been felled a long time past, but the roots and the stump remained. But God was not finished.

At times a stump of a tree might be left after the tree had died or was cut down. But the stump is still rooted in the ground and those roots are still taking nourishment from the soil in which it is rests.

It may go a long time before any life is evident, dormant and without fruit, but when the time is just right, new growth appears where none had been for a long time.

Isaiah was telling the king of Judah, and the people of Judea that for the nation, a time of apparent non-life was to happen. But the roots were still there, deep and dormant, awaiting the right moment.

And then without warning or apparent cause, one day a shoot appears. Breaking the surface of the ground, attached to the root, but now new life, a new beginning for a tree that was once considered long dead.

Isaiah 11:10 (ESV) 10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

And the question arises, from where will this take place?

God gives to us a hint within the context of the passage.

2. The ‘Branch’ - נֶצֶר nêtser - pronounced ‘nazer’ it forms the root word for Nazareth.

The name of the village means ‘The *guarded one*’ and it was a place of obscurity a cross-roads place where Jesus grows up.

The importance of that should not be lost on us as believers. This aligns beautifully with God’s redemptive work. Here is a place hidden away from scrutiny, it becomes the hidden sanctuary where the Redeemer will grow to manhood, protected and preserved for His future mission.

God did not raise His Son in Jerusalem, He hid Him in Nazareth. Thirty years of silence, an ordinary life, preparing, growing until one day, Jesus breaks the surface of obscurity and touches the world.

God often does His greatest work in the places where no one is looking.

3. The ‘Root’ - שֹׁרֶשׁ shôresh

The first and the last letter of this word are used as symbols for the name of God.

It literally means the foundation, the hidden part that is necessary for all that will happen to happen.

When Isaiah prophesied this he, from an earthly point of view, was seeing the house and the lineage of David. He understood it to mean that from David's line, there will come another king who will establish the full measure of the kingdom promised to Israel.

But nobody expected the Messiah to come from Nazareth. There are no references to this small village in all of the Old Testament, none of the Jewish scholars saw it, not did they write about Nazareth.

John 1:45–46 (ESV) 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

What a surprise to see that Nazareth could produce One whose coming was from of old. Foretold by the prophets and anticipated by those who watched for His coming.

The ‘*Nazer*’ Branch that grew in Nazareth would eventually bear fruit. But before He wore a crown, He would wear thorns. Before He ruled in glory, He would have to suffer in our place.

In a moment of divine inspiration, Isaiah points us to the fruit that the Branch would bear.

Isaiah 53:1–12 (ESV) 1 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 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.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

The bitter pill of redemption was His to take, and He did it on our behalf. He is the '*Nazer*' branch, who grew into the One who would redeem humanity.

Conclusion

Nazareth was the hidden guardian of the One God was sending.

For centuries people looked at Nazareth and asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

The answer was yes - The Savior of the world came from Nazareth.

And that should encourage every person in this room.

Because God has always specialized in taking what the world overlooks and using it for His glory.

If God can raise a forgotten village to prominence, or raise a stump back to life, and bring salvation through a cross,

Then He can take our brokenness, our failures, our obscurity, and make something beautiful from it as well.

The story of Nazareth is not ultimately about a village.

It is about a Savior who takes ordinary people and gives them an extraordinary future.