

Considering Christ at Christmas Pt. 1

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 11, 2022

INTRODUCTION

NOTE 1 – Thank you for joining us! Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a short space of time.

NOTE 2 – The 2022 ABM will take place on Sunday, January 22, 2023, following the Sunday Service (January 29 in case of inclement weather). Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected offices of Deacon and Trustee on our church Board—whose terms expire at the Annual Meeting—will again be distributed after service. The completed forms must be placed in the designated box located on the table in the front foyer by no later than next Sunday, December 18, 2022. Also, the deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is Sunday, January 1, 2023.

SETTING THE STAGE

NOTE 1 – The fifty-third chapter of the Book of Isaiah is one of the most remarkable examples of prophecy in the whole of Scripture. Penned some seven-hundred-years before the Birth of Christ, Isaiah speaks to the life of Jesus in vivid detail. As one author notes...

QUOTE – “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.”

NOTE 2 – This prophecy, in its totality, speaks to Jesus’ substitutionary death, burial and subsequent resurrection, saving of sinners, intercession, kingdom and more. The chapter is short enough that we will read it in its entirety. Please consider and prayerfully reflect upon the following...

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.

HOMING IN

Though this passage abounds with details worthy of our corporate time and attention, there is one small and easy-to-overlook portion that has captured my attention as of late. Would you consider afresh and anew the words of Isaiah 53:2b...

Isaiah 53:2b

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

Q. What does this Isaianic passage suggest?

A. Christ, at His Coming, would not be characterized by the elements typically associated with earthly greatness. In other words, there would be nothing about Him that a secularly-minded or worldly person would find appealing or attractive. As one author ins. notes...

QUOTE – 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 carnal point of view, Jesus would not have been deemed great or consequential. He possessed none of the characteristics normally associated with prominence. Let us spend some time elaborating upon and exploring these sentiments as we enter the holiday Season.

LET US DELVE IN AND CONSIDER THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS...

WEALTH

NOTE 1 – Consider that greatness is often intimately connected with the size and scale of one’s bank account! Those deemed great in the earth are often men and women of sizeable wealth and means. Consider, for instance, the people who attain celebrity status in our culture. The one common characteristic is not good looks, skill or positive societal impact. Rather, it is the amount of money they possess.

NOTE 2 – However, this cannot be said of Christ Jesus. In fact, the reverse happens to be true. Despite the claims of celebrity pastors who live celebrity lifestyles in the Name of Jesus, Christ himself had no wealth to speak of...

1) Jesus Was Raised in Relative Poverty (Being Reared in the Home of a Carpenter)

2) Jesus’ Latter Ministry Was Not Marked w/ Financial Abundance and/or Prosperity

NOTE 3 – Consider the words of Christ Himself on this matter...

Luke 9:57–58

57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” 58 Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

NOTE 4 – The only true possession of Christ was His garment or cloak, and even that was stripped off at His Crucifixion (i.e., becoming the property of the soldier who cast the best lot cf. Matt. 27:35). No, Jesus was quite familiar with lack, which is a hallmark not often connected with those who are deemed great.

EDUCATION

NOTE 1 – Consider that greatness in our world is also often connected to having the right degree. At least, that is what we have told several generations of our own youth. We esteem prestigious universities and those who have sat in lofty seats of learning (e.g., Harvard, Yale, Columbia, etc.). Many of the great associated with higher learning enjoy the rarified air of academia and the elitism that has come to grow around it.

NOTE 2 – Yet Christ was not associated with academia either. I am not saying that He was utterly uneducated. Jesus likely received an education at home or from a scribe attached to the village synagogue. It was, however, a “poor man’s education” only. In fact, the religious elite of Jesus day contemptuously said, “He had never learned” (i.e., “He was not college bred or trained!” cf. John 7:15). I affirm what one author noted...

QUOTE – “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.”

NOTE 3 – Though He was the greatest teacher to ever walk the earth and the fount of knowledge and wisdom, He was despised, scorned and shamed for his lack of academic pedigree by the “great” of this world.

PARENTAGE

NOTE 1 – Consider that greatness in this world is often associated with being born into the right family. Let us face it: having a family with the right last name (e.g., Kennedy, Gates, Buffet and Biden) seems to open all the right doors and conveys a level of earthly esteem not necessarily associated with Foley, Culver, and Barry. Quite often the great are deemed great because of the circumstances of their family at birth!

NOTE 2 – Yet Jesus, interestingly, could not claim glorious parentage. It is true that Jesus, through the lineage of both Mary and Joseph, had familial connection to King David of old. However, by the time of His birth, the wealth and authority of that dynastic name was long gone. Though royal blood flowed in the veins of Jesus, both of heaven and earth, Jesus was deemed little more than the illegitimate son of a “lowly” carpenter.

NOTE 3 – Moreover, consider the location of His upbringing. Yes, it is true that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. However, He was raised in Nazareth. Nazareth was a notoriously wicked town with little regard, as we learn from one of Jesus’ own countrymen and eventual disciples (i.e., Nathanael). Please take note...

John 1:46 (ESV)

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

NOTE 4 – “Christ had no acquaintance with sin in His own soul, but in the town He had but a full exhibition of the awful problem with which it was to be His life work to deal.” He was not raised in a prestigious metropolis like Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York City, London, etc. He was raised on the wrong side of the tracks, proverbially speaking! Again, greatness by pedigree eluded Him.

CONNECTIONS

NOTE 1 – Consider that greatness in our world is often connected with one’s network. Much of being great has to do with knowing the right people. As the old adage says, “It’s all who you know!” Find your way into the in-crowd (i.e., buddy-up to those who are great), and the world will likely deem you great by association!

NOTE 2 – Yet again, this cannot be said of Jesus. Certainly, there were vaunted classes in His day. You had groups like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and Teachers of the Law, Herodians, sycophants to the Roman Pilate and more. However, Jesus found a way to alienate, offend and put-off every one of these groups, etc.

NOTE 3 – He called such figures hypocrites, children of hell and of the devil, blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs full of dead men’s bones, snakes, vipers, foxes and much more (e.g., Matt. 23)...

NOTE 4 – Even worse, Jesus surrounded Himself with the lowly, the humble, the poor, the sinful, the wretched, ruined and shamed, the outcast and the outsider, etc. After all, He had come to call sinners and not those who were well (cf. Luke 5:31–32)—and the elite hated Him for it. In the end, the elite were the ones directly responsible for His Crucifixion. Of course...

1) Jesus Possessed Perfect Connection w/ God the Father

2) Jesus Possessed Intimate Connection w/ the Masses

KEY – However, the great of the world recognized and esteemed Him not.

AUTHORITY

NOTE 1 – Let us consider that worldly greatness is often connected with the scope of your authority. Much of being great is wielding power, in myriad forms, over others. Whether it is in the corporate world, the political realm or in the military, the great of the world are often those deemed to possess the most power.

NOTE 2 – Of course, Jesus certainly possessed authority...

1) He is the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth

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 Exercised Power Over Nature, Demonic Forces, Sickness and Death

Q. What do you think His miracles were but demonstrations of His kingly authority?

NOTE 3 – Yet the great of the world were never swayed by His miracles. He would cleanse the leper, feed the masses and raise the dead, and such figures would still ask for a sign of His dominion (cf. Matt. 16:1). To such people, Jesus was little more than a traveling rabbi and intolerable nuisance, for He did not have the type of power to which they were accustomed (e.g., military, political, etc.).

NOTE 4 – They rejected His authority so much they chose Caesar, whom they reviled, over Jesus, exclaiming: “We have no king but Caesar” (as they shouted for His Crucifixion) (cf. John 19:15). Simply stated, Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but the world would not recognize Him for what He truly was. As was noted at the beginning of this sermon, such truth could only be discerned through the eyes of faith. Again...

Isaiah 53:2b

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

CHRISTMAS CONNECTIONS

NOTE 1 – Of course, you may be asking: “Pastor, I thought this was going to be a sermon related to Christmas?”

NOTE 2 – You are correct, so please allow me to tie all of my loose threads together...

NOTE 3 – All the sentiments shared today bring us to realities evidenced in the Birth Narratives of Christ. The apparent lack of His earthly and worldly greatness abounds in every facet of the Christmas Story...

1) Christ did NOT come from money. Remember that Mary and Joseph were notably and demonstrably 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 could not even get a room on the night of His Birth!

3) Jesus was NOT born into a family with power or authority. The King of all was born into obscurity, far-removed 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...

NOTE 4 – Yes, Magi from the East would come some years after His Birth, but that was a small percentage of the great of their age, and they were not even of His own people! Herod would come to hear the news of the His Birth, yet was moved to infanticide v. worship. The religious leaders who heard of His Coming could not be bothered to pay homage to the One they had long anticipated because of the Scripture!

AGAIN...

Isaiah 53:2b

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

CONSIDERATIONS

FYI – There are two questions that I want you to consider as we depart...

Q1. To what degree are you chasing the greatness as the world defines it v. heaven?

NOTE 1 – To what degree are you chasing wealth, power, connections and a good name among men more than the kingdom and His righteousness? Though there is nothing wrong with these things in their place, they are treacherous in their capacity to enslave even the most well-intentioned of men. The best things make for the worst idols! Be careful, lest you be lauded by the world but forgotten by heaven. Tragic ending!

Mark 8:36

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

Q2. To what degree do you recognize that reality of Jesus' Nature and Work?

NOTE 2 – We have touched upon the manner in which the world viewed, and in many respects continues to view, Jesus. There is a great danger in viewing Him from a worldly perspective. We will miss much if we only consider Jesus through the lens of earthly greatness. Take note...

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.

KEY – Next Sunday we will consider the nature and work of Jesus from a heavenly perspective!

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org

NOTE 2 – Feel free to participate in our “beyond-Sunday” ministries (MM, WM, CYC, Study)

NOTE 3 – Christmas Schedule – Thursday, December 22 Service at 6:30–7:30pm (Carols and More)!

NOTE 4 – Christmas Schedule – Sunday, December 25 Christmas Service from 10:30–11:30am.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.