

The Nazrene

Matthew 2:23

The Nazrene

Matthew 2:23

Text

Old Testament reading - Isaiah 11:1-10

Is. 11:1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. Is. 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. Is. 11:3 His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; Is. 11:4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Is. 11:5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. Is. 11:6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. Is. 11:7 The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. Is. 11:8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. Is. 11:9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. Is. 11:10 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."

New Testament reading - Matthew 2:22-23

Matt. 2:22 ¶ But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. Matt. 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

I. Introduction - what's the controversy???

A. *Quotes of those who are troubled*

I find a great deal of comfort in the applications of this verse. I would love to get straight to the applications, but before I can do that, I do need to resolve a controversy that has arisen over Matthew 2:23. Liberals claim that this is either a mistake or a deliberate deception, and many evangelicals have been at a loss on how to respond. Let me read that verse in question. It's Matthew 2:23. It says, "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" That seems like a straightforward quotation of prophecy, doesn't it? And the New King James actually puts quotation marks around the phrase, "He shall be called a Nazarene." It shouldn't, but it does. But listen to

the following commentaries as they wrestle over this verse. Willoughby Allen says, "This verse contains a still unexplained difficulty."¹ What is it that is so difficult? Leon Morris explains the difficulty this way:

...it is not easy to find the words he will be called a Nazarene in any of the prophetic books, or for that matter, anywhere in the Old Testament. No passage even resembles this.²

So liberals use this passage to show that the Bible makes mistakes. They claim that Matthew is pretending to quote the Old Testament, when in fact he is fabricating the quote out of thin air. And Evangelicals have often not been very helpful in their comments. Albert Barnes, said, "The words here are not found in any of the books of the Old Testament, and there has been much difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of this passage."³ Plummer states, "The difficulty about the prophecy quoted in ver. 23 is one which our present knowledge does not enable us to solve."⁴ D.A. Carson, a very prominent evangelical says, "these words are found nowhere in the OT."⁵ John Barry gives his opinion: "The source of this quotation is unknown and it seems that Jewish people at the time did not expect the Messiah to come from Nazareth..."⁶ Just one more quote; this one from R. T. France. He says, "He shall be called a Nazorean" does not in fact occur anywhere in the OT, nor, as far as we know, in any other contemporary literature. As a matter of fact Nazareth, as a relatively newly founded settlement, is never mentioned in the OT, or indeed in any other non-Christian Jewish writing before it appears in an inscription listing priestly courses in the third or fourth century A.D. The search for a specific OT source for "He shall be called a Nazorean" is therefore likely to be futile.⁷

B. A Biblical response that shows that Matthew was right on!

prophets, not prophet

How should we respond? Well, the first thing to notice is that this is not a direct quote at all: Matthew speaks of "prophets" plural, whereas every other time he gives a direct quote he uses the singular "prophet." And that is why many solid Evangelical scholars conclude that he is summarizing what

1 Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907), 16.

2 Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 49.

3 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Matthew & Mark*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 21.

4 Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (New York; London: Charles Scribner's Sons; Elliot Stock, 1910), 18.

5 D. A. Carson, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 97.

6 John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 2:23.

7 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 92.

multiple prophets have said would happen, not giving a direct quote. There should not be quotation marks around those words.

absent quotation markers in Greek (no λέγων preceding a ὅτι)

Second, Lenski points out that the Greek makes it crystal clear that Matthew was not intending to quote any one passage. Speaking of the Greek, he says, "No λέγων precedes ὅτι, which shuts out not only a direct quotation but also an indirect prophetic utterance."⁸ Lenski says that the grammar mandates that there be no quotation marks.

The meaning of Nazareth points to seven Old Testament passages regarding the Messiah

Third, if you understand what the name of the city (Nazareth) means, then there are in fact seven Old Testament prophecies that mandated that Jesus somehow be called a Nazarene - not a Nazarite (that's a totally different word), but a Nazarene. The city name means "shoot, sprout or branch" and was a reference to a small twig that sprouts. A little branch growing out. Edersheim points out (II., 222-223) that there were two Old Testament words meaning branch, tsemach and netser, and both synonyms referred to the despised Messiah who would grow up in obscurity and weakness but would eventually grow into a glorious tree. And so, Matthew is right on the money. There were indeed prophets (plural) whose prophecies mandated that Jesus move to Nazareth and that Jesus be called a Nazarene. And I will

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 87. The whole quote says, "It is needless to go through the history of the exegesis of this passage which has certainly perplexed many. The use of ὅπως instead of ἵνα is immaterial, for both have the same meaning. But the plural 'through the prophets' is important. It cannot refer to one prophet speaking for all. This plural evidently refers either to the prophetic books in general or to the entire Old Testament. It also shows that no quotation is to follow which will introduce some word that was uttered by several prophets. This means that ὅτι is not recitativum, like our quotation marks, pointing to a direct quotation. No λέγων precedes ὅτι, which shuts out not only a direct quotation but also an indirect prophetic utterance. The prophets nowhere said even in substance 'that he shall be called Ναζωραῖος.'" Davies and Allison say much the same: By writing of 'the prophets' (cf. 26:56; Jn 6:45; Acts 3:18, 21, 24; Rom 1:2), Matthew alerts us to expect something other than the verbatim quotation of one particular Scripture: he is not just reproducing an OT text. The displacement of λεγόντων probably serves the same purpose. For although ὅτι recitativum is found in Matthew (e.g. 4:6; 21:16), our author shows a marked tendency to drop it from Mark (cf. Neiryneck, *Agreements*, PP. 213–16); and the unexpected replacement of λεγόντων—2:23 is the only formula quotation with ὅτι—must point to an unusual status vis-à-vis the other fulfilment citations. 26:54 supports this contention. 'How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that (ὅτι) thus it is necessary to be?' In this verse ὅτι introduces a remark of scriptural substance, not a sentence found in the OT, and this fact is in part signalled by the unspecified reference to 'the Scriptures' (plural). This offers something close to what we propose to find in 2:23: a quotation which rests upon or alludes to more than one OT text ('the prophets') and whose wording does not exactly match any particular Scripture (ὅτι). W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, *International Critical Commentary* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 275.

explain why those prophetic passages necessitated that Jesus move to Nazareth.

II. Zechariah 6:12 with all the other "branch" passages

Zechariah 6:12 calls Jesus, the Man whose name is Branch... Isaiah 11 does not use the synonym for branch but the actual word for Nazareth, Netzer, when it refers to him as a Branch. So Edersheim says that all of the Branch passages really form the background to Matthew 2:23. And we are going to be looking at them this morning.

Now let me clarify that while these passages say that Jesus would have the title of Netzer, it was referring to the title of a person, not the title of a town. In fact, if it had been the name for a town in Isaiah 11:1, the Pharisees probably would not have used that as a title of derision and scorn for Jesus because they would have recognized that the title was Messianic. It appears that Nazareth did not exist when Isaiah wrote that passage.

And the fact that the Pharisees felt comfortable calling Jesus a Nazarene shows that God has a sense of humor. How is God going to orchestrate getting the very people who would reject Jesus as Messiah to call Jesus by a Messianic title? The Pharisees never consciously called Jesus by any Messianic title. In fact, they got mad every time Jesus took one of those titles to Himself.

When He called Himself the I AM, the Jews were ready to stone Him. When He called Himself the chief corner stone, they were offended. It was clear that that was a Messianic title. When He called Himself the Son of God, they called it blasphemy. When He said that He was the Son of Man coming on the clouds (a reference to Daniel 7), they called that blasphemy because they knew that was a title of the Messiah. In John 10 they refused to acknowledge that He was the good Shepherd prophesied by Ezekiel to reform the shepherding of Israel, and at the end of that chapter they sought to stone Him.

So how does God get the Pharisees to call Jesus the "branch or sprout" without realizing they were calling Him the Messiah? Well, God marvelously did it by having Jesus live in a city whose name meant "branch or sprout." Everyone in that city was called a Branchite or a Nazarene.

But the plot gets even better. Every Old Testament prophet that called the Messiah a branch, whether they used the word Netzer or tsemach,

consistently portrayed this branch as being despised and rejected. And so there is a double play on this term. It's a Messianic title, but it is also a title that the prophets predicted would be despised.

You couldn't get more disrespect in Israel than to be a citizen of Nazareth. Interestingly, just like Sodom became a synonym for homosexuality and to Corinthianize meant to fornicate because of how much immorality there was in Corinth, the NIV study Bible points out, the term "Nazarene was virtually a synonym for despised." That's why Nathaniel in John 1 says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" One way to ensure that Jesus would be called the branch, and to be despised, and be rejected (exactly as prophesied) was to make sure that he grew up in Nazareth.

So Matthew shows us the marvelous way that God got the Jews of that day (and for that matter, even to this day) to call Jesus and Christians Natzri. You can read about the name in the Talmud and other Jewish literature. We're Nazarenes. Here is how Wilbur Pickering translates this verse: "And upon arriving he settled in a city called Nasareth (Branch-town], so that what was spoken through the prophets should be fulfilled, that He would be called a Natsorean [Branch-man]." And before we apply this term "Nazarene" let's look at some of the background "branch" or "Nazarene" passages.⁹

III. Isaiah 11

The first passage that I want you to turn to is Isaiah 11. This is the main prophecy that we will look at. Isaiah 11, beginning at verse 1.

Is. 11:1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. Is. 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Verse 1 refers to the stump of Israel. Chapter 6 has already identified this stump as being the remnant of Israel that would return from Babylon. The tree of Israel had been cut down, but Isaiah says that the stump represents the remnant of Israel and that Israel hasn't been completely forsaken. There would be new life that would come out of the stump, representing the remnant. So that was in chapter 6.

Well now, once again using this image of a stump with shoots growing out of it, he says in verse 1. "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse..." Of all the parts and branches of this stump that he focuses on, the prophet says that the Messiah would be a shoot coming out of the part

⁹ Wilburn Pickering, *The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken: Objective Authority for Living*, (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License, 2013), p. 4.

representing Jesse. Now, when Isaiah wrote this, Jesse has been dead for hundreds of years. Jesse was the father of David, right? But geographically that is a reference to Bethlehem. Seven times in the Old Testament Jesse is either called "Jesse of Bethlehem" or "Jesse was from Bethlehem." Jesse and Bethlehem are virtually synonyms. That was David's home town and that was his father Jesse's home town. If Jesus was to come out of the part of the stump of Israel (geographically) pertaining to Jesse, then God had to orchestrate some way of getting Mary and Joseph to leave their town of Nazareth and go to Bethlehem to be born. It had to be a Nazarene (or a Branch) born in Bethlehem, but then Jesus has to go all the way from Bethlehem back to Nazareth.

And I won't deal with the prophecy today, but there is one more prophecy that has to be fulfilled, and that is that Jesus has to come out of Egypt before He goes to Nazareth. So it is a complicated plot that God is weaving. Before Jesus was born they were all the way on the other side of the nation. And of course, Luke tells us that this was why Caesar Augustus made the unreasonable demand that people would have to be registered in the town of their ancestry. This was an incredibly disruptive decree, with migrations of people all over the empire back to their home towns. But God orchestrated it because Jesus had to be born in the town of His ancestry: Bethlehem; the town of Jesse.

And the census had to come at just the right time for Mary to give birth in what Micah refers to as Bethlehem, least among the thousands of Judah. But the bottom line of that first phrase is that He had to be a Branch (a Nazarene in the Hebrew), and yet spring up first of all in the region of Jesse (Bethlehem).

But verse 1 goes on to say that "a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Not only will he be from a small spot, Bethlehem, but He will be a small fry: a netzer, a twig, a shoot, a branch. In Zechariah 6:12 it calls Jesus "the Man whose name is Branch." But in order for this to happen, God has to orchestrate some events. God gets Jesus out of Bethlehem through the persecution of Herod who makes the family flee to Egypt, and when Joseph and Mary want to return from Egypt to Bethlehem, he makes sure that they can't. He makes sure that they providentially have to go the other direction to Nazareth of Galilee. So they settled in a place where Christ could earn the nickname of Nazarene. If this despised branch had been allowed to stay in Bethlehem you can bet that Christ's enemies would never have called him a Branch. We'll come back to this passage, but let's first take a quick look at the other branch passages. Let's start with Isaiah 53:2

IV. Isaiah 53

A. *The Weakness Of This Plant*

Isaiah 53:2 says,

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men....

Just two points here: First, this verse says that Christ was a tender plant. The literal Hebrew for that word is to suckle or nurse. It is mostly used of babies nursing. Only here and in six other places does it refer to shoots, twigs or little branches. The emphasis was on how small, dependent and weak Christ was in the incarnation. Why does God have Christ come as a baby? It was to identify with us in all that we go through. He identified with babies. He knew what it meant to learn and to grow up. True, He never ceased to be God. As God He ruled the world while His humanity was in the cradle. In fact, I like to say that at the very time that Mary was cuddling baby Jesus in her arms, He as God was holding Mary in His arms. But despite the fact that He was the omnipotent God who continued to uphold all things by the word of His power, He did not use His divinity to take away the weakness, dependence and tenderness of His humanity.

For example, the Gospels tell us that He hungered and thirsted. He experienced pain. And this whole chapter of Isaiah 53 goes on to describe the life and crucifixion of Jesus. It vividly describes how tender and vulnerable Christ really was. The Gospels tell us that after fasting for forty days that He was weak and He had to be physically strengthened by angels. In other words, the incarnation was not an illusion. It was real. He staggered under the load of the cross because He had limited strength in His human body. He knew what it meant to be weak and to suffer pain and can minister to those who have such weakness. Christ was a tender plant. And this chapter is a long catalog of the various ways in which that weakness was seen. It was a true incarnation.

B. *The Miraculous Growth of This Plant*

But secondly, there was a miraculous growth of this tender twig. It says, "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground." This particular root and twig did not grow because there is luscious soil and moisture in which to thrive. Instead, there is desert. The Hebrew word for dry means drought or parched. It is something growing in the desert. Now even the desert can grow when there is rain. But this passage

says that it is growing even though there is no rain. Notice that it says the root grows "out of dry ground." It does not get its life from the environment around it. So it is a picture of something unnatural happening. Against all nature, a tender plant grows where no plant could grow. It is a hostile environment, and this chapter shows the hostility of the world against Christ.

Like that tender branch out of dry ground, Jesus received no support from His hostile surroundings. He received it from God and thus verse 2 says, "For He shall grow up before Him...." We will be applying this to ourselves later, but it is important to realize that Jesus grew where no plant could grow. The glory of Israel had long since vanished. At one time it would have been an asset for world-conquest to be born an Israelite, but now Israel was a vassal nation, despised by the rest of the world. Being a Jew was dry ground. And among Jews, Galileans were disdained. To be a Galilean was dry ground. The Pharisees denied that any teacher could come out of Galilee. And within Galilee, Nazareth was the off-scouring of the nation. So bad was Nazareth's reputation that even Nathaniel - in whom was no guile (no deceitfulness) could say, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was dry, barren ground. Who would have expected anything good to come from Nazareth? It's not the way we would have done it.

And where this passage indicates that the plant will supernaturally grow without the aid of its environment, and where verse 12 indicates that He will have the victory despite appearing to be weak, the other branch passages show the awesome growth of the branch. Let's quickly flip to a few.

V. Zechariah 6:12-13

Turn to Zezhariah 6:12-13:

Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: 'Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch! From His place He shall branch out. And He shall build the temple of the LORD; yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Though this man named Branch starts small, He will branch out (or grow) until His glory fills the earth.

VI. Jeremiah 23:5

Turn next to Jeremiah 23:5:

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Again, this branch (or despised Nazarene) will be caused to prosper.

VII. Jeremiah 33:15-16

Turn next to Jeremiah 33:15-16.

Jer. 33:15 “In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. Jer. 33:16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE Lord OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

That passage is saying that the very nation and city that was executed by Jesus in the first century will eventually be saved and dwell safely. It's a miraculous reversal that the Branch will eventually cause to happen.

VIII. Isaiah 11 again

Well, let's turn back to Isaiah 11 again and let's see how this unlikely Nazarene from Bethlehem would turn the world upside down. Isaiah 11. I'm not going to read the verses. If you just scan your eyes over the verses, you will see what I am saying. Verse 1 talks about the Netzer branch. Verse 2 speaks of what empowered Him in His ministry: the Holy Spirit. Verses 3-5 speak of His rule in the midst of His enemies, and His overcoming of those enemies. Verses 6-9 speak of the lion lying down with the lamb. Verses 10-16 of the world wide submission to the Gospel.

In other words, the wilderness doesn't stay a wilderness forever; Christ doesn't stay a tender shoot forever. He becomes the dominant force in the world. Where the word Nazarene was used as a title of derision, it has become a title of honor for us; where Jews still use the title Netzri or little branch as a title of contempt for Christians, it will one day be a name that the Jewish nation will gladly bear. Matthew is not making a stretch when he says that Jesus had to move to Nazareth for the prophecies to be fulfilled that Jesus would be called Netzer as a title of contempt. Again, let me give you Wilbur Pickering's much more accurate translation. "And upon arriving he settled in a city called Nazareth (Branch-town], so that what was spoken through the prophets should be fulfilled, that He would be called a Natsorean [Branch-man]." I stand in awe of how God manipulated the Pharisees to call Jesus with a Messianic title without realizing that they were doing so. They thought they were putting Him down; He gladly bore the title.

IX. Application For Today

A. We can trust God's Word

What applications can we draw from these Branch passages? First, we can trust His Word. It is so easy for critics to criticize the Bible out of ignorance. I have so many books that in essence claim that Matthew has made a mistake here. But hopefully by now you can see that it really is a beautifully orchestrated fulfillment of seven Biblical prophecies. But even if I didn't know the explanation, I have learned long ago to take God at His Word without ever questioning Him. It is the critics who will always be proved wrong and God who will always have the last laugh. So I think this little passage illustrates why we should trust the Bible completely in everything that it says.

B. We can trust God's providence

Second, we can trust His providence. Caesar Augustus mandated one of the most unusual and most inconvenient movements of people ever. Even one year before Christ was born, if anyone had predicted that Caesar would make a decree like this (that everyone had to travel to his town of origin) people would have laughed at you and said that no emperor would be that crazy. This mandate must have been an incredible pain in the neck. His advisors probably recommended that he not do it. But God's prophecies had to be fulfilled, and somehow God got Caesar Augustus to make this insane decree.

When you face similar inconveniences that the civil government has imposed upon you, do you trust God's providence? How many believers in the first century might have been tempted to wonder "Where is God in all of this inconvenience? Lord, why are you absent?" But He wasn't absent; He was right there all along, orchestrating it all perfectly.

And God can move heaven and earth today. We can trust Him. Are there huge obstacles to achieving the things God has placed upon our heart? Yes there are. But God is in the business of moving heaven and earth to accomplish His purposes. It brings great glory to His name. Don't ever be troubled by the Caesars of this world. They are pawns in His hand. Don't look at all the negative things that stand in the way. There were enormous numbers of negative things standing in the way of prophecy being fulfilled, and yet it was fulfilled to a "t."

C. The growth of Christ's kingdom is not dependent on moist nourishing soil

Third, the growth of Christ's kingdom is not dependent on moist nourishing soil. It's not dependent upon wonderful circumstances. It is not dependent upon CNN, CBS, KFAB, or other organizations giving us good publicity. In fact, most of the great movements of Christianity in history received no cooperation from the world. They were resisted by the world, and yet the unlikely sickly-looking plant of Christianity prospered and triumphed over the world. It's done so in the past and it will do so again.

We need to stop being pessimistic about the dry ground out there and begin remembering that Christ is an expert at growing things out of dry ground. This dry ground may even be your marriage. It may seem hopeless to get any green plant to flourish in the dry ground. But remember that Christ can cause a dry and dusty marriage to blossom as a rose by His grace. A good marriage is not dependent on circumstances. It is dependent upon the triumph of Christ's grace in our own lives.

The dry ground may be the culture in America, or the State. Can Christ cause things to grow in Washington DC? Yes He can. And in fact, He is doing so through Capitol Ministries and other organizations. The Netzer passage in Isaiah 11 specifically guarantees that He will bring justice and equity in the governments of this world in His own timing. He can do it with their cooperation or without their cooperation. But the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of Christ. Amen?

D. Jesus identified with us in our weakness

The fourth encouragement is that these passages show that Jesus identified with us in our weakness. He came as one who was weak. You can go to Him with your difficulties and know that He cares. He came specifically to take upon Himself our weaknesses – to become a frail twig. And if you feel weak, know that He identifies with you.

E. Jesus identified with us in our shame

Fifth, Jesus identified with our shame. He knew what it meant to be despised. And Hebrews 13 tells us that when all men are ashamed of us and despise us that we need to still be willing to still follow Jesus. If we are too ashamed to be identified with Him, He will be ashamed of us. We need to be willing to be despised by all as Nazarenes. Hebrews 13 says that Jesus ...suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

And when we identify ourselves as Nazarenes, willing to be despised, Jesus delights to exalt us. He continues to be a friend of publicans and sinners willing to cleanse them from their sins.

One of the purposes of the incarnation was to cause the stump which was cut down to grow into a great and glorious tree as He builds His church and eventually turns desert into the garden of Eden. It's not our job to grow the church. It's our job to bring His message to dry ground. Our job is to be Christ's ambassador's to this world, and to watch Him grow His kingdom. May we have faith in the Nazarene – the Branch of Righteousness who is destined to triumph. And may we have the humility to be His fellow-Nazarenes. Amen.