

The Other Side of Bethlehem / Bethlehem: A Christmas Series #1

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are the smallest among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. And on that day, he will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

For the better part of 2000 years, at this time of year, when the People of God have thought that small town five miles outside of Jerusalem called Bethlehem, they think of these words: "Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark street shineth the everlasting Light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." When they think of the most famous son Bethlehem produced, they think of these words: "this, this is Christ the King. Whom shepherds guard and angels sing. Haste, haste to bring him laud. The babe, the son of Mary." When think of Bethlehem's most famous visitors, they think of these words: "We three kings of orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star." And when they think of Bethlehem's greatest historical marker, they think of these words: "Away in a manger, no crib, or a bed. The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head." And the People of God should think of Bethlehem in such a way because that's the side of Bethlehem they live on; the one that says "for unto us a child is born. And unto us a son is given."

But church I want to tell you that before Bethlehem's dark street shined the everlasting light, before the shepherds guarded and the angels sang, before the caravan through field and fountain, moor, and mountain, and before they little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay, there was the other side of Bethlehem. And it's this side of Bethlehem that paints the picture of why there needed to be gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the baby in a manger in the first place. For on the other side of Bethlehem, there was a matriarch named Rachel who died in childbirth. There was a Moabite Gentile named Ruth that needed a kinsman redeemer and found it there. There was a shepherd boy who became King of Israel because he was anointed there. And there was a well flowing with living water sufficient to quench the thirst of the shepherds of God's people while engaged in a battle there, on the other side of Bethlehem. And all these events on the other side of Bethlehem foreshadowed something greater: salvation made available by the Messiah, Christ the Lord, asleep in the hay in our side of Bethlehem.

So here is why you should listen this morning: our side of Bethlehem takes on a fuller meaning when you understand the other side of it. You see, when you understand that one birth brought sorrow and the other joy right there in Bethlehem, your heart rejoices even more. When you understand our salvation in Jesus Christ gives us all the things that Ruth received in Bethlehem, your heart sings Amazing Grace even louder. When you understand that a shepherd boy was anointed King over all Israel in Bethlehem while an even greater king was anointed the Good Shepherd for all the world, both Jew and Gentile, your heart shouts "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" all the days of your life. And, friends, when your mind wraps around the concept that the same town that featured a well of living water just so happened to be the birthplace of the living water Himself — incarnated there in a manger in all His splendor — your soul can do nothing else but say "oh how marvelous. Oh, how wonderful. Is my Savior's love for me." So today, I give you the other side of Bethlehem. My prayer for you this morning is that it makes the good news of our side of Bethlehem carry on an even deeper meaning for you this time of year, just like it has for God's people for the last 2000 years. But before we do that, pray with me.

The Other Side of Bethlehem

1. The Side of a Promise Buried (Gen 35:16-20)

- **The Kitten Promise Request:** (1) When my daughter was just a little squirt, she always thought of ways to get a dog, cat, or any other animal in the animal kingdom. (2) One Saturday morning, I said "Darcie Lou," go clean your room. (3) To which she responded: "I'll promise to clean my room if you promise to buy me a kitten." (3) "I'm allergic to kittens. We can't be in the same room with them," I said. (4) To which she responded, "well, dad, you could sleep outside."
- **Main Idea of the Point:** In the first scene of Bethlehem in the Bible, Rachel, the matriarch of the promise, died and was buried in Bethlehem. The promises of God were now delayed, and the result is sorrow. In the first scene of Bethlehem in the New Testament, Christ was born in a manger in Bethlehem. The promises of God were now fulfilled, and the result is joy.
- **Genesis 35:16-20:** *Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. ¹⁷ And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't despair, for you have another son." ¹⁸ As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. ¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). ²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.*
- **Rachel and the Promise Delayed:** (1) Rachel's Grandfather-In-Law, Abraham, received the promises of land and descendants and the instruction: "go to the land." So away he went. (2) Rachel's Father-In-Law, Isaac, was a miracle of the promise of descendants. He's born to Sarah when she was barren and in her 90s. (3) Rachel's husband stole the promise/birthright from his brother and went on the run. (4) And now Rachel is dead and buried in Bethlehem. (5) To understand the significance of this, notice that she names her son "Ben-Oni" (Son of My Sorrow). (6) But immediately after his death, Jacob changes his name to "Benjamin" (Son of my right hand), as if to say the promise might be delayed. But it will be fulfilled. (7) And it was through a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in a manger.
- **App:** Yet in the dark street shineth, the everlasting light the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. The Side of a Burden Carried (Ruth 2:11-12)

- **Sporting Events Choices:** (1) When it comes to watching your favorite team, you have two options: (a) Attend the game live in person. But in doing so, you'll pay for parking, for souvenirs manufactured in Yemen, for game tickets, and for food. Or (b) you can turn on the television and watch it at home. (2) Doing so will allow you experience the game as it occurs, just as you would in person.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** In Bethlehem, Ruth, the Gentile Moabitess, found redemption from her pain and her past. She found grace, mercy, love, acceptance, restoration, hope, family, and a future because of Boaz, her kinsmen redeemer. All the things Ruth found in Bethlehem are made available to us because of the child born there in a manger, our kinsmen redeemer.
- **Ruth 2:11-12:** ¹¹ Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."
- **Ruth and the Burden Carried:** (1) Ruth was a Gentile who married an Israelite, whom she met in Moab during a famine. (2) Life was good. But then what can go wrong did go wrong. Her Israelite father-in-law. Her Israelite husband died. Both of her Israelite sons died. All these events left her with no claim to the covenant or God's people. (3). The only surviving member of the family was Naomi, her mother-in-law. Ruth must make a choice: (a) Go to Israel, a foreign land, in the hope to just exist among God's covenant people or stay in Moab, Gentile Land. (4) She goes. And when she does, she meets Boaz, her redeemer, in Bethlehem. (5) She receives grace, mercy, etc. from him. (5) And what she received in Bethlehem from Boaz is available to us in Jesus.
- **App:** O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.

3. The Side of a Shepherd Anointed (1 Sam 16:1, 7, 13)

- **When David Was a Shepherd Boy (Vacation Bible School Song):** When David was a shepherd boy, he did as he was told. He watched the flocks in Bethlehem in rain, or shine, or cold. And when the roaring lion came and then the growling bear, He asked the Lord to strengthen him to slay them then and there. He also slew the giant bold with simple stone and sling. So, God chose out the shepherd boy to be His people's king.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** In Bethlehem, Samuel anointed a shepherd boy as King of Israel. 1000 years later, the Magi anoint a child born in a manger in Bethlehem not only as the King and Shepherd of Israel, but the Savior and Good Shepherd of the World.
- **1 Samuel 16:1, 7, 13:** *(v1) The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." (v7) But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (v13) Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.*
- **The Anointing of Two Shepherds:** (1) David was anointed by Samuel, the prophet, in Bethlehem with oil. Not only was that customary, but it was also typological for the way shepherds deal with sheep. Shepherds put oil on the wounds of their sheep to help them heal. So great was his reign, the still to this day he's known as the Shepherd King. (2) But there was another Shepherd King born in Bethlehem. He was anointed with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gold denotes his kingship. The frankincense denotes his priestly sacrifice. And myrrh foreshadows his burial and resurrection. (3) And he isn't just another Shepherd King anointed in Bethlehem. He was the living breathing embodiment of Psalm 23 lying there in a manger.

4. The side of a well appointed (2 Sam 23:14-15)

- **Water Choices:** (1) In the modern world, you have a lot of water choices. (2) At home, you have the choice of tap water or filtered water. (3) In the convenience store, you have the choice of Dasani, Aquafina, or Fiji. (4) At Sam's you have the choice of choosing the expensive water cases up front or you can journey all the way to the back of the store for the cheaper ones. (2) In the ancient world, you had wells. And one in Israel was precious to the people of God because they believed it contained living water. It was in Bethlehem.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** In Bethlehem, a well stood at the gate to the entrance of the city that David and his mighty warriors long to drink from during a battle with the Philistines. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a living well with living water was made available to all men, both Jew and Gentile. And whoever drinks from this well will never thirst again.
- **2 Samuel 23:14-15:** that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!"
- **The Well in the Manger:** (1) David longs for living water from the well just outside the city gates of Bethlehem while in the heat of a battle. (2) The Church of the Nativity was constructed by Constantine the Great's mother, Helena in the 300s AD. (3) When they poured the foundation, they preserved the space of the nativity. (4) But guess what lies just outside of the foundations of the church? The remanences of an ancient well, one that housed the living water David longed for. (5) The well and the manger are one in the same: they tell the story of a Savior born there who said: "anyone who drinks from this well will never thirst again."
- **App:** We hear the Christmas angels. The great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.