

Celebrating Obscurity Isaiah 53:1-6

Jesus' choice to be born in Bethlehem reveals a great deal about His values and His mission on earth, and shows us how to best celebrate this Christmas holiday.

This morning we lit the Bethlehem candle

- Remembering Micah's 8th Cent. BC prophecy that promised King would be born in Bethlehem
- A remarkably specific prediction – out of *all* the cities of Israel... *this* one little town
- Strong evidence for the truthfulness of the Bible – very specific Old Testament promise come true

But what I want us to focus on this morning is the question...

“What do we learn about Jesus from His choice to be born in Bethlehem?”

- Jesus wasn't like us – we didn't get to pick where we were born
 - o our parents made the decision – we were just along for the ride
- But Jesus is the Son of God – eternal, all-powerful, sovereign
- So unlike every other human... He got to choose where He would be born

He chose Bethlehem... so let's talk about Bethlehem for a moment

- Not really much to say!
- **Small town 5 miles south of Jerusalem – had always been overshadowed by the big city**
 - o if ancient Rome = New York + Washington DC combined
 - o then ancient Jerusalem = BCS
 - o and Bethlehem = Snook... tiny – one-stop-light kind of town – easy to miss
- When Mary and Joseph came – no room – too small a town to accommodate many visitors
 - o In two lists in the Old Testament of towns in Judah – Bethlehem not even mentioned!
 - o no one vacationed in Bethlehem – wasn't the center of anything
- In other words, the last place you'd expect a king to be born!
 - o Kings are born in palaces; in mansions; in great capital cities
- Not in an obscure country town... in a manger

And yet that's what Jesus chose – to arrive in this world without fanfare, fame, or luxury

He chose obscurity and poverty – Max Lucado

Jesus chose obscurity, humility, and poverty – not just in birth but throughout His life

He consistently chose the opposite of the fame, luxury, and wealth you would expect a king to choose

That's the point of the prophecy we'll study this morning in Isaiah

Turn to Isaiah 53

- prophecy written by Isaiah approximately 800 BC
- Isaiah tells us about Jesus... about the life He would live and the death He would die

He tells us that Jesus would choose...

1) an UNREMARKABLE BODY

- **Read v1-2**
- **“tender shoot” = lit: “sucker shoot”** = the undesirable growth at the base of a tree
 - o looks bad and is bad for the tree, so you prune it off

- **“root out of parched ground”**
 - o you’d expect God’s Son to be strong and noble – like an oak near a stream of water
 - o he will be like a weak, withered root trying to grow in dry, cracked soil
 - Kind of plant you want to yank out of the ground and put it out of its misery
- **Point: Jesus would have no handsome form or majestic appearance that would attract us**
 - o He would be an utterly unremarkable looking man
 - o His looks, cloths, possessions, circumstances wouldn’t attract anyone to Him
 - o Would NOT have been “Most Likely to Succeed” / “Most Popular” / “Most handsome”
 - o If he went to his high school reunion few would even remember Him!
- **Fascinating: we have 4 books in the Bible about Jesus – 3779 verses**
 - o guess what you’ll never find: any description of His appearance!
 - o King Saul was “head and shoulders” taller than his countrymen
 - o King David had “beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance”
 - o Of King Absalom it is said, “in all of Israel there was no one as handsome”
 - o But of Jesus... silence!
 - o Why? Because there was nothing remarkable or attractive about His appearance
- **Ironic: men chosen to play Jesus in the movies are ALWAYS good looking!**
 - o NO! You are all way too good looking! Jesus was NOT handsome
- **Should be a wakeup call to us living in an appearance-obsessed culture**
 - o when God came to earth, He CHOSE a body that was not attractive
 - o Jesus was the only person in history to get to choose the body He was born with
 - o could have chosen to look like Henry Cavill (Superman) or Chris Hemsworth (Thor)
 - o chose to be average – not hot, not cute, not ripped... just completely forgettable.
- **Result in v1... who can believe *this* average, unremarkable guy could actually be God’s Son?!**
 - o You know the story: Jesus performs countless miracles yet few choose to follow Him
 - o they just can’t believe such an unremarkable looking man could actually be God’s Son

2) an UNPOPULAR LIFE

- Read v3
- **“He was despised and forsaken”**
 - o “despised” – in Heb doesn’t carry emotional power the Eng word does
 - o Not hatred... simply a **cold indifference** – people would want nothing to do with Jesus
 - o **Read Phil 2:7 – “taking the form of a slave”**
 - could have taken the form of a celebrity, warrior, king
 - chose to take the form of a slave – identify to the world as a servant
 - who wants to be around that – guaranteed to be unpopular
 - He chose the most unpopular life possible
 - o **Result – He was “forsaken” – everyone abandoned Him**
 - exactly what happened at end of his life – even His closest friends cut and ran
 - when hung on the cross: He was naked and utterly alone
 - o He knows what it’s like to be bullied, betrayed, humiliated, abandoned because He was!
- **He chose an unpopular life full of “...sorrows...grief...”**
 - o “sorrow” = pain
 - o “grief” = illness, sickness
 - o God is painting a picture for us: Jesus would be like a person who suffers from an incurable disease. His life would be full of pain... a tragic life... a miserable life.
- **Result – people won’t even want to look at him – “one from whom men hide their faces”**
 - o like driving through Mumbai, India – saw old man with leprosy – filthy, covered in soars
 - o you really don’t want to look – don’t want to face tragedy of suffering
 - o That’s Jesus – would be kind of guy people avoid – uncomfortable to be around Him
- **Think about it: Jesus is the one person who could have actually chosen fame**

- could have had millions of screaming fans, fame, luxury, pleasure...
- yet He chose an unpopular life... a tragic life... an abandoned life
- **The Creator of the Universe chose to be loser in the eyes of this world**
- **Why? So the 3rd choice would be possible**
 - Jesus chose unpopularity so we would send Him to the cross where He would die...

3) a SELFLESS DEATH

- Read v4-6
- **His death so painful everyone would conclude – end of v4 – He’s being punished by God**
- **YES – Jesus was punished by God... but not for His sins... for our sins**
 - **“pierced”** – literally pierced by nails and by a spear
 - **“crushed”** = “to be broken into pieces, pulverized” – used of people trampled to death
 - **“chastened”** = “punished” by God
 - **“scourged”** = “wounded, slashed”
- He took it all **for us** – for our transgressions, our iniquities – so we could be healed
- **Isaiah summarizes the point in the metaphor of v6**
 - We’re the foolish sheep who ran from God to chase sin and selfishness and pride
 - But the punishment our foolishness deserves fell on Him instead of us
 - punishment “attacked” Him rather than us – He stepped in front of us and took it
- **Our culture puts self above all**
- **Jesus put all above self**

The only person who EVER got to choose His body, His life, and His death...

Chose an unremarkable body, an unpopular life, and a selfless death

What do we do with that? How do we apply this?

- Generally speaking, we don’t choose our bodies, our life, or our death
 - we’re not sovereign or omnipotent like Jesus – don’t get to control our circumstances
- God doesn’t want you to feel guilty if you are attractive, popular, or get to live a long life
- That’s not the point or the application of this passage

IMO, the application is three-fold:

1) Trust that Christianity isn’t made up

- Because who would make up a story about God coming to earth... like this?
- I can see making up a story where a god comes to earth looking like Chris Hemsworth – Thor
- But a deity who comes looking so average no one notices?
- Who’s so unpopular, the world He made hates Him?
- Who willingly suffers abuse, violence, crucifixion – and doesn’t zap anyone?!
- No one makes a movie like that because it doesn’t make any sense to us
 - We can’t fathom such power choosing such humiliation – not what humans do
 - That’s not the kind of story we make up
- The only reasonable way I know to explain the humiliation of God in the Gospels... it’s true
 - Humans didn’t make it up – it really happened this way

2) Connect with those most like Jesus

- There is a **disconnect** for Christians when we think about Christmas in America
- **We want to celebrate this – manger scene**
 - the birth of Jesus is the whole point of the season – not Christmas without this
- **But we also want to celebrate this - holiday in nice house**
 - beautiful tree in a beautiful house, warm fireplace, full stockings, surrounded by your loving family, opening gifts, enjoying rich food and friendship

- **Nothing wrong with scene on right... but it doesn't go with the scene on the left!**
 - o Jesus wasn't born into a comfortable upper-middle class family living in a nice house!
 - o He was born into poverty and deprivation
 - o He was born in shame to unwed mother – community didn't understand virgin birth
 - o No sooner does He enter world than He has to flee the country because of Herod
 - o He was a refugee in Egypt without a home, without security
- **So 2nd application of Isaiah 53 – find ways this Christmas to connect with those most like Jesus**
 - o with poor, outcast, refugee, those from broken homes, struggling for hope, without security
- Doesn't mean you can't spend any time in the scene on the right – you can and should enjoy!
- BUT don't spend all your time on the right
- **Find practical ways to spend time with people actually living on the left of that slide**
 - o email communityoutreach@grace-bible.org - lots of practical ways to do this
- **Some of those practical ideas include:**
 - o Can you help build a Habitat for Humanity house?
 - o Can you volunteer with the BEE Community or Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, or Hope Pregnancy Center – all of them are looking for volunteers
 - o Can you and your family serve in a soup kitchen this holiday?
 - o Can you research and get involved in helping refugees?
 - o Can you give some of that Christmas money to charities helping people in need?
 - o How about helping this week right here at Southwood with the Christmas Coop?
- We are missing Christmas if we don't connect with those actually living like Jesus did
 - o far from luxury and security
 - o find a way to bridge the gap, learn about their lives, and serve them in some way

3) Celebrate Christmas by remembering Good Friday

- Christmas = celebration of the incarnation of Jesus
 - o that the Son took on human flesh to live with us
- But must remember Isa 53: the purpose of the incarnation was to lead to the crucifixion
 - o Jesus was born so that He could die for us – that's the clear logic of Isa.
- Christmas is overshadowed by Good Friday
 - o Christmas is smaller, less significant than Good Friday
 - o Because as good as it is – nothing compared to the love demonstrated on the cross
- The greatest gift of God to us was not given on Christmas – it was given on Good Friday
 - o Jesus' death purchased forgiveness, freedom, and life for us
- That's the good news of the Gospel
- This Christmas: take time to read and discuss passages like Isaiah 53 or Matthew 26-28
 - o Connect Christmas with the cross – because that's what the goal was – the point
 - o Meditate on these passages so you can see Christmas through lens of Good Friday

Pray and give thanks for what Jesus suffered for us