

NAZARETH: A People Greatly Favored By God

Intro: The past several weeks we have been studying various places in the Bible, and the events and persons that made them famous. This morning I would like to look at the town of Nazareth. This humble little town was greatly favored by God because He sent angels to both Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:39) to inform them that Mary, a virgin, would conceive the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. The people of Nazareth were also greatly favored by God because Jesus grew up in their midst. He spent the first 30 years of His life playing and working among the people of Nazareth. The sad truth is however, the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus' claims to be the Son of God. In fact, Luke tells us in Luke chapter 4, verses 16-30 that Jesus was *first rejected* in His hometown synagogue at Nazareth.

Background on Nazareth:

The town of Nazareth is located on the northern slopes of the Jezreel Valley in lower Galilee. A major road from Damascus to the Mediterranean Coast ran through Nazareth. The Jezreel Valley was the scene of numerous battles in the O.T., and will be the location of the future Battle(s) of Armageddon. **MAP** The town of Nazareth only occupied about 60 acres, and was home to an estimated 200 people. The people of Nazareth were looked upon with disdain and contempt. Primarily because they catered to, and mingled with Roman soldiers, who were posted just north of the city. The Jewish people in larger, older cities viewed the Nazarenes as "ignorant hillbillies."

Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament, the Jewish Talmud, or the writings of Josephus. Nevertheless, the New Testament explicitly identifies Jesus as "the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee (Matt. 21:11). He is frequently referred to in the Gospels simply as "Jesus of Nazareth" (Mark 1:24; Luke 18:37). Jesus Himself, like His hometown of Nazareth, was despised and forsaken by men. The real tragedy is that the people of Nazareth, even though being greatly favored by God, would come to despise and forsake Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God.

Look with me this morning at why the people of Nazareth were a people greatly favored by God.

I. The People Of Nazareth Received God's Grace (Luke 1:26-33; Matt. 1:18-25)

A. They were visited by angels

1. The angel Gabriel visits Mary in Nazareth (Luke 1:26-33)

Did you know that the Christmas story actually begins in Nazareth. Luke informs us that God sent the angel Gabriel to speak to Mary, who lived in Nazareth. Luke chapter 1, verse 26 recounts how Gabriel was dispatched with Divine authority to carry God's message to Mary, a virgin. Gabriel informed Mary that she was going to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, and give birth to the Son of God. Gabriel informs Mary in v. **32** that the child she is going to bear will be the Son of the Most High; and God will give Him the throne of His father David; v. **33** and He will reign over the house of Israel forever; and His kingdom will have no end." Mary asks how this could be possible, seeing as how she is a virgin. Gabriel assure Mary that the power of the Holy Spirit is going to accomplish this supernatural conception and birth.

Nazareth was a city greatly favored by God because Mary was chosen to conceive and give birth to the Son of God, who would rule over the house of Israel forever. **The Christmas story originated in Nazareth!**

Nazareth is the scene of a second angelic visit, this time to Joseph. Turn with me in your Bible to Matthew chapter 1. **Matthew 1, verse 18**

2. An unnamed angel visits Joseph in Nazareth (Matt. 1:18-25)

Matthew informs us that Mary had just returned home to Nazareth after spending several months with her cousin Elizabeth, who was herself pregnant with John the Baptist. It is now obvious to all that Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, was pregnant. While Mary's pregnancy was by the power of the Holy Spirit, no one but her cousin Elizabeth believed her. Joseph was grieved in his heart, but we read in verse **19** "being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace Mary, Joseph desired to put her away secretly." Joseph doesn't understand what has happened. How could his beloved Mary be with child?

As Joseph struggled over what to do, we read in v. **20** that "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." v. **21** "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus,

for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” The angel assures Joseph that all this took place in order to fulfill the Word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, who predicted in Isaiah 7:14—“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which translated means, “God with us.”

Not only was Nazareth a city greatly favored by God because of the angelic appearances to Mary and Joseph, Nazareth was a city greatly favored by God because the people of Nazareth had the Son of God living in their midst for thirty years.

B. They were visited by the Son of God (Matt. 2:13-23; Luke 2:39-52)

1. Jesus the Nazarene (Matt. 2:13-23; Isa. 11:1-10)

Matthew informs us in chapter 2 of his Gospel that following Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to “Arise and take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt to escape King Herod’s murderous rage” (vv. 13-14). Following Herod’s death, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt, and told him to take the Child and His mother and return to the regions of Galilee to live in the city of Nazareth (vv. 19-22). **Nazareth became Jesus’ boyhood home.**

Matthew informs us that Joseph’s moving his family back to live in Nazareth was more than mere coincidence. It was done to fulfill prophecy. Look at **Matthew 2, verse 23**—Matthew says they “came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’”

Now, this is a difficult verse to understand because the prediction that Jesus would be called a Nazarene is not recorded in any of the prophets. You can look in vain through all the Old Testament prophets, and you will find no mention of this prediction. In fact, the town of Nazareth is likewise nowhere mentioned in the entire Old Testament.

So how do we explain it? Where in the Hebrew Bible do we find the word “Nazarene”? Many Old Testament scholars are convinced that the word Nazareth came from the Hebrew word “*Netser*,” which means “a sprout” or “a branch.” When a tree is cut down, a branch often sprouts up from the stump. The Jews called this sprout a *netser* because it very rarely amounted

to anything. It was viewed as an object of contempt and scorn. This described Nazareth, the despised and scorned little town.

The term *netser* or branch leads us to an astounding prophecy in Isaiah. Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 11, verse 1: “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” Do you see the word Branch? It is the Hebrew word *netser*. What Isaiah is predicting here is that while the nation of Israel would be cut down like a tree, a stump would remain. The stump is Jesse, David’s father. The stump is the house of David, referring here to the entire house of Israel. From this stump, a little *netser* would spring forth. No one would think it important. In fact, it would be despised and considered of no value or worth.

This is referring of course to none-other-than the Lord Jesus Christ. The shoot or branch will grow up from the fallen stump in the Person of Messiah. Verse 2, He will be filled with the Spirit of the LORD. And according to verses 6-9, Messiah, the Branch’s future reign will be characterized by perfect peace and harmony in all of creation. **Look at v. 10** It will come about in that future day, that the Gentile nations will bow to the root of Jesse, who will stand as an ensign or signal for all peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.”

That despised *Netser*, that Nazarene, that One who lived in Nazareth, is none other than the Anointed of God, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Many scholars believe that this is what Matthew is referring to when he says, He shall be called a Nazarene. The One despised and rejected is the eternal Son of God.

2. Jesus’ childhood development in Nazareth (Luke 2:39-52)

The first 12 years of Jesus’ life are summed up in one verse, Luke 2:40— “And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” The people of Nazareth were greatly favored of God because they witnessed first-hand the grace of God shining through His Son, Jesus Christ. The people of Nazareth had the privilege of watching a child grow up untainted by sin. Just think of it friends, Jesus had NO faults or sin whatsoever! No one ever saw Jesus loose His temper with any of His brothers or sisters. They never saw Him disrespect His parents or neighbors. He was a perfect kid because “the grace of God was upon Him.” His physical, emotional, and spiritual growth was perfect. He was the only perfect human being who has ever lived on earth. He was God in flesh. Verse

52 sums up Jesus' formative years in Nazareth—**52** “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

The people of Nazareth were greatly favored by God as they watched His Son grow to manhood. What favor. These people enjoyed God's favor!
And yet the people of Nazareth rejected God's Son. **Point II in your outline**

II. The People Of Nazareth Rejected God's Son (Luke 4:14-30)

According to Luke 3:23 Jesus began His public ministry when He was about 30 years of age. He left Nazareth and headed south to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. Following His baptism, the Holy Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan for forty days and nights. He then came to a wedding at Cana in Galilee, where He began His public ministry. His first miracle was turning water into wine at this wedding.

After performing this first miracle, He visited Jerusalem where He performed many miracles (John 2). He also cleansed the temple, and met with Nicodemus. According to **Luke 4:14** Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit; and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in all their synagogues and was praised by all.

Christ next returns to His hometown of Nazareth. Luke 4, verse 16

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. **17** And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, **Isaiah 61:1-2**

Luke 4:18 “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN, **19** TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”

Luke 4:20 And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. **21** And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus was claiming to fulfill this Messianic passage. He was claiming to be the Messiah. He came to offer forgiveness of sin to the captives, and to bring healing—sight to the blind—and to set free those who are downtrodden, **19** to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD. **22** And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

Apparently some in the crowd rejected Jesus claim to be the Messiah. They saw Him as nothing more than the son of Joseph. The people demanded that Jesus prove to them He was the Messiah.

Jesus responded in verse 23 And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well.’” The people were saying we have heard about the miracles you did up in Capernaum. Now do some here, if you truly are the Messiah! You say You’re the Messiah, now prove it!

Jesus answers that people are seldom accepted by people who know them well. **v. 24** And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his home town. Because the people of Nazareth refused to believe His claim to be the Son of God, Jesus could not perform miracles among them. It would be just like in the days of Elijah and Elisha, they could not perform miracles in Israel because of the peoples lack of faith, so God sent them to the Gentiles.

v. 25 “But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; **26** and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a Gentile woman who was a widow. God sent Elijah to minister to a Gentile widow woman in Sidon because the people of Israel refused to listen to his message.

Look at the second illustration, Elisha v. 27—“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

Jesus was saying to these people in the synagogue in Nazareth that you must receive Me as your Messiah by faith, apart from these foolish demands for signs. And because you refuse to accept Me by faith I am going to take My offer of salvation and deliverance to the Gentiles, who will gladly accept Me by faith. When Jesus said He was going to offer His salvation to Gentiles,

everyone in the synagogue was filled with rage against Him. These Jews hated Gentiles. They didn't want anything to do with Gentiles. The Rabbis in that day taught that God created Gentiles to fuel the flames of hell!

Look at the peoples' response in v. 28 And all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; **29** and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. **30** But passing through their midst, He went His way. **The people of Nazareth rejected God's Son.**

What a tragic response to the great favor God had bestowed on the people of Nazareth. They were favored by angelic visits to Mary and Joseph, and witnessed the sinless Son of God grow up in their midst. And yet in spite of all God's goodness to them, they rejected His Son, and the salvation He had come to provide for them.

Conclusion:

Don't be like the people of Nazareth. Don't reject God gracious provision for your sin. He sent His eternal Son, Jesus Christ to die in your place on Calvary's cross. Put your faith in God's promise that your sins are forgiven for all eternity. They are washed away, every single one of them, when you put your trust in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's Good News friends. If you are here this morning and you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin and death, won't you accept Jesus as your Savior this morning?

Believer, have you lost the joy of your salvation. Have you wandered away from the sweet fellowship that God makes available to you through His Word? Do you spend time in His presence in prayer and meditation? Do you sing praises of thanksgiving to Him for all He has done for you in Christ? O dear saint come back to Jesus today, and begin enjoying the blessings available to you as a child of God.

Let's pray.

Stand with me as we sing, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene!