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"He Shall Be Called a Nazarene"

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Matthew 2:23 says that Joseph, Mary, and the young child Jesus "came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" This verse has troubled many Bible students because the statement, "He shall be called a Nazarene" is not found anywhere in the Old Testament. What are we to make of this?

One clue is Matthew's use of the plural "the prophets." The gospel writers often quote from Old Testament prophets, but the typical wording is: "that what was spoken by the prophet [singular, often with the prophet's name] might be fulfilled" (compare verse 15, a quote from Hosea; or 1:22-23, a quote from Isaiah). Matthew's use of the plural here indicates that what is in view is not one particular prophet, but the prophets taken collectively. "He shall be called a Nazarene" is not a word-for-word quotation, but the expression of a theme found throughout the prophets' writings.

The prophets foretold that the Messiah would come from a humble, despised background (see, for example, Isaiah 49:7; 53:1-3; Zechariah 11:4f; Psalm 22:6-8). There could be no more fitting fulfillment than Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth of Galilee. To most Jews, Galileans were ignorant country bumpkins, a step behind both culturally and spiritually. Even their accents were peculiar (Matthew 26:73). Galilee's distance from Jerusalem and its nearness to Syria and Phoenicia lent it the nickname "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:16; Isaiah 9:1). Even among the cities of Galilee, Nazareth was obscure. The Jewish Talmud lists 63 towns of Galilee, but Nazareth rates no mention.

Many would have shared the sentiments of Nathanael when he first heard of Jesus: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

The idea that the Messiah should come from such lowly beginnings was one the chief priests and Pharisees would not entertain. "Search," they said, "and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee" (John 7:52). Yet it was here, Isaiah foretold, that the light of God would first dawn (Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:16). In this unlikely place would begin the work of God's Son. *The Plant City Planter*

Character Matters

Unknown

Many people are willing to take a chance on others never discovering their wrongdoings. Many of these, however, are caught and punished for their misdeeds. Others get by with evil works because they are able to fool people all the days of their lives. (But they never fool God for even one moment, JS).

Others refrain from doing things which are wrong because they know society does not approve of those things. They are afraid to take the chance of being discovered in their evil schemes by the public. As the standards that are acceptable to the majority vary, though, so will the standards of such people.

Just think of what is practiced now in the way of immorality that does not even cause an eyebrow to be raised that would have provoked the strongest kind of censure just a few years ago. One who allows society to establish his standards will never be anything but an advocate of the status quo.

Still others who would be willing to take the chance of doing many things which are evil even though they might be apprehended by society are deterred by a fear of God. Anyone who has any knowledge of the Bible knows that it reveals that all sin will be found out and judged Eccl. 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10; Num. 32:23 states: "...and be sure your sin will find you out". Heb. 4:13 speaks of the same thought when it says, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Those who refrain from doing that which is wrong because they know it would displease the Lord are to be commended.

However, God desires more than fear. Surely the person who has trained himself to follow the Lord's will ought to realize that he should do those things that are right because they are right. The religion of Christ does not encourage people to do all they think they can "get by with." Rather it teaches that those who are the Lord's disciples are to become good in their hearts, Mt. 15:18-20.

Jesus shows the heart to be the wellspring of actions: evil proceeds from the heart, Mk. 7:20-23, so should goodness. God has commanded those who desire to be His children to change their hearts, Rom. 12:1,2 and to become godly in their manner of life. God said, "Be holy, for I am holy." 1 Pet. 1:16.

As disciples, our goal ought not to be abstaining from evil only because we are afraid of punishment but rather to be holy even as God is holy. James 1:13 cites the supreme goodness of God: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone (to do evil)." v. 14. shows that temptation comes because of lust, inordinate desire, which entices one to sin.

God is so completely good that evil is not an enticement to Him, He is not even tempted by it. Since temptation comes because one is drawn by his own desires toward that which entices, then the impossibility for God to be tempted must mean He has no desire for anything that is evil.

Can you think of something you once practiced which was sinful but that you have now discarded? If so, you are becoming more like God. How great to be able to reach a state where you have no desire to sin. Just how far have you gone toward real goodness? What do you do when you think no one is looking? What would you do if you could hide your deeds from the Lord?

Surely honest answers to these questions will help each of us to evaluate ourselves properly. Our answers will enable us to see the progress we have made as a Christian and to realize more fully that our own goodness is very meager and that great challenges are before us and, with deep humility of our own unworthiness, that we must seek God's abundant love and grace to help us be the kind of people we ought to be, the kind He would have us be. The secret to good character is a converted heart. *Timberland church of Christ website Lufkin, TX*