



THE PURSUIT OF JESUS

Does God Play Favorites?

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The Crossing Church
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OPENING

This week we are continuing our Quest 52 series in our year-long **Pursuit of Jesus**. We are looking at the **Person of Jesus** and focusing in this first quarter of our study on **Who He is**. During this year of pursuit we will see vividly the magnificence of this person we call Jesus and will have the opportunity to be changed forever.

SCRIPTURE¹

Luke 2:1 In those days *Caesar Augustus* issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

Matthew 2:1-3 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of *King Herod*, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was *disturbed*, and *all Jerusalem with him*.

Leviticus 12:6, 8 “When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting a *year-old lamb* for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. But if she cannot *afford* a lamb, she is to bring *two doves or two young pigeons*, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean.”

Luke 2:22, 24 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “*a pair of doves or two young pigeons*.”

Luke 1:30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found *favor with God*.”

Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to *you*; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

1 Peter 5:5b-6 All of you, clothe yourselves with *humility* toward one another, because, “God *opposes* the proud but shows *favor* to the humble.” *Humble* yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that *he may lift you up* in due time.

John 10:15 “*I am the good shepherd*. The good shepherd *lays down his life* for the sheep. The *hired hand* is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and *cares nothing* for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I *know* my sheep and my sheep *know me*— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture referenced here is NIV

OBSERVATION

We are going to begin with some of the main characters in the Christmas story to help answer the question, "Does God play favorites?" Let's begin with Caesar Augustus whose uncle was Julius Caesar, the dictator of the Roman Empire beginning in 49 B. C. When he was assassinated, Augustus succeeded him and years later issued an edict that all Jewish men were to return to their ancestral home towns to be taxed and counted in a census. This decree caused Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem, the home of King David, and therefore, Jesus was born where the prophecy said He would be born and also placed David in His genealogy.² Augustus appointed local kings to oversee different regions of the Empire – he selected King Herod the Great for Israel because he was a great builder, an architect, a strategist, he was brilliant and he was ruthless. He killed anyone who was perceived to challenge his power, including some of his wives and children. He was perfectly capable of ordering a rampage to kill two-year-old babies in Bethlehem in order to destroy Jesus. This danger sent Joseph's family into Egypt which fulfilled another prophecy.

QUESTION: What other prophecies about Jesus have you read in the Old Testament?

APPLICATION

As we look at the person of Jesus we are asking if He plays favorites. We know that Mary and Joseph were poor peasants. He was a carpenter, stone mason and builder in a society that had and valued the elites: the wealthy and powerful were the top 2% and doctors, lawyers, teachers who were the educated 5%. At the lower end of society were the expendables - prostitutes, beggars, homeless, destitute, elderly and special needs people making up 15% of the population. Mary and Joseph were in the middle. The parents of the very Son of God brought a lowly sacrifice of two doves when they presented Jesus to the priest to be dedicated. Yet they were God's choice to raise His Son here on earth. Then there were shepherds who worked with animals and were not allowed into the Temple. They were outcasts spiritually and socially, they were hired hands and didn't own anything of value, probably thieves and considered the lowest of the low. There are many examples in Scripture where God shows us He values behaviors differently than our world does. Remember **MODGNIK**? Kingdom spelled backwards? God often does things in a way that is backward to our world's choices. For example, we take pride in human accomplishment through our strength and God values human accomplishment through our submitting to His strength – He values humility.

QUESTION: In what other ways does God value the opposite of what our society values?

QUESTION: Where would you place yourself in our current society – upper, middle or lower percent? How much does your answer influence the pride you feel about yourself?

QUESTION: What in your life are you most proud of? Is there a specific area of pride you think God wants you to get rid of?

It's hard for us to think that people of power and wealth and prestige aren't favored by God, isn't it? Forbes Magazine rates 74 men and women the most powerful people of the 7.4 billion humans on our planet. Caesar Augustus and King Herod would make that list, but not Mary and Joseph. They might be on the list of the least powerful people in the world along with shepherds and maybe we would be there, too! But who did God choose to use for a higher purpose? I doubt we would have answered Herod or Augustus. So, who does God favor? What is the one criterion for making God's favored list? **A HUMBLE SPIRIT.** It invites His blessing. When we humbly come to God and say, "God, I need Your help, I have made a mess of things and can't fix it on my own, my marriage is broken and I have blown it with my kids, but You are the One who can redeem anything. Please help me - forgive me!"

QUESTION: How do you define the word humility?

QUESTION: How humble do you think you are?

² Micah 5.2

One of God’s favorite metaphors for Himself is a shepherd.³ The main characteristic of the good shepherd is humility – it’s sacrifice. God doesn’t just favor humility, he defines it – laying down our lives for others. So, does God play favorites? **YES!** The only thing that gets us on that list is humility. When we humble ourselves before God we open the door to His favor in our lives

QUESTION: Who is the most humble person you know? How does he/she show it? How does God show favor toward this person? How does your life compare to the life of this person?

Jesus says, “I know my sheep.” It is individual and personal. He leaves the 99 to rescue the one. He knows our names, needs, insecurities and struggles. It’s time to take a step toward God, to lay our pride at Jesus’ feet.

QUESTION: As you study more about Jesus and the humility He demonstrated throughout His own life, how motivated are you to follow Him and trade in your pride for a new humble and submitted life?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to live humbly so that You can use us for higher purposes and we can live righteous lives in Your presence every day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION: What other prophecies about Jesus have you read in the Old Testament?

QUESTION: In what other ways does God value the opposite of what our society values?

QUESTION: Where would you place yourself in our current society– upper, middle or lower percent? How much does your answer influence the pride you feel about yourself?

QUESTION: What in your life are you most proud of? Is there a specific area of pride you think God wants you to get rid of?

QUESTION: How do you define the word humility?

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QUESTION: Who is the most humble person you know? How does he/she show it? How does God show favor toward this person? How does your life compare to that of this person?

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³ Psalm 23