

The Coming Glory - A Willing Sacrifice

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2013

Preacher: Matt Scheffer

[0 : 00] Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, thank you for this passage of scripture. Please open our ears and our hearts and our minds to hear you speak and see the glory of your servant.

Please electrify us, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. He has an incredible story, just a humble mobile phone salesman from South Wales.

Plucked out of obscurity to become an international superstar. He stunned the world with his audition for Britain's Got Talent in 2007. He is, of course, Mr. Paul Potts.

In case you don't remember his rise to fame, we're going to have a YouTube clip. Hopefully this works. If it doesn't, that's okay. But here he is in action. You'll see what I mean.

The world of showbiz seems a million miles away. It's Paul, a mobile phone salesman from South Wales.

[1 : 11] By day, I have to tell my mobile phones. My dream is to spend my life doing what I feel that I was born to do. Paul, what are you here for today, Paul?

To sing opera. I've always wanted to sing as a career. Confidence has always been sort of a difficult thing for me. I've always found it a little bit difficult to be completely confident in myself.

Okay. Ready when you are. Nick and Bertrand of You under Oh Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[3 : 20] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Exactly.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Paul Potts is an unexpected superstar. And in many ways, the message of the book of Isaiah is about the unexpected. Through this Old Testament prophet, God promises salvation for his people and he will do it through an unexpected servant.

The servant isn't named, but we've heard and seen some descriptions of him over the past few weeks as we've gone through Isaiah. For example, in chapters 42 and 49, the servant is righteous.

[4 : 26] He's empowered by God's spirit. He brings justice to God's people and to the world. And tonight in chapter 53, the work of the servant comes into sharp focus.

He brings salvation, but like Paul Potts on Britain's Got Talent, he's unexpected. And he's unexpected for three reasons. You can see them there on your outlines.

The first reason is that he's exalted but rejected. So let's begin with point one. He's exalted but rejected. Now the passage actually begins in chapter 52, verse 13.

And it begins with extraordinary language. God says, God says, God says that his servant will act wisely or will prosper in some translations.

It just means that he will live God's way. Not only that, he will be raised, lifted up and highly exalted. Now this language actually echoes back in chapter 6 in Isaiah, when the prophet saw a vision of God himself on the throne.

[5 : 40] So in Isaiah 6, Isaiah says that he sees God high and lifted up and seated on a throne. Can you hear the echoes here?

It's the language of glory and honour and it's used for God in chapter 6. And here it's used for the servant. But the servant won't be recognised as glorious or exalted.

In fact, the opposite will happen. So verse 14. Many will be appalled at him. He has a disfigured appearance and his form was marred or literally destroyed beyond human likeness.

The servant becomes so disfigured, so brutalised, he can't even be recognised as a human being anymore. And he will cause nations to reel in shock and horror and silence.

Verse 15. He will startle nations. Startle is a better translation than the NIV here, sprinkle. And even kings will shut their mouths.

[6 : 46] Why? Because what they were not told, they will see. And what they've not heard, they will understand. This is just so unexpected. The question is, who can believe it? In verse 1. 53 verse 1.

And this servant comes from obscure, humble beginnings, like a shoot out of dry ground. In verse 2. He's not attractive in any way. He has no beauty or majesty, nothing desirable about his appearance.

In verse 3. He was despised and rejected. A man of suffering, familiar with pain, like one from whom people hide their faces.

He was despised, and we held him in low esteem. So the passage begins with the servant high and exalted, but he becomes despised and rejected, treated like a piece of trash.

That's point one. Point two, he is punished but innocent. And skip over to verse 7. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

[7 : 50] He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers are silent, so he did not open his mouth. Notice the repetition here in verse 7. He did not open his mouth.

In other words, he didn't retaliate. He didn't even defend himself. He is completely innocent. But he goes to court. Verse 8. By oppression, and that word oppression is related to the word for being arrested.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? That is, who stood up for him? Who defended him in court? No one. This week the world has mourned the loss of Nelson Mandela.

I think there's a slide for it. He was imprisoned 27 years. And when we hear of unfair trials like Mandela's, we feel outraged. Well, the servant of the Lord is not only falsely tried and arrested, but he also dies.

So verse 8. He was cut off from the land of the living. And that means to die. It's a poetic way of talking about death.

[9 : 00] You know, we have our own sayings for that. We might say somebody's kicked the bucket. If you're an art student or you've read Shakespeare, you might say he shuffled off this mortal coil.

And what does it mean to be cut off from the land of the living? Well, it means to die. And in the Bible, it is the punishment for sin. And he not only dies, but look in verse 9.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked. A grave. In other words, he's buried. He's assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he'd done no violence, nor was any deceit found in his mouth.

Notice here in the end of verse 9 is a link back to verse 7, reminding us that even though the servant suffers and dies and faces punishment, he's actually innocent.

He said nothing wrong and he's done nothing wrong. So that's point 2. He's punished but innocent. And thirdly, he's crushed but victorious. Verse 10.

[10 : 04] It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he's the good news. He will see his offspring and prolong his days.

This is a reference to coming to life, but it's even more explicit in verse 11. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

Do you notice the contrast with verse 8? In verse 8, he's cut off from the living, that is, he dies. In verse 11, he sees the light of life. In other words, he comes to life again.

And what's the result of his dying and coming to life? In the end of verse 11, he will justify many, which means make people right with God. And it's because he suffered, because he died.

Verse 12. I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong. And this is language of victory and triumph and conquest. A warrior who's plundered his enemies.

[11 : 10] Some years ago, I was in America over Halloween and everyone goes out trick-or-treating on Halloween, even adults. And the family I stayed with had a few kids and they'd had years of experience of trick-or-treating.

We came back after the night of raiding the neighbourhood and I just had a measly handful. But these kids had bucket loads. They had bucket loads of lollies. And they tipped them over in the lounge room floor and it was just kind of, it was like that Scrooge McDuck scene.

You know when he dives in the mud? That's what it was like, this pool of lollies. And we pulled it together and divided it four ways between us. You see, I shared in their spoils of Halloween, as it were.

I shared in their victory. And here, in Isaiah 53, the servant triumphs and shares his victory with his people.

So that's point three. He's crushed, but victorious. So let's just remember for a moment what we've seen in Isaiah 53, the work of the servant. He's glorious, but he is rejected, he dies, he comes to life, and is exalted.

[12 : 19] Now the question that we're meant to ask is, why? Why does he go through this? Well the answer is, in verses four to six, he suffers for us.

And as we go through verses four to six, just listen to or look at all the references either to us or our or we in this section. In verse four, he took up our pain, our suffering.

He was punished by God, stricken, afflicted. In verse five, pierced for our transgressions, our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

By his wounds, we are healed. You see, the servant suffers and dies for us. He suffers not because he deserves it, but because we deserve it.

Look at verse six. Here you go. Here's the one shot for everybody who's grown up with Colin Buchanan. Anyone game enough to sing the song? Gillian? Do you want to have a go?

[13 : 24] Come on, sing it. Yeah, yeah, go. Go. He all actually could have gone straight. Ba, ba, do, ba, ba. He just turned his own way. Ba, ba, do, ba, ba.

For the Lord has laid on him the liberty of us all. Sing. Ba, ba, ba, ba, ba. Isaiah, king, three, six. Thank you.

Because I wasn't going to do it. But let's look at the verse. Let's put Colin aside for a moment and let's look at the verse. We, all like sheep, have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. You see here right in the middle of the servant's song is the reason the servant suffers and he suffers for us.

That is, in our place. Or to use a more technical word, he is our substitute. Now we're familiar with substitutes because substitutes appear in all different spheres of life.

[14 : 27] Some years ago I went with my parents, my family to see Phantom of the Opera starring the great Anthony Warlow. We got our seats and our tickets and we sat down ready for the show to start but then the announcement came just as the curtain went up that tonight the part of the Phantom will not be played by Anthony Warlow due to health reasons.

It will be played by and with somebody else I can't even remember. But it was his understudy. Now what does an understudy do? An understudy is actually a substitute. When someone can't play their part the understudy stands in their place.

The understudy goes on stage and does the part for them. That's what a substitute does. That's just one example something a bit more blokey.

Just think of like a team sport soccer or basketball there's often someone called a sub which stands for substitute. That's right.

When a player on the field is either tired or injured and can't perform they come off and another player goes on and takes their place and plays for them on the field. That's what a substitute does.

[15 : 36] So we're actually quite familiar with substitutes even if we don't perhaps realise it. And here in Isaiah 53 that's what the servant does. He is our substitute. He has no sin of his own but he takes upon himself our sins and our guilt and he takes the death penalty the punishment for sin instead of us.

That's why he suffers. And you see this is incredible unexpected news to the original audience. God's people are in exile in Babylon because of their sin and in chapters 1 to 39 of Isaiah God confronts his people with a message of judgement.

They are guilty and they will be condemned. But in chapters 40 to 55 God speaks a message of comfort to his people. Comfort to them because their sins have been dealt with.

Their time of exile will be over. It's a fresh start with God. How? Not through a triumphant militaristic warrior who crushes the Babylonians but through a seemingly weak seemingly unexpected powerless death of the servant.

It's incredible. And probably why chapter 54 begins with an invitation for barren widows and the outcasts to sing for joy and to celebrate and rejoice.

[16 : 56] Why? Because the time of punishment is over and God's salvation has come. And that's not just a message for the original audience but it's also God's message to us as well because you see we too as human beings are guilty of declaring our own independence from God.

We ourselves we are amongst the we and the us of verse 6. We too have gone our own way either passively ignoring God or actively rebelling against him and we too deserve the penalty for sin which is death but here in the work of the servant we too have a promise of a fresh start with God.

We too can be justified even though we deserve to be condemned. So this message of salvation through the servant is also a message for us. So let me just draw together some things together and finish with two questions and the questions are there on your outline.

Who is the servant and how should we respond? So of course the question is that we all want to know who is the servant? Well the simple answer is it is complex and it is debated and if you want to know more you can come and ask me or speak to Andrew Reid after the service.

There are a number of options. The servant could be Israel elsewhere in Isaiah especially chapters 48 and 49 Israel as a nation is called God's servant so perhaps this is describing you know God's people's experience of exile and their return perhaps a sort of death and coming to life again perhaps.

[18 : 43] The problem is that throughout Isaiah and the rest of the prophets Israel fails to live out the righteous characteristics of the servant that are listed here and elsewhere. Just a brief skim through Isaiah in fact any of the prophets shows you that Israel has a stubborn heart towards God it's a nation full of injustice and idolatry hardly the innocent righteous blameless sacrifice described here so it doesn't really work so the second option it could be that it refers to a Davidic king or messiah it could be but that's tricky because in this passage there is no reference at all to David or a descendant of David or the kingdom or kingship and in Isaiah I think it's been mentioned before the only person who's called the anointed one literally in Hebrew the messiah is actually the pagan king Cyrus not the servant so if the servant is the messiah you wonder why that connection isn't made clearer here so look the point is that there is a range of options not just the ones I've mentioned but many more but that's not the point because we who are

Christian we know that the early Christians and the New Testament writers loved this passage because it looks and sounds so much like Jesus doesn't it they quote it everywhere now Isaiah 53 doesn't name him but it's so much like him it's uncanny isn't it and we know from the details recorded in the New Testament that Jesus had a humble origin born as it were in obscurity like the tiny shoot out of dry ground he was born in a manger in Bethlehem we know that he grew up and he lived rightly before God we know that he was despised and rejected we know that he was eventually arrested he was oppressed and humiliated flogged to the point of being almost unrecognizable and he was ultimately pierced when he was nailed to the cross and on the cross he bore the guilt of our sins and the punishment our sins deserve and he died and he was buried and three days later he saw the light of life he rose from the dead he ascended into heaven and Paul writes in

Ephesians that God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him far above all rulers and authorities and powers not only in this age but in the age to come now can you hear that language of victory and triumph and being exalted and then when we come to the very end of the New Testament to the book of Revelation the apostle John sees heaven opened he sees God's throne room as it were like Isaiah in chapter 6 and what does he see in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation he sees a lamb scarred around its neck from having its throat slit it had been killed but now it is standing alive and the lamb rules at God's right hand and all the heavenly creatures sing out that he is worthy to open the scrolls of history why because he was slain and they sing with your blood you purchased people for God from every tribe nation and tongue they praise him because he died because he suffered so friends when we come to Isaiah 53 we can't help but see Jesus everywhere and that's okay because the work of this servant is not ultimately found in Israel or in the a Davidic king but ultimately in Jesus Christ crucified and risen which is why

Christmas is such a wonderful time of celebrating because at Christmas we remember that God's son came into our world the baby born in the manger not simply to grow up and be a teacher or a healer but he came to be this suffering servant to die on a Roman cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins so that we might be as Isaiah says justified or we might be right with God now and forever so let me finish by asking how should we respond to Jesus first of all let me ask you do you trust in Jesus Christ do you trust in him as the servant who dies to forgive your sins and make you right with God that's the first way to respond to trust in Jesus and rely upon his death and rising to new life to give you a new start with God if you haven't done that but you want to and you want to tell someone then please come and see me or Mark or someone here tonight or better yet tell

God so that's the first way to respond to trust in the servant the second way to respond is to follow his example you see when we come to the new testament Isaiah 53 is applied not only to Jesus but also to the church to Christians and so as 1 Peter 2 was read out Peter says that Christ left you an example to follow and he quotes Isaiah 53 committed no sin no deceit was found in his mouth that's Isaiah 53 you see for the apostle Peter Isaiah 53 is a pattern not only for Jesus to follow but also for us and if we line ourselves up with God then we are God's servants and Peter says Isaiah 53 is the pattern for life for God's servant it's not riches or success or popularity it's humble sacrificial service and if we line ourselves up with

[24 : 46] God that might mean that we face rejection from others it might mean being despised being ostracised socially might mean being the butt of the jokes the religious jokes in the workplace the point is that if we line up with God then the path to glory is shaped like Jesus the servant who suffers but is glorified so if we are already Christian then we're to do what Peter says and we're to follow the example and the pattern of the suffering servant Peter says to do good not to retaliate entrust ourselves to God it's the example and the pattern of the prophets it's the example and pattern of the servant here in Isaiah the example of John the Baptist of the Lord Jesus of Paul and the apostles the pattern in the scriptures and in

Christian history is that God uses weak servants frail weak vessels vessels who suffer like the servant to bring him glory and make his salvation known to the world just ordinary weak unexpected Christians who have treasure in jars of clay and if that's the case why would you want to be anything else let's pray almighty God we thank you for the work of the servant we thank you that it is ultimately found in the Lord Jesus please help us to trust in him please help us to follow his example and to entrust ourselves to you when we suffer for doing good please help us to persevere and we pray that you would glorify us with your servant Jesus on the last day we pray this in his name amen