

Introduction

The prophecies of Isaiah tell of a wicked nation Israel surrounded by other wicked nations, the world. Judgment is coming from God upon them all. But Isaiah is also the mouthpiece of God for great hope. In the 40th chapter he declares, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

And how is the glory of God revealed? In chapter 40:9 Isaiah continues, "Behold your God! Behold the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." Who is this shepherd? In chapter 42 Isaiah again says "Behold." "Behold MY SERVANT whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights."

From the human standpoint, the glory of God is revealed in the most unseemly of forms, the form of a servant. The glory of God comes not in the form of the things that are loved and respected and adored by this world but in a form that is lowly, unvalued, and unwanted. In our text this morning Matthew, as he has done before, is again demonstrating that Jesus fulfills Messianic prophecy. He is the glory of the Lord in the form of a servant.

[Read Text; Pray]

In our text this morning Matthew recounts what happened in the aftermath of Jesus' testy encounter with the Pharisees. They had accused his disciples

of breaking the Sabbath, but Jesus had proven them guiltless. The Pharisees had hoped to be able to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. Instead he exposed the absence of mercy in their callous hearts. Rather than repent of their sin, they were hardened and schemed to destroy Jesus.

Jesus was aware of their determination. And he withdrew. Withdrawing was a common practice of Jesus. He would withdraw to pray and withdraw from the hubbub that had resulted from his mighty works. In the case before us, Jesus withdrew from the Pharisees and from the attention that had become focused on the conflict that had erupted. Nevertheless, many followed where he went, and he healed them all but ordered those healed not to tell what he had done.

That sounds really strange, doesn't it? Jesus withdraws and Jesus tells people to keep quiet about his healing the? This is in contrast to the Great Commission that comes at the end of Matthew. Jesus instructs his followers to go and to make disciples of all nations. But here he is withdrawing and telling people to keep quiet. One reason is because Jesus is not quarrelsome. He is not interested in a debate. He wants to triumph with truth not argument.

A second reason is focus. Healing was an aspect of Jesus' ministry, but it was not the central focus. Jesus' ministry of healing validated his claims; it authenticated his message. As we have pointed out before, it put on display physical portrayals of the soul-healing he came to do. But the intent of Jesus' ministry was not to create a popular and worldly following based upon his mighty outward works. John 2:23-24 reports that when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast a lot of people "were believing on his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part was not entrusting himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."

All that Matthew recounts in verses 15-16 leads him to point out that the purpose was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. There Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, is identified as the Servant of the Lord. Let's look, then, at Matthew's presentation of Isaiah's portrait of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, who is the consummate servant.

First, we observe that . . .

I. Jesus Is a Chosen and Beloved Servant.

A. He is chosen. From the beginning, God by his own sovereign will, has made choices. He chose to create. He chose Noah to build the ark. He chose Abraham to become the father of many nations. He chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and through whom to give the law. He chose David to be the king over Israel.

In the context here in Matthew, the Pharisees supposed themselves to be the chosen of the Lord. In THEIR minds THEY were the ones on God's side. They were God's policemen after all. But Jesus reveals they were without mercy and they did not really love God.

In contrast to the Pharisees, Matthew points us to Jesus. He is truly the chosen servant of the Lord. He has been chosen to serve. Jesus clarified to his disciples that he had come NOT to BE SERVED but TO SERVE. He alone can serve in the way human beings need to be served if we are to be helped through the flood of judgment, if Abraham is to have a great family of descendants, if we are to be brought out of the Egyptian bondage of our sin, and if we are to live under the reign of a godly king for all eternity.

B. Not only is he chosen, he is also beloved. The love of the Father for Jesus is a love because he is worthy. God looks on his Son and celebrates the way in which the Son perfectly reflects his glory. The Father says of the Son (Hebrews 1:9) "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness, therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

Jesus is not loved in spite of who he is. He is loved because of who he is. He perfectly reflects the Father. One of those reflections is in serving. The God of the universe has a servant's heart. That's the heart of Jesus as well! He reflects the heart of God to serve those who will humble themselves before him.

In healing the sick who follow him, Jesus is the exact imprint of the Father. He is a shepherd who tenderly cares for sheep. He protects, relieves,

upholds, comforts, forgives, and restores. He will do that for those who will come to him to be served.

II. Jesus Is a Pleasing Servant.

A. Jesus shows himself to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy in that he is chosen and beloved, but also in that he is one with whom the soul of God is well-pleased. When Jesus was baptized by John, He came up out of the water and the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." At his transfiguration a voice came from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Recorded in John 8:29, Jesus told the crowds around him, "I always do the things that are pleasing to [the Father]." The Father's delight is in Jesus because he does precisely what pleases him. Coming as a servant to fully obey God's law in every respect pleases the Father. Coming as a servant to serve sinful humans pleases the Father. Obeying the Father even to the point of death on a cross pleases the Father. And seeking a kingdom not of this world and not by the means of this world and not in the power of this world pleases the Father.

B. As you see Jesus withdrawing and healing people and telling them to keep quiet, he demonstrates he is not building a kingdom that depends on broad public opinion and public support. It is not a kingdom that needs or even desires the approval of the age. Its fundamental concerns are not earthly wealth and physical health. It is not a kingdom to be grown by loud and boisterous yelling and verbal quarreling. It won't be won by being loud. In fact the kingdom will come with tenderness. All of this pleases the Father because the Father desires to be trusted and to do things in a way that exhibits his power not the power of the world.

C. Psalm 33 says that the Lord looks down from heaven and sees all the children of man and observes all their deeds. And the Lord makes this proclamation: The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue." But says the psalmist, "Behold the eye of the Lord is on those who fear HIM, on those who hope in his

steadfast love that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.”

D. If you are trusting that you are a good person and that’s all you need to be good with God, it is a false hope. You cannot rescue yourself.

It is God’s delight to do good in the lives of his people. But they must trust him. That’s how Jesus pleased the Father and it is how we will please him as well.

III. Jesus Is a Proclaiming Servant

A. In the second half of verse 18, Matthew quotes from Isaiah saying: “I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.” This is the first of four references in Isaiah to the servant of the Lord. The other references highlight that the servant will suffer anguish and will glorify God by bringing to him chosen Israelites and even Gentiles. But in this first prophecy of the Servant, Isaiah draws attention to a specific activity. He says the servant will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. Proclamation is at the heart of his work. This is nothing less than preaching the gospel. The gospel proclaims the justice of God, the righteousness of God.

The good news of the gospel starts with the sobering reality that all human beings are sinners who fall terribly short of the glory of God. Divine justice demands punishment. But God has satisfied the demands of his own justice by supplying a substitute, this very servant who suffered God’s judgment, Jesus.

The calling of Christ’s disciples is to proclaim the same justice the same way Jesus did. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. We have no other means of reaching the world but the testimony of God. We proclaim Christ and him crucified. We depend upon the powerful working of the Spirit of God as we simply proclaim Christ so that people’s faith does not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

B. The way in which the servant proclaims God’s justice is significant. Two aspects of Jesus’s preaching receive emphasis.

1. First, he will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. The idea is of the manner of his proclamation. It is not boisterous, brash, quarrelsome. Jesus taught with the authority of truth not with volume and antagonism. He did not resort to emotional manipulation or rancor. He spoke truthfully absolutely. He did not come across as the Pharisees in the day. And he did not come across as some who preach in our day. He did not come across as harsh and arrogant with the mere appearance of authority by being argumentative.

2. Second, Jesus is deeply sensitive and genuinely caring and merciful. "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench." These are precious depictions of the way of Jesus. He did not come to earth to destroy the weak and those whose hope is almost gone, those who see themselves as barely holding on, who fear their faith might fail.

i. A bruised reed he will not break. Reeds had a number of uses in the life and time of Jesus. They were made into flutes and pens and such. But reeds were a dime a dozen and if one was bruised, the reed would be snapped in two and another would be taken. To me it's like bananas. You know what happens if a banana is bruised. It turns mushy and brown in that spot. Who wants to eat a bruised banana? And if you get home with a bunch of bananas, and one turns out to be bruised, you just throw it out and go on. No big deal, right? Bananas are expendable. That's the way it was with reeds. Nobody worries about them.

ii. A smoldering wick in those days was no better than a bruised reed. In fact maybe a little worse because of the smoke. You know when you blow out a candle, that's when the smoke gets thick and pungent. That is how it was with a smoldering wick. It was not just of little use, it was a bit of a nuisance. Trying to burn, but it can't burn brightly; and even then it puts off an irritating odor. The natural solution is to throw it out and put another wick in the lamp. No worries wicks are expendable too.

But when people are like bruised reeds and smoldering wicks, there is someone who cares. There is someone whose message to them is, "You matter to me." He is someone who deals tenderly with the fragile and

unwanted people of the world. His name is Jesus. Jesus is a physician to the sick. He is sight to the blind. He is light to those in darkness.

The bruised and the smoldering are those who see the feebleness of their efforts, the iniquity of their sins, the littleness of their faith. They fear their faith might fail. They say in their hearts, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief." They feel themselves sinking deep in sin, but look to Jesus as Peter did when sinking in the water, and cry out, "Lord, save me!" They hear the truth in the message of Jesus and they repent of their sins and hold fast to him who will hold them fast who trust in Jesus.

Do you feel yourself to be a bruised reed or a smoldering flax? Well, it is exactly what we all are. But the real bruised reed and the real smoldering flax are those who own it. They come to Jesus with nothing but their brokenness and sin and rebellion. And those who come to him he will certainly not cast out. He receives sinners. Jesus died for sinners. Jesus calls out to sinners to repent and come to him.

And Jesus assures those who have come to him by the nature of who he is. He did not come to cast you aside, you bruised reed. He did not come to break you; he came to heal you. By his wounds you are healed. He did not come to put you out, you smoldering wick. He came to set you ablaze with holy fire.

IV. Jesus Is a Hope-Inducing Servant.

By his preaching he will lead justice to victory. It is by the cross and by the preaching of the cross. The final line quoted by Matthew from the prophecy of Isaiah is priceless. "And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

A. Hope is a scarce commodity. All around us is despair and hurt and pain and no expectation of things getting better. The move of society into greater and greater darkness and a stronger and stronger affirmation of a godless morality is bringing with it an emptiness. The predominant world-view of our time is evolutionism. It espouses that we came from a cosmic accident and at some time it will all catch up with us. Ultimately there is no purpose for our being here and we are headed for ultimate extinction. We

will die and it is all meaningless. It is no wonder there is such hopelessness in this world.

B. But in the name of Jesus, the nations will hope! Jesus is not simply a fairy tale to help us along in this morass of meaninglessness and hopelessness. He is the testimony of God that there is a purpose. There is a reason. There is a God who designed it all, and meaning derives from knowing him. At one time all Gentiles dwelt in complete and utter hopelessness. We were without hope because we were without God. But now in Christ we who once were far away have been brought near. Paul says of Jesus in his letter to the Ephesians, "he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." Gentiles who come to God through Christ now have real hope. In Christ we are no longer strangers and aliens but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. We are being built into a dwelling place for God.

In Christ, we have the ultimate purpose. In Christ we have an ultimate destiny. It is to fellowship gloriously with God. This is where we are headed. This is the reason to be alive. This process in which we find ourselves is moving toward consummation. And the consummation is what keeps hope alive every day.

Conclusion

Turmoil abounds. Heartache. Struggle. We feel our bruises. We see our lives smoldering. Do you feel that this morning? Well, Jesus does not break the bruised or snuff out the smoldering who hope in him. He came as a servant that your hope may abound. And that is the way I want you to depart this morning. Your soul may be in turmoil but if you are in Christ, say to your soul what David said to his, "Hope in God!"

Paul sums up these facts of Matthew 12:15-21 as he closes out the epistle to the Romans. He says that Christ became a servant so that in him we might have hope.

Remember when Jesus at the last supper girded himself with a towel and began to wash the disciples feet. One disciple in particular was indignant at the thought of Jesus washing his feet. It was Peter. He resisted Jesus

saying, "You will never wash my feet." But Jesus explained "If I do not wash you, you have no share in me."

Coming to Christ is not coming to show him how clean you are, how healthy you are, how righteous you are. That was the way of the Pharisees. To have a share in Christ, you must let him serve you. You must accept his work in living and dying and rising. His work of satisfying the law's demands must become your hope. If you are not willing to come and be served by Christ, you will have no share in him. But if he is your hope, you have hope indeed.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13).