

Considering Christ at Christmas

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 2, 2018

Main Theme – Considering Christ from an array of perspectives. This week from a “worldly” view.

WORSHIP & PRAYER COMMUNION

At this time, I want to call forth the ushers distribute the emblems of Communion:

Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years are times of great CELEBRATION. Let’s talk about some ELEMENTS commonly associated with CELEBRATION.

- 1) We tend to celebrate with a GROUP/crowd of people (i.e., family, friends, and/or acquaintances). Celebrating by yourself just doesn’t seem to have the same feeling.
- 2) We tend to need a REASON to celebrate. We may celebrate the start of a New Year. We may celebrate a birthday, an anniversary, a promotion, etc., but there always seems to be a reason.
- 3) Our celebrations tend to look to the PAST. Birthdays, anniversaries, national holidays, etc., often commemorate past events and happenings worthy of remembrance and recollection.
- 4) Celebrations tend to highlight a PERSON or a past EVENT. Memorial Day is for fallen soldiers. Labor Day is for workers. Anniversaries are for couples. A birthday celebrates an individual.
- 5) Celebrations are often connected with FOOD and DRINK. Nobody celebrates with a diet! The diet might begin on January 2, but nobody goes without food on New Year’s Eve or Day!
- 6) Celebrations are JOYOUS occasions. The Fourth of July might have its solemn moments, but it also has its fireworks!

KEY – We use that same word—CELEBRATE—in reference to the Lord’s Supper. We often speak of ‘celebrating’ Communion, etc. Though this might sound contradictory, this IS a time of celebration. Consider:

- 1) We celebrate the Lord's Supper in a GROUP. It may be a small group (even just 2 –3), but there is something communal in what we do in Communion.
- 2) We celebrate for a REASON. We celebrate the gift of eternal life provided through Christ's sacrifice and the reality that He has conquered death!
- 3) This celebration looks to the PAST. Communion provides for us an opportunity to look back—nearly 2,000-years—to consider and commemorate a momentous moment in history.
- 4) Some celebrations are for EVENTS – others are for PERSONS. Communion is a celebration of BOTH: The Crucifixion and the Crucified.
- 5) This celebration of Christ's gift is connected with FOOD and DRINK. The bread is symbolic of His broken Body. The juice is symbolic of His shed Blood. Some celebrations fatten the body – this one feeds the soul!
- 6) This celebration—solemn as it may be—is to be received with JOY. Consider the joy we have in and through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (willingly undertaken for you).

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NIV)

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Upcoming Events (Regular)**
 - Men's Ministry – Saturday AM, December 8, from 9–10am
 - Women's Ministry – Tuesday, December 11, from 6:30–8pm
- **Upcoming Events (Holiday)**
 - CYC Christmas Play – Friday Evening, December 21 (Starting at 7pm)
 - New Life's Christmas Service – Sunday, December 23 @ 10:30am–Noon

MORNING OFFERING

At this time, I want to call forth our ushers.

-Thank you for your faithfulness in giving to the Lord/His work
 -Your giving fuels the work of Christ in and through this church

May the Lord bless you as you give! May you experience His faithfulness in kind!

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The 2018 Annual Business Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 20, 2019 following the Sunday Service. Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected offices (Deacon & Trustee)—whose terms expire on the date of the Annual Meeting—will be distributed today after service. The completed forms must be placed in the designated box on the front foyer table no later than December 16, 2018. Also, the deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is December 30, 2018.

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- **CHILDREN DISMISSED FOR CHILDREN'S CHURCH**
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INTRODUCTION

As always, it is wonderful to see you. I look forward to these weekly moments of worship and instruction. I pray that you are ready to receive what God has for you (as we enter the Christmas Season)! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. Let’s turn to Is 53.

SETTING THE STAGE

The 53rd chapter of the Book of Isaiah is one of the most REMARKABLE examples of prophecy in the whole of Scripture. Penned some 700-years before the Birth of our Lord, Isaiah speaks to Christ’s life in amazing detail. As one author notes:

This section of Isaiah contains inarguable, incontrovertible proof that God is the author of Scripture and Jesus is the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. The details are so minute that no human could have predicted them by accident and no imposter fulfilled them by cunning.

This prophecy—in its TOTALITY—speaks to Christ’s substitutionary death, His burial, resurrection, saving of sinners, intercession, and his kingdom. The chapter is short enough that we will read it in its entirety. Consider...

TO THE WORD

Isaiah 53 (NIV)

- 1 Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

HONING IN

What a remarkable prophecy! In the midst of this amazing prophecy regarding Christ, one small, easy-to-overlook segment has CAPTIVATED me as of late. Let's consider a portion of verse 2...

Isaiah 53:2b

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Q. What does this mean?

It means that there was nothing about Christ—at His First Coming—that drew the world to Him. This text is NOT referring to a physical beauty or attractiveness. Rather, there was NOTHING about Jesus that a person with a worldly perspective would have found APPEALING. As one author notes: The Christ would “arise in lowly conditions and wear none of the usual emblems of royalty, making his true identity visible only to the discerning eye of faith.”

KEY – From a worldly point of view, Jesus would NOT have been deemed great or of consequence. He did not possess those characteristics normally associated with EARTHLY greatness. Let's spend some time elaborating upon these sentiments. Let's Delve In...

ELEMENT #1 – WEALTH

Consider that greatness in our world is often intimately connected with the size of one's bank account. To be great in this world is to be a person of WEALTH and MEANS. Consider—for instance—the people who occupy CELEBRITY status in our culture. The one common connection that all elite figures share is NOT good looks, skill or positive societal impact. Rather, it's the amount of money they possess.

NOTE – Yet this CANNOT be said of Jesus Christ. In fact, the reverse is true. Despite the claims of celebrity pastors who live celebrity lifestyles off of Jesus' Name, Christ Himself was NOT wealthy by any earthly metric.

- 1) He was RAISED in relative poverty, being reared in the home of a lowly carpenter
- 2) His later ministry was NOT marked with financial abundance. Consider His words:

Luke 9:58b (NIV)

Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

NOTE – In fact, the only TRUE possession of Christ was His garment/cloak, and even that was stripped off of Him at His Crucifixion (becoming the property of a soldier who cast the best lot)!

KEY – Jesus was quite familiar with lack, normally NOT a hallmark of those deemed great!

ELEMENT #2 – EDUCATION

Consider that greatness in our world is often connected with having the RIGHT degree (or at least that's what we have convinced a generation of young people). We ESTEEM the great universities and lofty seats of learning in our nation (e.g., Harvard, Yale, MIT, etc.). We ELEVATE their professors and the geniuses that they produce!

Many of the great associated with higher learning enjoy the RARIFIED AIR of academia and the elite CULTURE that has come to grow around it.

NOTE – Yet Jesus was NOT great by this metric either. I am NOT saying that He was uneducated. Jesus likely received an education at home or from a scribe attached to the village synagogue. It was only, however, a POOR MEN'S education. As the scribes of His day contemptuously said, "He had never learned." i.e., As we might say, "He was not college bred."

I AFFIRM what one another notes: ". . . The love of knowledge was early awake within Him. He daily knew the joy of deep and happy thought; He had the best of all the keys to knowledge—the open mind and the loving heart—and the three great books lay ever open before Him—the Bible, man, and nature.

KEY – Though He was the GREATEST TEACHER to ever walk the earth and the FOUNT of knowledge/wisdom, He was despised for His lack of academic pedigree!

ELEMENT #3 – PARENTAGE

Consider that greatness in this world is often associated by being born into the RIGHT family (i.e., having the right parentage/familial pedigree). LET'S FACE IT: being born into a family with the last name Kennedy, Gates, Clinton, Buffet, etc., confers a level of earthly esteem NOT necessarily associated with the names Foley, Rice, McAuliffe, etc.

NOTE – Often the great are deemed great because of the circumstances of their family at birth.

NOTE – Yet Jesus—INTERESTINGLY—could not claim such a pedigree. I say interesting for a reason. Jesus—on both sides of His family (Mary and Joseph)—was connected to King David, and thus, royalty. Yet by the time of His birth, the status, rank and wealth associated with that dynasty was long GONE. Though royal blood (i.e., human and divine) FLOWED through His veins, Jesus was deemed little more than the (pot. illegitimate) son of a carpenter by the esteemed of his age.

Moreover, consider the LOCATION of His upbringing. Yes, he was born in Bethlehem, but He was raised in Nazareth. Nazareth was a notoriously wicked town, as we learn from one of Jesus' own countrymen and eventual followers:

John 1:46 (ESV, Nathanael Speaking)

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Jesus had NO acquaintance with sin in His own soul, but in the town He had a full exhibition of the awful problem with which it was to be His life work to deal. He was NOT raised in the proverbial LA, NY, DC, Tokyo or London. He was raised on the wrong side of the tracks (as they say).

KEY – Again, greatness by pedigree or birthright ELUDED Him.

ELEMENT #4 – CONNECTIONS

Consider that greatness in our world is often connected to your network. i.e., Much of being great has to do with knowing the RIGHT people. As the old adage says, “It’s all about who you know!” Find your way into the IN CROWD—buddy-up to those who are great—and the world will likely deem you great BY ASSOCIATION.

NOTE – Yet this CANNOT be said of Jesus. Certainly, there were VAUNTED classes in His day. You had groups like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes/Teachers of the Law and governing powers like King Herod and Pilate. Yet Jesus found a way to alienate, offend and put-off EVERY one of them!

KEY 1 – He CALLED such figures hypocrites, children of hell, children of the devil, blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs full of death and dead men’s bones, snakes, vipers, foxes and more (cf. Matthew 23).

KEY 2 – Even worse, Jesus surrounded Himself with the lowly, the humble, the poor, the sinful, the hopelessly ruined, the shamed, the outcast and the like. After all, He had come to call the sinners and not those who were well (cf. Luke 5:32) – AND THE GREAT HATED HIM FOR IT. In the end, the elite were the ones most responsible for His death on the Cross.

KEY – Jesus HAD CONNECTION with His Father in Heaven AND with the masses (out of whom came the apostles). But the great of the world esteemed Him NOT.

ELEMENT #5 – AUTHORITY

Lastly, consider that greatness in our world is often connected with the scope of your AUTHORITY. Much of being great is WIELDING POWER—in myriad forms—over others. It may be on the JOB SITE (who has the biggest office), in the POLITICAL realm (who wields the most control), in the MILITARY (who has the highest rank) or in a DESPOTIC nation (who has the biggest army), BUT the great of the word are often deemed those with the most POWER.

KEY – Of course, Jesus possessed authority.

1) He was the CREATOR of the heavens and the earth (what exists that He has not made?)

Colossians 1:15–17 (NIV)

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

2) He DEMONSTRATED authority over the natural world, demonic forces, sickness and death

Q. What do you think the miracles were BUT a DEMONSTRATION of His kingly AUTHORITY?

NOTE 1 – But the great of the world were NEVER swayed by the miracles. He would cleanse the leper, raise the dead, feed the masses, etc., and they would STILL ask for a sign that He was truly the Son of God! To such figures, Jesus was LITTLE MORE THAN a traveling teacher, the poor son of a carpenter and an intolerable nuisance.

NOTE 2 – They rejected His authority so much they rallied to CAESAR (whom they reviled) over Jesus: “We have no king but Caesar” they shouted as they called for His execution (cf. John 19:15).

KEY – Jesus WAS, IS, AND SHALL BE King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but the world NEVER recognized who and what He truly was. As was noted in the beginning, it could only be discerned through the eyes of faith

AGAIN...

Isaiah 53:2b

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

CHRISTMAS CONNECTIONS

Now you may be asking, “Pastor, I thought this was going to be a sermon related to Christmas? It says so right in my bulletin!” You are correct. Allow me a moment to tie all of my loose threads together...

KEY – ALL of the sentiments shared this morning bring us—in many ways—to realities evident in the Birth Narratives of Jesus Christ. i.e., The apparent lack of earthly/worldly greatness is evident in EVERY FACET of the Christmas story!

- 1) Jesus did NOT come from money. Remember that Mary and Joseph were notably poor.
- 2) Jesus was NOT born into a position of academic or parental pedigree. He was born into the home of simple, hard-working peasants who would have found no favor by the elite of their day. They couldn’t even get a room at the inn on the night of His birth!
- 3) Jesus was NOT born into a family w/ a throne or authority. The King of the Universe was born into obscurity, far from any seat of earthly power.
- 4) Jesus was NOT born into a position of connection. The great of the earth did not rally around Him at His birth. His entrance into the world went unnoticed, save for a few lowly shepherds in the fields.

YES...the magi would come some years after His birth, BUT that was a radically small percentage of the great of their age, and they were NOT even from His own people. HEROD would hear the news of the King’s birth and move—not to worship, but—to infanticide. The RELIGIOUS LEADERS who heard the report of the magi couldn’t be bothered to go find the King they had waited nearly a millennium for!

AGAIN...

Isaiah 53:2b

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nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

CONSIDERATIONS

There are two things I want you to consider this morning (two takeaways):

1) To what degree are you chasing greatness as the WORLD defines it v. HEAVEN?

Q. To what degree are YOU chasing wealth, power, connections, and a good name among men MORE THAN you are chasing hard after the kingdom and His righteousness? Though there is nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves, they are TREACHEROUS in their capacity to ENSLAVE even the most well-intentioned men. The best things make the worst IDOLS.

BE CAREFUL: what good is it to be deemed great by the WORLD and unknown by HEAVEN?

Mark 8:36 (NIV)

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

2) To what degree do you recognize the REALITY of who/what Jesus Christ is?

We have touched upon the manner in which the world viewed (and in many respects still views) Jesus. There is great DANGER in viewing Him from a purely worldly point of view. We will miss much if we only consider Jesus through the metrics of EARTHLY greatness.

2 Corinthians 5:16

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

CONCLUSIONS

APP. May the eyes of your understanding be ENLIGHTENED this holiday season to SEE Jesus...

NEXT SUNDAY MORNING – A Heavenly View of Christ Jesus. **PRAY**