

Christmas From The Island of Misfit Toys

Isaiah 53:2-3 MSG

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas in all the right ways, but even in the silly and the secular aspects of Christmas we can see elements of eternal truth hidden in culture all around us. That's because the image of God has been placed *on the inside of us*. So, even when we do secular things or watch secular Christmas movies, if we look hard enough, we can find kernels of Truth in there - and many of us growing up had our lives marked by those movies.

One of them was *Miracle on 34th Street*, and we can even have a visceral response when it comes on. It's like our hearts are ignited because that movie is associated so much with family and Christmas. Another movie was *Home Alone*, and some of us could identify with Kevin Mallister who starred in the movie when it came out in 1990.

But, for others of us, more than any other Christmas movie we identified with as a kid, was the old-school *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* - the 1964 "claymation" edition. There were some very odd characters in that movie. There was Herby the elf who wanted to be a dentist instead of an elf - Yukon Cornelius, the prospector, who was all about silver and gold - and the abominable snowman.

There was also another main aspect of that movie, which was *the Island of Misfit Toys*. All those characters stumbled onto this island, and they realized that the whole island was full of living toys who had been rejected. They're broken. They're misfits. They've lost their purpose - and they're *unwanted*. Almost every one of *us* has something about our past where we can identify with not quite fitting in or where we felt like we had a square wheel on our train. The story of Christmas is truly about the advent of an anointed outsider - *Jesus*. In the Bible, the Book of Isaiah contains over 110 prophecies about Jesus' first coming, and 220 prophecies about his second coming!

Isaiah 53:2-3 MSG

"The Servant grew up before God - a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about Him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at Him and people turned away. We looked down on Him, thought he was scum."

This was written hundreds of years before Jesus showed up on the scene, and it described him down to the minutest bits and pieces of his exact nature, how he would show up, what he would do, and all the things about him. We all have seen beautiful paintings of Jesus, but apparently his physical appearance wasn't anything to write home about. He didn't show up in some heroic, legendary way. When he showed up on the scene, he was the anointed *outsider*, a *misfit*, a "scrubby plant." There was nothing attractive about him. People rejected him, and looked away from him. He was the anointed outsider, the first of a group of misfit toys.

The Christmas story in the book of Matthew actually begins with a part that most people just skip in their Bibles. It's a long genealogy showing how we got to the moment of Jesus' appearing - his whole family line for forty-two generations back. There's fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the time the Israelites were exiled into Babylon for 70 years, and then fourteen generations to the time that Jesus showed up.

It's no accident that the Holy Spirit put these fourteen-generation groupings in there. Ultimately Jesus would appear as the coming King, and the prototype for that was King David. David was only a fore-shadow until Jesus showed up, then died and rose from the dead three days later.

Isaiah 9:6-7 NKJV

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever."

What's really striking about the genealogy in Matthew is the crazy cast of characters in it - a group of misfit toys - a parade of square-wheeled trains. In all forty-two generations, there were some deeply-flawed misfits and outsiders that the Holy Spirit chose to highlight as part of Jesus' family - a bunch of broken, messed up weirdos that led to the perfect coming King. There was Abraham, who was originally a nobody. He came from a pagan and demon-worshipping culture. He didn't know God until God revealed *himself* to him. And then, even after being an anointed outsider who knew God, Abraham made some major blunders. And yet, after God redeemed and re-defined his life from being a misfit, he became what Scripture calls "the father of faith."

Then came Jacob, his grandson, who was called "the heel-clutching, deceptive, manipulator." That was his reputation. He literally came out of the womb clutching his brother's heel. He later got his brother's birthright by being deceptive and lying, and yet, he ended up persevering with God, and God changed his name to *Israel*. He stepped into a destiny with God and became something over time that he never realized he *could* be, but he didn't start out that way. He started out as a *misfit*.

Then there was King David, who started out as the runt of the litter of seven kids. He's a shepherd. Even after he began walking with God, he became adulterous and tried to cover up his adultery by murdering her real husband. Not exactly a perfect dude - more of a broken, misfit, square-wheeled train. But what's really scandalous about Jesus's genealogy is that it mentions five women in it, which was a big no-no in world culture at the time. Five women make an appearance in Jesus's genealogy. So we see a beginning to raise the value of women in a world culture that just didn't do that. And which five women did God pick to highlight? - *some pretty darn crazy ones!*

Starting with Mary, a nice girl, but she's a teenager from a poor family, and she's believed to have conceived a child out of wedlock right before her wedding. So, she had a scandalous reputation developing from that. Then there's Ruth, who was a Moabite, one of the enemy-people of God, a Gentile whose husband has died. Basheba, who slept with David, had a murdered husband and was disgraced and scandalized. But as we read on, we realize God redeemed her. She became a great woman of faith. She's actually referenced in the Proverbs as giving counsel and became an example for all women and wives. That's not how she started, though.

Then there's Tamar who thought it would be a great idea to pretend to be a prostitute to go ahead and get justice and bring about the will of God. She's in there. And then there was Rahab. She didn't just *pretend* to be a prostitute. She was one. And she was a *Canaanite*. That wasn't just an enemy-people of God. They were the most wicked, perverse, brutal, and murderous culture in the world at the time.

When we read Jesus' family line, we can feel a little bit better about our own. Jesus is like, *"You got a crazy family?" I get it. In fact, it's all written down for you in case you ever forget. It's an island of misfit toys.*" So, in the genealogies, what would typically happen is we would just see all the fathers, right? But at five interesting break points in Jesus' genealogy, it adds in who the mother was. And it does it with these five women.

Matthew 1:5 says, *"Sammon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab..."* In other words, God's saying, *"Hey, this woman is significant, and I'm highlighting her on purpose to you."* Jesus' pedigree and resumé highlights Rahab the prostitute thirty-two generations before Jesus showed up. And what we see when we begin to look at Rahab's story is that her life became both a picture of faith and an example of a foreshadowing of God's plan to include, redeem, and welcome outsiders ultimately through Jesus Christ. Her story is dripping with gospel "pre-echoes."

The Old Testament has a lot of “image prophecies,” almost as if the gospel is playing out through a narrative that takes place in the Old Testament hundreds or thousands of years before the gospel actually played out with Jesus. It's like a trailer to the movie that's coming up, and we see how Rahab's life becomes like a movie trailer of the gospel story that would play out when Jesus would show up in the future, especially the part where Jesus would welcome not only his people, the Jews, but he would also welcome Gentiles from all over the world into the story. And Rahab becomes a picture of that for us.

And we see that Rahab is not only mentioned in Matthew, but her whole story is written out in Joshua, and she's also mentioned in the books of Hebrews and James. So this Canaanite prostitute gets mentioned in four books of the Bible. And we see through her life, that for her and for us, it's not about whether we're fit or misfit, it's about our *faith*. It's not about whether we have reproach or regrets, it's about whether or not we repent and whether or not we recognize and respond to the opportunity that God gives us. Rahab had an opportunity and she took it.

Hebrews 11:30-31 NLT - The hall of faith chapter of Scripture

“It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down. It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

God didn't just surprise Jericho in this city where Rahab lived. He'd actually given them a really long time to repent and they knew exactly who he was and what he required of them. But Rahab became an example of a Gentile misfit-outsider who saw the obvious and said, *“This is God. I've got to turn to Him.”* Rahab's faith is mentioned as being equal to the faith that brought down the walls of Jericho itself.

James 2:24-26 NLT

“So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions ...Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.”

James gave this dissertation about how “real faith” always has action to back it up, and then he talks about *“Rahab the prostitute.”* Hundreds of years after she lived, she's still called “Rahab the prostitute” even though she was redeemed. Rahab had become a completely new woman, but she didn't forget where she came from. And God doesn't want us to forget where she came from either - not to shame her or to encourage us to live in shame - but all of us will live a grateful, centered, real, authentic life before God when we remember where we came from - *but we don't stay there.*

The Jewish people were ready to step into the promises that God had made to Abraham, and the first battle was with the city of Jericho, a massive, walled fortress and the gateway to Canaan, and all that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. God had given this people four-hundred years to repent, but finally said, *"All right, your sins are full and complete and now you're going to inherit what I promised you."* Canaan and Jericho weren't just wicked people. They were wicked with a capital "W".

They were worshiping demons on purpose and they *knew* what they were doing. They were known for the most extreme forms of sexual perversion and they sacrificed their children in the fire on altars to demonic gods. That was just a normal part of their culture for hundreds of years, and God had given them time to repent. At some point, God said, *"Time's up!"* In fact, the Bible says that the land was so defiled by this people that it was ready to vomit them out. God had been very patient, but the time had come and the Jews were about to go in and possess this land. This is where Rahab lived. This was the culture and system she was a part of.

Joshua 2:1-6 NLT

"Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, 'Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.' So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night. But someone told the king of Jericho, 'Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.' So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: 'Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.' Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, 'Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn't know where they were from. They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.' (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.)"

This was a bold move for Rahab. She had put her life on the line here because if she was caught in this lie right here, they absolutely would have killed her. They probably would've chopped her up and put her on their demonic altar. So, this was not a small move for Rahab. She was betting the farm on this one decision right here.

Joshua 2:8-14 NLT

"Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. 'I know the Lord has given you this land,' she told them. 'We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt...No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the Supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. 'Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families. 'We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety,' the men agreed..."

Rahab, who was an object of coming judgment, just like the rest of her city, recognized who God was, not based on her personal experience with God, or some miracle that she got to be a part of, or something God did for her. She recognized who God was simply from the testimony and the stories of what he had done in another people. That was enough for her. She didn't have any personal experience. She just heard the stories and it was enough for her to bet her whole life on it. This is the example for us. And Rahab is a living example of this, yet a whole city of people had heard the same stories and same testimony, but they didn't respond the way Rahab did.

God didn't rebuke Rahab. He received her and made her famous in scripture because he loved her faith so much. Rahab *believed* - then she acted. She put everything on the line. And then she said, *"Guarantee me that you'll have mercy on me and my family."* He'll never reject a person who comes to him like that.

Joshua 2:15-18 NLT

"Then, since Rahab's house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window. 'Escape to the hill country,' she told them. 'Hide there for three days from the men searching for you. Then, when they have returned, you can go on your way.' Before they left, the men told her, 'When we come into the land, you must leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window through which you let us down. And all your family members - your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives - must be here inside the house.'"

What does this sound like? It sounds like the Passover, doesn't it? Where they had to put the blood on the doorpost and all the families had to be together inside the house. And as long as they were in there and as long as the blood covered them, the angel of death would pass by them. Except now this isn't a bunch of Israelites. This is a Gentile and her family *before* Jesus ever showed up. And so they're let down by this rope for three days and then the scarlet red rope is held up as the sign of their deliverance and their salvation. Matthew 12:21 says, *"And in His name the Gentiles (all the nations of the world) will hope ..."* just like the rope (or *tikvah*) of hope and expectation raised up over Rahab's house. Wherever you are in your life, God has a way for you, and he's already provided a "Rope" for you to grab onto today ...*right now*.

Prayer - Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Rahab and for her example of faith to us. Give us the grace to trust You and believe You like she did because of Your Word and not because of what we see with our natural eyes. Thank You that we already have enough evidence to believe. Thank You, that because of Jesus' scarlet rope of salvation, we can be saved - and not just us, but our families as well! Thank You for this Christmas season when we celebrate Your birth - Immanuel, God with us - on this Island of Misfit Toys!