

The Servant's sure victory

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Date: 25 July 2010

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Our gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for these gifts given to you in the offering.

We thank you, Lord, that you are a giver, that you gave your Son, your Chosen One, your Beloved, to proclaim justice to the Gentiles. Lord, as we gather tonight, we pray that you will quieten our hearts, open our eyes, unstop our ears to hear what he has to say, we pray that by the inspiration of your Spirit, we might see in the face of Jesus Christ the glory of God and learn to love him more and to walk in a manner worthy of him.

And so we ask this in his precious name. Amen. Well, my wife Helen is often asked what she does for a living.

And she works in, I'll tell you now so you don't have to ask her afterwards, she works in Kilmarnock, she works in something called the Cochlear Implant Unit. And the way she describes an implant is a special kind of hearing aid which is inserted into the inner ear.

It's an electrode that enables people to hear speech. And the story of the discovery of the cochlear implant is, I think, a wonderful story. There was an Australian by the name of Graham Clark, who is a believer, and he had this idea one day that if he could stimulate the cochlear, people could hear again.

[1 : 29] And his colleagues thought he was mad. He was described as dangerous. Scientific bodies refused to give him any funding. But he thought he was right.

So he hired a small lab, he gave up his job, he did some post-doctoral studies, and he developed this idea over many years. And one day he actually came up with a prototype.

And he thought, well, I need to find a volunteer. So he got this man, an Australian called Rod, and he consented to the operation. He put the electrode in under anaesthetic, and then they woke Rod up.

And when Rod was awake, they firstly decided to test him with some music. So they played the national anthem, the British national anthem. And Rod, being a good Commonwealth citizen, stood up, as he was expected to do.

They then played him waltzing Matilda. And being a good Australian, he sang the next verse. And then the moment of truth. Could he hear speech? And presumably covering his eyes so he couldn't lip-read, Graham Clark said to him, Eat the apple.

[2 : 38] And there was a pause. And Rod said back, Eat the apple. And having lost his hearing one year earlier, Rod Saunders was now able to hear.

And Graham Clark left the room and burst into tears of joy. Because his theory was right. Sometimes in life, we face opposition.

And sometimes we have to keep going, knowing that the victory is secure. And in our passage tonight, we see the Lord Jesus facing opposition, but continuing in the ministry entrusted to him by the Lord and confident of the final victory.

We read this morning from Matthew chapter 4. And Matthew 4 is, of course, at the beginning of the Gospel. And in that chapter, we have this wonderful picture of Jesus' baptism, where he comes out of the water and we see heaven opened and the Spirit descending, and this voice saying, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased.

And Jesus then begins to proclaim the kingdom of God. And just before the Sermon on the Mount, we're told that he went teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, healing every disease and affliction.

[3 : 57] And great crowds followed him, and his fame spread throughout Syria and the surrounding area. It seemed a very promising beginning to a ministry.

But as we reach chapter 11, we realize that things are changing. Chapter 11, verse 3, he is encountering doubt. John the Baptist sends disciples to ask him, Are you the one who is to come?

Or shall we look for another? In verse 19, he is being spoken against. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look at him, a glutton and a drunkard.

A friend of tax collectors and sinners. In chapter 11, verse 21, we find people who see his miracles, but who refuse to repent. Woe to you, Chorazin!

Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Siren, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

[5 : 02] And in chapter 12, verse 14, we find very serious opposition from the Pharisees. They went out and conspired against him how to destroy him.

And it is against this backdrop of unbelief, slander, opposition, and a refusal to listen to Christ that we find him tonight.

How does the Lord respond in the midst of such opposition? Verse 15, Firstly, He withdraws from the opposition, not running scared, but aware that his hour had not yet come.

And so he removes himself from the presence of the Pharisees. Secondly, he continues doing what he had been doing all along, healing the sick and calling people to follow him.

He continues in the ministry which he has been given. And verse 16, not seeking publicity for himself, he ordered them not to make him known.

[6 : 12] It's a very vivid contrast, isn't it, between Christ and the Pharisees. There they are, not wanting to heal somebody on the Sabbath, in fact plotting to kill somebody on the Sabbath, and here we have Jesus healing people in compassion.

We have the Pharisees who in Matthew's Gospel were told loved to have wonderful clothing and to sit in the seat of honour and be greeted in marketplaces. And here we have the Lord ordering his followers and those healed not to tell anyone what has happened.

So we're given a contrast. But Matthew sees in that contrast a far deeper meaning. And in verse 17, he introduces us to a quotation from Isaiah chapter 42.

A quotation which describes this individual known as the servant of God, the servant of Yahweh, and the servant who has a very important role. Verse 18, he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

This servant is the hope of the world. And Matthew is saying Jesus Christ is that hope. And his behaviour demonstrates that he is the one that was prophesied and promised in Isaiah.

[7 : 19] So we want to look at that quotation tonight. We want to ask the question in what way Jesus Christ fulfils it. And I want to do so under three headings.

Firstly, the servant's relationship to God is personal. Secondly, the servant's tactics are unconventional. And thirdly, the servant's success is inevitable.

His relationship is personal. If you watched the news this week, you would have seen Barack Obama and David Cameron being best friends and wearing the same suit and the same tie, interestingly, and so on.

And there was a lot of talk, wasn't there, about the special relationship between Britain and the US. We're not just two cultures separated by a common language. There's more in our friendship and our alliance.

History, language, culture, common values, and so on. The special relationship that exists. And the first thing we're told in verse 18 is that the servant's relationship to Yahweh is a special relationship.

[8 : 23] Firstly, he has a unique job. He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles, to the nations. You see, in Isaiah 41, we've been given this picture of the Gentile world.

It was a world which did not know God. It was a world which was bowing down to idols of silver and gold and consequently, when danger comes, came, there was no hope. A hopeless world without God and without hope.

And Isaiah says in verse 41, behold the idols. But in chapter 42, verse 1, we're told to behold the servant. Somebody who will proclaim justice to these Gentiles.

And the word justice in that context means a knowledge of God, a knowledge of the one true God. David Jackman describes it like this. The servant is God's channel of self-revelation.

Through him, the nations will come to know God and they will know what is pleasing to God. He will reveal the true nature of God to the nations of the world. He has a unique role.

[9 : 34] But then we see that he has a unique relationship to God. Verse 18, behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

God doesn't subcontract some hired hand for this important unique ministry. He sends the servant who is precious to him, chosen, appointed by God, beloved, filled with the Spirit, anointed by God.

And Isaiah, of course, doesn't tell us who this servant is. But Matthew, all the way through the Gospel, makes it quite plain. You remember those words in the baptism, chapter 3.

When he was baptized, Jesus went up from the water, the heavens were opened, we see the Spirit of God descending and the voice saying, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

Or that night when the disciples were taken up the Mount of Transfiguration and Jesus was changed before them. And we read in chapter 17, he was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.

[10 : 44] And a voice from the cloud said, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. Matthew wastes no time in telling us that this servant, chosen of God, with whom God is well pleased, who is filled with the Spirit, who is prophesied by Isaiah is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

That begs the question, doesn't it? Because we say, well, if he is the chosen servant of God who will proclaim justice to the nations, why then in chapter 11 all the rejection? Why all the abuse?

Why the death threats? But the portrait in Isaiah is multifaceted. And in chapter 42 we're told to behold the servant with whom God is pleased.

But in chapter 53 we're told to behold my servant, who in verse 3 is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. chosen by God and rejected by men.

[12 : 05] So we ask the question, don't we, how do we respond to Jesus Christ? How do we meet him? Do we meet him with doubt, such as the disciples of John did, saying, is he the one?

Do we meet him with slander, taking his name as a curse word upon our lips? Do we meet him with a refusal to repent, to bow the knee to him?

Or do we delight in him? Do we say, this is the one I love? And do we, like the crowds in chapter, verse 15, follow him and own him as our Lord?

How do you respond to Jesus Christ? And if you are a Christian, what then is your expectation of discipleship? Jesus is very honest with his disciples.

Just one chapter, earlier chapter 10, he says to them quite a shocking thing. He says, all men will hate you because of me. You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

[13 : 09] A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If they call the master of the house, Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household?

Jesus is very honest that to follow him means that yes, we will be chosen by God, beloved by God, able to please God through our lives, but we will be rejected by men.

And we have to be aware of that. The servant's relationship is personal. And secondly, his tactics are unconventional. Verse 19, he will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench. A friend of mine used to travel around Central Asia, and one of the countries he told me about was Turkmenistan, Turkmenistan, perhaps you've heard of it, small country, population of Scotland.

And he told me that Turkmenistan was really until a couple of years ago ruled by a man who was an expert in self-publicity. He changed his name to Turkmenbashi, the father of all Turkmen.

[14 : 31] And there were posters of him pretty much hanging off every major building in the capital city. He wrote a book, this book was compulsory reading at school, it was on sale in every bookshop, and in fact to pass your driving test you had to answer questions about this book he'd written.

He went one further, he began to name the month of the year after himself and his family, and to crown it all off he built a 35 foot high golden statue in the centre of the capital city which revolved in synchrony with the sun.

An expert in self-publicity. What a contrast with the Lord. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not quench. The Lord's way was unassuming, it was unaggressive, it was unthreatening.

Verse 15 tells us many followed him. What did he ask them to do? Write a petition to the Pharisees, form a pressure group lobbying Herod, raise up an army with which to take Jerusalem.

[15 : 46] He ordered them not to make this known. You see, the Lord's philosophy of public relations was very different from that of man. Which public relation expert would have advised being born in Nazareth?

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? An entourage of a few working men and a few women with sinful histories. When he travelled he had nowhere to lay his head, no five star hotels, no business class.

When he hailed the sick he told them more often than not not to make it known. And when he performed the wonderful miracle of raising a girl from the dead, he sent all possible witnesses except his disciples out of the room.

when finally he came to the capital city he arrived on a donkey, no white charger. And when at last he met people of power and influence in the persons of King Herod and the governor Pilate, he refused even to speak to them.

Public relations. Jesus had no headed paper, no website, no honorary degree, no blog, no front page adverts on the metro. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

[17 : 04] And his ministry was characterized by gentleness. We have two images, firstly a bruised reed, secondly a smoldering wick. I gather that reeds were quite common in the Middle East, they grew in marshes, you could use them for anything, for staffs, for flutes, for spears, very useful.

And if they broke you just threw it away and you picked up another one, very disposable. The Lord does not break that which is bruised. Nothing is useless to him.

Nothing is expendable or likely set aside. And likewise a smoldering wick, people would have little lamps and the wick, the sort of candle wick would burn down and as it got to the end it wouldn't give off much light or heat and they'd throw it away, very cheap, get another one.

Not the Lord. A smoldering wick he will not quench. If something is weak, if something is faint, if something is dying, he will not snuff it out.

Christ has great power and authority but he ministers quietly and gently to his hurting people. Bishop J.C.

[18 : 13] Ryle says this, the Spirit is here describing persons whose grace is at present weak, whose repentance is feeble and whose faith is small. towards such persons the Lord Jesus will be very tender and compassionate.

There are some in every congregation who are ready to despair of their own salvation because their strength seems so small. They are full of fears and despondency because their love, their knowledge and faith and hope appears so dwarfish and diminutive.

Let them drink comfort out of this text. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, says Christ, 11 verse 29, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest from your souls.

Christ was quiet and humble and gentle as he performed the ministry given to him by God. And we shouldn't be surprised therefore if to this day he continues to call people bruised reeds and flickering smoldering wicks to himself.

And we ought to, in seeking to be Christ-like, ought to be gentle to them. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says this, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

[19 : 46] Christ, when we meet people whose faith is weak, who are doubting, we need to be gentle. When we meet people who are slandering us, we need to be gentle.

When we meet people who are opposing us, when we meet people who are coming like verse 15, bringing all their problems and looking for help. If we are to be truly Christ-like, we need to be gentle and ask God by his spirit to bring forth the fruit of gentleness in our own lives, that people might understand the Saviour's gentleness and his compassion towards them.

The servant's relationship with God is personal. His tactics are unconventional. And finally, his success is inevitable. Some months ago, I was in Dingwall, and I was about to get a train, and the entire platform was crowded with people.

Dancing, singing, you know, firing klaxons, and I thought, well, the Highlands, it's quite a place, isn't it? A lively bunch up here. But I said to one young man, what's going on? He said, well, Ross County are playing football.

And of course, it was the Cup, and I can't remember who they were playing, but they beat them, and then they beat Hibs, and then I gather they came to Glasgow, and they played a local side, and they beat them too.

[21 : 05] Sometimes victory is unexpected. And although the Lord does not quarrel or cry aloud, although he is characterized by gentleness, we're told that he will be successful until he brings justice to victory, and in his name, the Gentiles will hope.

Despite the rejection by men, despite the unbelief, despite the death threats, the Lord will succeed in the ministry God has given him to do. And all the way through the Gospel, there's that note of certainty, isn't there?

When the angel announces his birth, we're told he will save his people from their sins. When he's reassuring the disciples, he says, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will never overcome it.

But how is that possible? How is the Lord able to bring victory from the combined opposition of the Jewish leaders and the Roman Empire? And the very heart of the Gospel is this, that the victory is not through Christ escaping or cheating death, but rather Christ tasting death for everyone.

The servant becomes obedient to death, even death upon a cross. Some chapters later, Peter is speaking with Jesus, and Christ explains to him what must happen, showing his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from their elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and raised on the third day.

[22 : 39] His enemies are conspiring to destroy him, to kill him. And it is precisely through his death that the victory will come. Peter didn't understand it then.

But Isaiah had been speaking about it for centuries. And in chapter 53, we're told of the servant that he would be wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his stripes, we are healed. The servant was going to die for the sins of others. The Lord was going to lay upon him the iniquity of us all.

And this wasn't an accident. It was foreordained by God. It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. But it wasn't the end of the story.

And that after his death would come the resurrection. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. And the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.

[23 : 45] Isaiah had told us that the servant was going to come and die in order to atone for the sins of the others. And having died, been raised from the dead in order to make others righteous and to make intercession for the transgressors.

Peter himself explains in Pentecost when the nations were gathered around in Jerusalem. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs.

This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. The great victory over sin, the devil and death comes not from Christ fleeing from his enemies, but by him submitting to the Father's will, becoming obedient to death upon the cross, and having been crucified, triumphing over all of his enemies, and having been raised from the dead, giving the victory over the grave.

Theologian Henri Blouchy says this, evil is conquered as evil because God turns it back upon himself. He makes the supreme crime the murder of the only righteous person, the very operation that abolishes sin.

- [25 : 13] The maneuver is utterly unprecedented. Evil, like a judoist, takes advantage of the power of the good which it perverts. The Lord, like a supreme champion, replies, using the very grip of the opponent.

It is through the death of Christ orchestrated by his enemies that salvation comes to the world, that justice, that the foolish revelation of God is given to the Gentiles. And is given that we, Gentiles like us, might have hope.

Hope of pardon for sin. Hope of new life in the power of the Spirit. Hope of resurrection from the grave. Hope of fellowship with God now and forever. Justice to the Gentiles.

Chapter 11, verse 27. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. And no one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son. And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

God's love, God's holiness revealed on the cross. Christ dying for sins and bringing justice to victory. So as we close, friends, let me ask you, is that your hope?

- [26 : 33] What are the grounds of your hope? Do you, in fact, have any hope? As we look at this world of sin and sorrow and anguish and death, do we trust in God's chosen servant?

The one who can proclaim justice to us. The one who accepts people. Though they might be bruised reeds and in great need of healing. Though they might be smoldering wicks and in need of strengthening.

Who accepts all who turn to him and repentance and faith. Is that your hope? And if you are a believer and if you're finding it tough, if you're facing some of that persecution that Christ warned his disciples about, are your eyes fixed upon that hope?

Professor Graham Clark went through some tough times. He didn't know that he was going to get things right, but he kept going. He kept persevering because he thought it was worth it. Christ knew the victory would come.

He faced unbelief. He faced opposition from all sorts of quarters. But he continued to keep ministering because God had appointed him. And he knew that we would bring forth justice and victory.

- [27 : 43] Keep your eyes, friends, on the prize. Keep your eyes on the goal. Keep your eyes on the glory which is to be revealed. Though we face many light and momentary troubles. We thank God for his servant.

The relationship of the servant is personal. His tactics are unconventional. And yet his victory is inevitable. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you, Lord, that you so loved the world you sent, your only son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.

As we think of our lives, Lord, we thank you for the way he has been so gentle with us, restoring us, cleansing us, healing us, encouraging us, and fixing our eyes upon that great crown of life.

So, Father, as we go from this place, we pray that you will give us a heavenly perspective. Help us to continue serving you in the face of opposition or indifference. And help us, Lord, by the power of your spirit to become more and more Christ-like.

- [28 : 56] That our gentleness might be known by all in this church, in our homes, and in our workplaces. And, Lord, we look to you to do this. For it is only in your power that it is possible.

So, we give you our time together. In Jesus' name. Amen.