

Behold My Servant: Who Has Believed Our Report?

by J. Glyn Owen

The prophet's report demands a response of faith, trusting in the work of the Spirit of God to bring us to a place of obedience and surrender.

Duration: 59:32

Scripture: Exodus 3:5, Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah 53:1-2, Isaiah 53:5, Isaiah 53:10, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the difference between the past and future tense in relation to the servant song in Isaiah. The servant song begins with a future tense, stating that the servant will act wisely and be highly exalted. The speaker suggests that the prophet is referring to the main thrust of his message, which is the revelation of the servant of Jehovah as the arm of the Lord to believers. The speaker also highlights the different tenses used in different translations of the passage, with the NIV and RSV using past tense and the King James version using future tense. The sermon emphasizes the importance of believing in the report of the servant and the revelation of the arm of the Lord.

Transcript

Shall we pause for a moment's prayer as we come to this gigantic passage of scripture tonight? Let us again turn to the Lord together. We pray, our Heavenly Father, that we may metaphorically know what it is to take off our shoes. For the ground whereon we tread is holy.

As we move into this holy of holies of the Old Testament, into the sacred place of suffering, as depicted by the prophet, you alone know the extent of our need rightly to understand and having understood to honor such a massive revelation, you know our need now. O Spirit of God, help us to the glory of the Savior's name. Amen.

We come this evening to the most remarkable chapter, perhaps, in the whole of the Old Testament literature. And I'm going to begin now by reading from the King James Version, the first three verses of Isaiah 53, and you will see that there are some differences there that we shall have to touch upon as we come to try and discover for ourselves what God is saying here. Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground.

He hath no form nor calmness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him.

He was despised and we esteemed him not. Now there are two or three things here that stand right out on the very surface of the passage and demand our attention. First of all, I would like you to look at a report that apparently demands a response.

The prophet asks, who has believed our message? Or, in the language of the King James, who has believed our report? Now the connotation of that word translated report or message is important. We need to get the point that the prophet wants us to get at this stage. Actually, the words underlying the sentence before us could mean either a report about us, as if the prophet will speak on his own behalf along with other prophets, the report about us prophets.

Or it could mean the report which we the prophets have received. Or it could mean, thirdly, the report which we the prophets or which I the prophet Isaiah proclaim, deliver, declare. It could mean one of three things.

What's the background? It would seem that the background is this. Every true prophet of God is distinguished from the false prophets. Every true prophet of God was taught by the spirit of God to listen to the voice of God.

And this was one of the essential characteristics of a genuine prophet. He had learned to listen for and to the voice of God. True, true as many of the Old Testament prophets tell us, they were also disciplined in the art of listening to men and of hearing the significance of what people were saying and how they were saying things, what they were saying about one another, the way they performed their religious acts.

They were told and they were taught how to listen to men, how to assess the acts of men as well as the words of men. But fundamentally, the prophets were schooled, the prophets were taught in this supreme art, listening to the voice of God. And in listening to hear and in hearing to be prepared to bring the message from the inner chamber of his presence out into the outer court of the world and there to declare it in the name of the God that had given it.

Now that's the prophet. He is first of all a person who knows or who knew how to gain access. And having gained access, how to listen, having listened, how to receive, having received, how to go out in the strength of the Lord and impart the report of what he had heard in the inner place, the innermost recesses of fellowship with God.

Now that's what we have here. Isaiah is asking, who is it that has believed the report that we have given? We've been in your presence. We've heard your word.

We've delivered the message. We've tried it aloud. But who has believed our report? Now the content of that report or of that message is, I think, to be described in two senses.

If you were to ask the question, what was the report that Isaiah brought to the people, it can be answered in two ways. One, and we shall not pursue this, but we could reply and say, in general terms, the report that Isaiah brought was the sum total of the book that bears his name. He didn't write this book.

He's not the author of this book. The Holy Spirit of God is. God is the author of this book.

It was God who gave these ideas to the man of God. It was God who spoke to Isaiah. And it was Isaiah who responded to the work of the Spirit of God, first of all in delivering and then in writing this word.

But the ultimate authorship of the book is not Isaiah. It is God. And therefore, in this larger sense, it is true to say that the report that Isaiah brought to the nations comprises the whole message of the book that bears his name.

But the answer can also be given differently. It can be viewed more particularly in this particular context. It could well be that the prophet is here thinking of the divine message given him, especially concerning the servant of Jehovah, the Lord's servant that we have been dealing with, the message of the servant songs, the message particularly of the passage beginning at the end of chapter 52 and going on to the end of chapter 53.

This remarkable capstone to the series of servant songs that we have been considering together. Now, I personally subscribe to the view that Isaiah is here referring very especially to what we may call the overarching emphasis of Isaiah 52-12 to the end of Isaiah 53. There is one magnificent emphasis which runs right through the passage that Mr. McLeod was expounding last Sunday evening and the whole of this 53rd chapter.

And I tend to the view that what the prophet had in mind when he asked in this way, Lord, who has believed our report, is this. He's referring to the main thrust of his message. Well, what was that? Well, now here it is.

There are two strands that are brought together and they don't make sense. To a man with no faith, they just don't make sense. The first stress, and this is how the servant song in chapter 52, that is verse 13, this is how it began.

See, my servant will deal wisely or will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Right? Notice what comes next in chapter 52.

The servant verse 14, just as there were many who were appalled at him and the sentence isn't finished. His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred more than human likeness. And now notice the switch again back to the subject with which he began.

So will he sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see.

And what they have not heard, they will understand. Have you got the two strands? The first strand is this. With categorical and divinely given assurance, the prophet says, my servant, the Lord's servant is going to gain supremacy and Lordship.

And he's going to succeed. And he's going to startle the nations as well as sprinkle the nations. And if you go right through to the end of chapter 53, chapter 53 ends on the same note.

So that having gone through death and suffering and anguish and bloodshed and all the rest of it, he is the one who is going to share the spoil with the strong. In other words, he's the victor. It's the victor who shares the spoil.

It's the mighty in war who shares the spoil. And this passage, this servant song ends up at a place where the servant, whatever else you want to say about him, he's there right on top of things. He's Lord.

He's King. Now that's one strand. It's the reiterated statement of verses 13 and 15 in chapter 52.

He will be raised up. He will be very high. He will be exalted and there's nothing that can stop him.

But now here's the other strand. It's this strand of terrible suffering. His visage was marred more than any man.

We hid our faces from him. There was nothing in him to attract us. There was everything in him to repel us.

His physical condition as seen by human eyes was such as to put everybody away. And he turned everybody off. Nevertheless, and this is the message it seems to me, this is the report he's bringing.

My servant is going to succeed. Suffer, yes. In a manner in which no one has ever suffered before and no one will ever suffer after.

But, but, but he will succeed. Now there comes then of necessity the challenge of the report as delivered. Who has believed our report? You can understand.

You can understand in the light of what I've just tried to say very briefly. You can understand that this is a very real challenge. Talking about a deliverer like this, who is going to suffer as this one is going to suffer, who can, who can honestly believe that he'll come out on top? Who can honestly believe that a person who's going to suffer as this person is going to suffer according to Isaiah 53, who can possibly see him coming out on top and dividing the spoil with the strong? The thing is monstrous.

Of course, we know the answer. But Isaiah, you see, was aware of the natural unbelief of his contemporaries. He had been long familiar with this challenging feature in the experience of men and women schooled in the providence of his, schooled in providence and schooled in history as they were, schooled by the law and schooled by the prophets.

Nevertheless, Israel of all people was stubbornly unbelieving and proclaiming to them such a deliverer who was going to deliver in such a way, says Isaiah, who has believed our report? It's all been in vain. That would seem to be the sense of it all. Yes, Isaiah had his finger on the pulse of the generation.

He knew that the hearts of his contemporaries were unbelieving hearts. And he was right in his assessment of the situation. Believers in such a messianic deliverance as Isaiah was announcing in these chapters was very, very rare.

Nevertheless, God has never been without a nucleus, without a remnant of people who by the Holy Spirit working in their hearts and in their minds have had faith in him and been obedient to him and served him. Now, can I pause for a moment and say something in parenthesis? In a sense, it's unrelated in another sense, it is. What I want to say is this.

You see, there is a continuity between the Old and the New Testament in many, many ways. But in this sense, for example, New Testament preachers can identify with Isaiah, particularly on the score that we too have to announce a report. And when we've announced our report, we've got to look around and see who has believed that report.

You will find this coming out very clearly in the writings of some of the apostles. Paul, for example, writing to the Corinthians, he says in chapter 15, verses 3 and 4, this classical passage of his, what I received I passed on to you as of first importance. Well, what is that, Paul? Here it is.

That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. It's the report.

Paul reported to the Corinthians that Messiah Jesus of Nazareth had died according to the scriptures and was risen again according to the scriptures. And bearing that report, men must receive it or reject it, must believe it or deny it. You know, it's still the same.

Don't you think, my friend, that having heard the word of God, you can just sit comfortably in your pew and just shrug it off your shoulder. You can't do that. That luxury is not yours nor mine to enjoy.

The man or the woman that hears the report of what God has done in Christ has got to do something and is responsible for that action, be it positive, be it negative. You find this again, of course, in the writings of the apostle John, for example. He stresses this very much.

As, for example, in 1 John 1, the first three verses, you can see this element of report coming in again. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched. This we proclaim concerning the word of life.

You can hear the report coming through. We've touched him, says John. We've seen him.

We've handled him. And what we're telling you is what we're sure of. We were there.

We were witnesses. If you believe the record of the prophets and of the apostles announcing what God has done in and through his son, there is this element to the record. There is this element of the gospel.

It's the element of a testimony to truth, to fact, to history, to what is done and cannot be undone because it is done. You cannot wipe out history. You cannot undo what God has done in Christ.

Calvary cannot be blotted out of the globe or out of history. It is done. If you believe.

But now that brings me to the second main point here. The response that is accompanied by a revelation. And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? Now, get the point.

Who has believed our report or our message, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? Of the many differing interpretations of this statement, it would seem to me that two in particular commend themselves. Both are true to the general teaching of scripture, and both ought to find some place in our view of things too. But probably one predominates here, and I don't want to be dogmatic as to which one it is.

I leave it to you. But we'll look at the two of them. The first interpretation.

Among a number who embrace this first view is the renowned Edward J. Young, to whom we owe so much, for he was called to his reward at a young age. Now, Edward J. Young has got a wonderful little volume on Isaiah 53, and student folk here would treasure it if they had it. Young and others believe that we have the same essential truths enunciated in the opening question of verse 1, who has believed our report, almost identically the same thought again in the next part of the verse, stated in the words now before us, albeit the terms are quite different.

And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? What he's saying is that the prophet is saying exactly the same thing in different words, or almost the same thing in different words. Now, upon first hearing, you may feel that there is scant basis for a view such as that, because the words are so different, are they not? The first half of the verse refers to believing, the believing of a report, and the second half to the revealing of an arm, the arm of the Lord. What is there? What connection is there? How can the one mean the other? How can the two be in any way the same? Well, now, Young and others would reply that here we encounter what is called the phenomenon of parallelism, which is encountered in Hebrew poetry.

You know that it wasn't easy to write the scriptures before the printing presses came into operation, and the Jews had found a way of teaching scripture and teaching truth, and that was by memorizing it. And in order to get the truths home, they often used this principle of parallelism, by which they said the same truth twice over, sometimes three times over. Now, there are various kinds of parallelism.

I'm sorry, I'm not going to give you a lesson on grammar, but it's necessary to see it at this point, I think, in some measure. The simplest form of parallelism is when you say exactly the same thing twice over. For example, in Psalm 49.1, the first line says, Hear this, all peoples.

The next line says, Give ear, all inhabitants of the world. Now, you see, you have exactly the same thing said, but the words are different. Why are they said in two different ways, the same truth? Well, for this reason, because the Hebrews wanted the people who read the scriptures or heard the scriptures to remember the scriptures.

This is a major phenomenon in Hebrew mind, that they meant the message of the scriptures to be memorized. God meant the scriptures to be memorized. The Spirit of God meant the scriptures to be memorized.

That's why we have phenomena such as these. But you may say, What on earth has this got to do with what we're talking about? Well, there's a very practical point here. This is what Jung and those who take his view say.

Whenever anyone has believed the prophet's report, and having believed the prophet's report, is then looking by faith for a deliverer, for the servant of the Lord, who will suffer and through suffer, become sovereign and savior. There, says Jung, the arm of the Lord has been revealed. What's he saying? What he's saying is this.

Let's put it in our own terms, our own contemporary idiom. Whenever and wherever you have a genuine believer in the Word of God, that faith is brought into existence by an act of God. God himself creates faith.

The human heart has been so radically affected by sin, that though you can report the very words of God in the power of God to men, there will be many, many, many who will not believe it and not receive it. I mean, just think of it. The incarnate Lord himself could preach to men and they didn't believe him.

Now, what chance have the rest of us got? Come and fry as we are, the best of us. The Son of God, the incarnate, and Paul says in the epistle to the Colossians that all the fullness of the deity was pleased to dwell in him. He preached to men and they just shrugged it off and didn't believe.

Now, what chance have the rest of us got? Unless the mighty Spirit of God, who brought out a nucleus after the Lord Jesus, and who gathered the ecclesia around him during the days of his flesh, will also use our feeble words in reporting the truth and likewise move upon the hearts of men and bring faith to birth.

Now, whether that is the main truth here or not, certainly it is a biblical truth. And it is something that we need to stress, and we need to stress it for this reason.

You see, if the Spirit of God is working upon your heart and conscience at any given time in a service such as this, don't deal lightly with it. Don't say, I'll attend to this business tomorrow. Don't do that.

You can't act when you want to. Save only when the Spirit of God is upon you and drawing you and wooing you and illuminating you. Insofar as it is applicable, that is how we are to understand the words of the poet, that there is a time in the affairs of man when, if taken by the flood, we can make the right decisions.

Insofar as it is applicable at all. Now, you have echoes of this in many places in the New Testament. For example, we read that when Apollos arrived in Achaia, we are told that he was a great help to those.

I like this description of the Christians. He was a great help to those who, by grace, believed. Acts 18, 27.

Isn't that lovely? You see, you can't believe when you want to. Sin is too great and its power too mighty and Satan is too strong. You and I just cannot get rid of our chains as and when we please unless the Spirit of God come upon us, as Jesus said, to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

It is only in that atmosphere, in that ethos, when the Spirit of God is working upon us, that we are free to believe and able to believe. Faith, then, is the gift and the fruit of the Spirit of God, not a humanly cultivated phenomenon. And insofar as Isaiah meant that, then it certainly applied there and it applies today.

Can I use an illustration of this? Because it is so practically irrelevant. The late Dr. F. B. Murr spoke of a visit he once made to a firm of lawyers in the city of New York and the city of London. He doesn't tell us what he was doing there, of course, but he went to see this firm of lawyers.

And the head, the senior man of the firm, took him to their strong room, which was quite an experience for him, because it meant going down underground and the strong room comprised a long, narrow passage excavated under the street. And then he describes that on entering the passage, this particular lawyer took into his hand what looked like an unlit candle attached to a coil of wire. The one end he deftly fastened to a switch, and in no time the power traveled along the coil of wire and the light flashed in the china candle, which served as a bulb, so that he could see where to go.

It was thus that he found the materials that he was looking for on the occasion of my visit, and it was likewise that he found his way out again from that long, long passage underground. Now, says Dr. Mayer, and these are his words, man is like that dead, lifeless flex, until the current of God's power flows into his heart. When that power is turned on, however, the light of faith and hope and love begin to burn.

The light of faith and hope begins to burn. Thus it is that believing or the exercising of faith synchronize with the experience of God's arm of power being revealed. Who has believed our report? Do you say you have? Then Isaiah would say, if this is the right interpretation, yes, very well you have, but you have because the arm of the Lord has been working upon you and within you.

It's not purely an act that you have expressed in and of yourself. It wasn't a purely natural act. Oh, you were in it, your will was in it, your whole being was behind it, but it was God who gave you grace, both to

will and to do according to his good pleasure.

But now there's a second possible understanding of that same key passage. The key to the second view is that the phrase, the arm of the Lord, is not used here as a mere metaphorical reference to God's power employed in creating faith, but that rather it is a designation of the servant, the servant of God, the servant, the Messiah. So the meaning is this.

Who has believed our report? And to whom is the Messiah, the servant of Jehovah revealed as God's arm? Now the more you think of it, the more remarkable a statement or an understanding this is. Those who believe the divinely inspired report concerning the servant of Jehovah will in due course recognize him as God's arm in action. And whether this is what Isaiah had in mind here or not, certainly this is a divine truth.

Certainly this is true. Jesus spoke in one occasion of him casting out demons by the finger of God. Do you remember that? If I by the finger of God cast them out, then what about your own sons and daughters? I'm not concerned about the detailed exegesis of that, but just the reference.

In other places our Lord Jesus was the outstretched hand of God coming down to people in their needs, bringing the gift of God from highest heaven to lowest abysmal depths. There is much that our Lord may be able to do. There is much that God may be able to do by his word, by his influence, the influence of the Spirit.

But scripture does depict God as the God whose arm is strong. It was by his mighty arm that he delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. And again it was by the might of his arm that he called them back from Babylon.

And it was by his arm that he nursed them through the wilderness. It's the mighty arm of God, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Scripture's got a lot to say about God's arms.

And I think there is much to be said for this understanding, that our Lord Jesus Christ is here depicted as the arm of Jehovah. Perhaps, of course, we should not think of the term quite as literally as we have, and take it as a reference to God's instrument for the fulfillment of his purposes. Without an arm, you see, there are certain things that you cannot do.

You can do many things, but without an arm there are some things that remain undone. Our God is able to do exactly what he has determined to do because he has an arm that is strong as himself. And that arm is the Lord Jesus.

He is the extension of deity into time. Now this second understanding of the words before us, take Isaiah saying then that provided you have received the prophet's report in good faith, you have already been given the revelation of the one who is to be God's arm in the accomplishment of his task. You see that the servant of Jehovah is not just a servant who is told, go here, do that, but he is actually one in and through whom God is active.

God's arm. God extended. And this, of course, is what the New Testament insists upon.

I and the Father are one. Jesus Christ was not a messenger separate from God. Even in his incarnation, he wasn't cut off from God as you send an ambassador from one country to another and he's severed from the base.

Jesus was no such ambassador from heaven to earth, separated from base. Not at all. He talks about his being in heaven even when he's on earth.

The son of man who is in heaven, he says in John chapter three. In other words, I and the Father are one. There is this vital abiding union between them.

And when he speaks, the Father speaks. When he acts, the Father acts. God was in Christ.

Now we have something here probably of the order of what we have. There is a difference, but something of the order that we have when Simon Peter made his epochal confession at Caesarea Philippi. Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, said Jesus.

Flesh and blood doesn't reveal that to you. You didn't get that in school. You didn't get that in the college.

You didn't get that here, there, or elsewhere. My Father who is in heaven. Believing the report means seeing the Messiah, seeing the servant of Jehovah as the Lord stretching out his arm to deliver.

Now just a few words about the third main point here. The bulk of our text remains, and I haven't dealt with it. But what I want to do is to give you a picture.

The result of the revelation of the servant of Jehovah as the arm of the Lord to believers. Believers, that is, in the prophetic report. You will notice a difference here.

Depends what translation you have. The NIV and the RSV will have one tense. The King James Version has a different tense.

Quoting from the NIV, it goes like this. He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of a dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him, etc.

It's in the past tense. In the King James it's all in the future tense. He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground, etc.

In the future tense. Now, here is a problem, and I've got to say something about it, because I know some of you are involved in giving serious attention to this passage of scripture. What's the difference? How does one put in the past and another in the future? Well, now, first of all, perhaps something we've said already gives you a little cue here.

This servant song began with the future. My servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

That's 52.13. And then right at the end of chapter 53 again, we are back with the future. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great. He will divide the spoils with the strong, etc., because of certain things he did in the past.

But now, we have a different tense. Actually, this is in the Hebrew. It is the past tense.

It is a perfect tense, which describes something in the past. Now, why then do the translators of the King James translate it as if it were in the future? What right did they have to put in the future what the Greek tense unequivocally puts in the past? Well, now, the reason is this. They, and not only they, many people

before them and many people after them, believe that you have a phenomenon in the Old Testament which is called the prophetic perfect.

Now, the prophetic perfect is this. The prophet is seeing the things of the future with a mind illumined by the Spirit of God. And the things that he sees which are really in the future, they haven't yet come to pass.

He sees them so clearly and so certainly that he speaks of them as if they had already come to pass. And so he speaks of them in the past tense, as if they are already finished and done with, whereas as a matter of fact, they are yet to come. Now, let me give you a beautiful example of that.

You remember the words in Isaiah chapter 9. We often use them and even sing them at Christmastime. For a child has been born to us, and to us a child is born, and to us a son has been given, literally. And the government has been put upon his shoulder, and his name, etc.

Now, a child has been born to us. That's what Isaiah said. But if you read the context, the child was not yet born, the child was not yet given.

And insofar as it referred to the Lord Jesus Christ, there were five, six, seven hundred years to transpire before the child was to be born of the Virgin Mary, and this was to be fulfilled. But can you see why he used the perfect tense? It was because it was certain to him that the reality was still in the future. So when we speak of the reality, it is legitimate to speak of it in the future tense.

So, though the translators of the King James Version do not translate what we find in the Hebrew, they interpret it at this point. Nevertheless, they do so legitimately. Because if this is what we have there, then they rightly understand and rightly interpret the mind of the prophet.

Now that's all about that. I want you to look at the primary statement that we have here. I want to take leave to employ the future tense as the King James Version does, and I want you to notice the main thing that is said here.

And the main statement that we have in the rest of the passage before us tonight is this. He shall grow up before him as a tender plant. The main statement, grammatically and otherwise understood, is that.

Who has believed our report? To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? Well, he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, etc., etc., etc. He shall grow up before him. But the main clause in the whole that follows is this.

He shall grow up before him as a tender plant. Now, what we have there is exactly the same kind of statement as we had in chapter 52, verse 13. What do we have in chapter 52, verse 13? See, my servant will act wisely.

He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. But now the same truth is put in agricultural or horticultural terms. He shall grow up before him as a tender plant grows up.

Like a tree thriving in uncondusive environment, as we shall see here. But it's a tree growing, sprouting and growing and getting taller and bigger and greater. And its roots spreading and its branches spreading.

But the tree's growing, you see. And that's the point. Now, if you take that as the key, you've got an understanding to this and a very enriching one.

The very eyes of those who had believed Isaiah's reports were now destined to see the Lord's servant growing up. And now this is what we have in the rest of the passage. Growing up despite the obstructions.

Growing up into lordship and sovereignty and saviorship. Being made perfect through sufferings. All kinds of sufferings are going to frustrate him.

All kinds of experiences are going to stand in his way. And each one of them should hinder him. But they can't.

Nothing can stop him. He's like a mighty commander in chief of an army. And he's going on in all the might of his divine power.

And whoever tries to stand in his way, he moves them aside and he moves majestically forward to his destined glory until at last you see him dividing the spoils of his victory with other people. That's the message. Now, I can only refer to some of the things that would hinder his path to victory and to glory.

Let's just look at them. And you must meditate upon them yourselves. There are five of them.

He shall grow up before him despite his unwholesome environment. And let me explain this in case I haven't. He, that is, the first reference, the first he, is to the servant of the Lord.

Who, if we accept one understanding of the phrase, who is the arm of God outstretched? But at any rate, it's the servant of the Lord. He shall grow up before him. Who is the second him? Well, the believer.

The person who's received the message by faith. The person who's received the report. The believer.

He, the servant of God, shall grow up before the believer. How shall he grow up? How will the Messiah? How will the servant of God grow up? As a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground. Now here's a miracle here, right at the beginning.

The reference to the dry ground can be a very general one, can be a particular one. People have generally interpreted it in this way, that this is describing how our Lord Jesus Christ grew and emerged in a civilization that was totally corrupt. The Greco-Roman world did not make Jesus of Nazareth what he was.

Neither did Judaism. Even the best of it. Even the noblest Judaism of his day did not make Jesus of Nazareth the person he was.

He grew up like a sapling, like a wilderness. Everything was desert and dreary and dark and dismal. Death reigned.

Jesus thrived in the midst of death. He shall see him growing up. As a root out of a dry ground.

Again, the second, he shall grow up before him despite his physical unattractiveness. Look at the second verse. And I deliberately read this in the King James to get the tense.

But there are values in reading it in another version. He hath no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire in him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, don't let's miss that. Almost everything in life is judged today by the physical qualities of the other person. A man is looking for office or a woman, it doesn't matter.

Unless you're attractive, you're of very little use today. It's your face, it's your countenance, it's your body. God save us from despising the body.

But we are living in a day and an age where the body is worshipped. And if you're no body, you're no good. And the scriptures are so challenging.

They tell us that Jesus had no body to attract man nor woman. And the ordinary sensual fallen human creature saw nothing in the face of Jesus of Nazareth to attract him to him. If Jesus walked among the crowd, I'm not suggesting for one moment that Jesus was ugly or misunderstand me.

What I am suggesting is that he was one of the hoi polloi, very much like other people. Nothing to distinguish him. And if you rubbed shoulders with him in the post office in Jerusalem, you wouldn't know that you had touched the Son of God unless by the Spirit of God he desired to communicate with you.

He was so like other people. In other words, God didn't send Mr. Universe here whose biceps you can examine and watch him juggling along on the stage of the television screen. You know, he didn't do that.

Because the attraction of Christianity is not sensual. There's meaning to this. There's meaning to this.

The attraction of Christianity is not to the sensual in man or woman, nor is it sexual. He shall grow up before him, despite his own physical unattractiveness. Thirdly, he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, despite the fact of his unpopularity.

Our Scripture is very clear. He was despised and rejected, not received, but rejected. Rejected of men.

He was despised, it's repeated later on in verse 3, and we esteemed him not. He was despised and rejected of men. Oh, I know there were moments when he was popular.

There were waves of popularity, but they were very few and far between, and they came when they did come at the beginnings of his ministry, when people didn't really know what he was after. However, clearly he declared his message. They didn't know what he was after, but the moment they saw that he was talking about a cross and about death and about their dying to themselves and to sin and to the world and to Satan, they didn't want it.

They hid their faces from him. The servant does not gain success because of any wave of natural emotion in his favor. He's not popular at the polls.

He wasn't there yesterday. He isn't today. He can be voted out from the Constitution yet.

He's not popular, your Savior and mine, and a wave of popularity. If you want to make Jesus popular, then you've got to titivate him, and you've got to cut him down to size. You've got to get rid of this teaching of his and that teaching of his and this aspect of his doctrine and that, and you've got to cut and excise.

You can't do that with him. He shall grow up before him as a tender plant despite his unpopularity. How on earth is it going to take place? Oh, I'll tell you, he's the servant of Jehovah, that's why.

He's not the weakling you think he is. Men may nail him to the tree, but he is Jehovah incarnate. He shall grow up before him as a tender plant despite his undisguised sorrows.

Verse 3, the second bit, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, a man of sorrows. I don't know how to say this without being misunderstood one side or the other, but it may need to be said that Jesus of Nazareth is only heard laughing, smiling, once, I believe, in the whole of the New Testament. Now, I'm not suggesting that he was a morose, unhappy person.

I'm not suggesting that. But what I am suggesting is this, that the anguish of sin and the awareness of the plight of unbelieving men and women cast away from a holy God for all eternity, burned like a cinder in his soul, how could he smile? And insofar as our world has lost the consciousness of the holy, we have lost the awareness of the sobriety of things that was evidently underlying the life and the work and everything that Jesus did and was, a man of sorrows. Do you ever think of the damned? Tell me, my friend, do you ever think of hell? You may call me a square, well, you do so.

But I tell you, every man and woman in Christ should spend some period listening over the edges of the caverns of Gehenna to the wars of the damned. Take the smile, the superficiality out of so much of our spirits. And if my Lord was a man of sorrows, it's not because there was anything wrong with him and in him, but because he was bearing the sin of the world.

He shall grow up before him lastly as a tender plant, despite the fact that he is naturally unacceptable and unwanted. Look at the way the prophet puts it, as one from whom men hide their faces, we hid from him. Now he doesn't try to elaborate, he doesn't try to go into details, but you know, there are some types of people and you hide your faces from them.

Somebody's been involved in an accident, some of you people don't like to see blood flowing, you hide your face. There are other things that put you off, you just can't look at them. And this passage goes so daringly far as to say that the corrupt human heart looks upon the Lord Jesus Christ as someone so repulsive in his sufferings, saving though they be, men turn away from him.

Nevertheless, nevertheless, nevertheless, nevertheless, nevertheless, nevertheless, and this is the burden of the message, nevertheless, doesn't matter what obstructs his way, he shall be very high, he shall be exalted, he shall cause kings to be startled, he shall sprinkle the nations, he will divide the spoiled with the strong, he will be the savior of his people, he will, he will reign, this Lord Jesus, servant of the living God, he will, that's the message. That's why Isaac Watts pulls no punches when he sings, Jesus shall reign, wherever the sun does his successive journeys run, put anything in his path, he's moving forward. My God is marching on in Christ, risen, reigning, coming.

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