



Sermon

Revealing Jesus

Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42

5/1/17

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The Servant songs are passages found in Isaiah addressed to a servant who will act for God. There has been much debate as to who the servant is. The Jews, of course, wondered. It looks like Israel as a people but some things do not fit.

It could be a prophet but some things are more like a king. It could be a king like Cyrus the Persian king who is mentioned in this context for bringing about the return to Jerusalem from the exile. But there is much which does not fit a pagan king.

Some portions seem to describe a priest of God. Yet the Law required priests to be of the tribe of Levi and kings were to be of Judah. There is even to be a clear self-sacrifice by this person.

The identity of the servant only makes sense when you allow that Isaiah could be talking of a future person who is a Jew, a priest, a king, and an offering for sin. The only person for whom this makes sense is Jesus the Messiah, the Christ.

Both in this passage from Isaiah 49 and in last week's reading from Isaiah 42, the servant is given the title "Light to the Gentiles/nations."

There is a progression of revelation of Jesus. These are prophetic statements about him to prepare people to expect him. Many of those involve light – for example:

- *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*¹
- *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.*²
- *... the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.*³
- *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*

¹ Isaiah 9:1ff

² Isaiah 60:1

³ Luke 1:78-79

- *For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*⁴

The angel tells Mary then Joseph that she will carry the son of the Most High. John the Baptist's parents both have prophecies about the Messiah John will reveal.

Jesus is born. Jewish shepherds are told by angels. The wise men are alerted and travel to see him and so the showing to the Gentiles starts.

All goes quiet until he is mature at 30 and then he bursts onto the public scene of Jewish life. In the reading last week we heard of his baptism – grand entrance if you will. Today we follow on from that with more detail. John explicitly says, "I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel"⁵

There will be more and more disclosure to the Jews in Galilee and Judea. Once he had offered himself, died and risen again from the dead, it was not long before the message of Jesus starting spreading to the neighbouring nations and gentiles started to turn to Christ. And so is fulfilled the word we heard from Isaiah 49:6:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Here we are at the ends of the earth from Jerusalem – have you received the light of Christ? Have you received his salvation?

Jesus was revealed by the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist heard from God about the special one he was to baptise. He had to take an action in obedience, then the Holy Spirit came on Jesus to identify him. This identified Jesus as Messiah – the anointed.

The Father witnesses to Jesus that this is so. "You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased."

How was Jesus revealed to you? Did someone do something? Did the Holy Spirit act in some way? It takes the Holy Spirit to do it. On Alpha, it is when we pray for the Holy Spirit to touch people that they get a revelation of Jesus.

The following day John the Baptist gives testimony – he tells the people what happened. He announces who Jesus is to the people. His role is taking off. He has prepared their hearts for the Messiah, now he announces who the Messiah is.

How does he name him – as the Lamb of God. What does that mean? It is a reference to sacrifice: lambs are sacrificed. He adds Jesus will take away the sin of the world. It is a reference to the sin sacrifices of Israel. I doubt John understood the import of his announcement but he was faithful to say what he was given. John had the revelation that Jesus would be a sacrifice for the sin of the world. A sacrifice – we think of that as something that costs us a lot. My parents made a real sacrifice to pay for my education. But that is not the original sense. A sacrifice was not a gift of money, not an offering.

It's like the pig and the hen considering a plate of bacon and eggs. For the hen it is an offering; for the pig it is a sacrifice!

A sacrifice is something killed and offered to a god. Usually it is given on behalf of the giver. The life of the victim is given instead of the life of the offeror. Now let's not interpret Jewish thinking based on pagan sacrificial practices. For the Jews, God had provided the sacrificial system as a model of what Christ was going to do. It represented the many facets of his offering of himself. There was a dying in place of the sinner. There was a punishment for sin, a dedication to God. All this Jesus was to satisfy on the cross. All this was modelled in the various Old Testament sacrifices.

⁴ Luke 2:32

⁵ John 1:31

John named Jesus of Nazareth as the Lamb of God who would die for the sin of the world. Do you know him as the one who died for you in particular? Do you know him as the sinless offering who died in your place on that terrible cross? Do you know him?

John testified that Jesus is the Son of God. He was not just a wandering Jewish rabbi who got killed – this was and is the Son of God. Do you know him as the Son of God? Do you know him?

John asserts Jesus is greater than he is. He had existed before John even though he was younger than John – John means he is the eternal one – God himself. Do you know him as the eternal God?

John told the people that God had spoken to him and said, “He who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.”

I have already said, it is the Spirit of God, who reveals to mankind Jesus and who he is. Do you know that filling with the Holy Spirit? Has he revealed Jesus to you? Do you know him?

Can you say with John, “I testify that this is the Son of God.” How can we say that without seeing Jesus with our eyes – we can say it because the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to us. Do you know him?

Verse 35: The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

What is the response when you encounter the Lamb of God? These disciples of John the Baptist heard John saying, “Look do you see him over there – that is the Lamb of God!” And they followed Jesus. They wanted to know more about him.

Have you heard and chosen to follow? It is not enough to have information, “Oh, Jesus is the Son of God the saviour of the world that’s interesting. (Yawn)” It is such an astounding statement that it ought to be embraced with all your being or rejected as totally false depending on whether it is true or false. If it is true, you have to follow him. Are you following him?

These men were disciples of John. A disciple is a student a learner. The disciples of a Rabbi would literally walk in his footsteps. They would keep close to him. They would try to experience life as he did. There are stories of disciples following the Rabbi even into ablutions to learn everything about how they should live. These two tag along behind Jesus and after a bit turns to them and asks them what they want.

Do you notice that Jesus asks people what seem to be obvious questions? He gets us to state our intentions and wishes. What do you want as you start to follow Jesus?

What these two wanted was to know where he was staying. It was a way of asking if they might sit with him and they are invited to come and see and they remain with him. These words are all the language of discipleship: follow, come and see, remain.

Verse 40: Telling others

As soon as people realise who Jesus is, they tell others. John has revelation, tells the crowd and instructs his own disciples to switch allegiance to Jesus.

The first two disciples no sooner remain with Jesus for some hours, than they tell others and we hear of Andrew going to find his brother, Simon. He declared that Jesus was the Messiah and brings Simon to meet Jesus.

John is making sure we know disciples spread the word about Jesus. This is stupendously good news and it needs to be shared. John told Andrew; Andrew told Simon and so on. Who are you telling about Jesus? I heard Stephanie the representative of Barnabas Fund speak at New Wine. She spoke of people in the persecuted church who are tortured to make them deny Christ and saying you can do anything you like to me, you can kill me but I will not deny Christ. She said, it gives her courage to speak about Jesus in NZ because the cost which may be embarrassment is so small in comparison.

Who would you go to and say, I want you to meet the most amazing person ever?

What might you say about Jesus? Well John gives us a series of titles in this section.

It is an amazing list:

- Jesus (29)
- Lamb of God (29)
- One who baptises with the Holy Spirit (33)
- Chosen son of God (34)
- Rabbi/teacher (38)
- Christ/ Messiah (41)

And if we continue into the rest of the scene in verses 43-51:

- Son of Joseph (45)
- Nazarene (45)
- Son of God (49)
- King of Israel (49)
- Son of Man (51)

That surely gives you something to say about him!

We talked about the progressive revealing of Christ to more and more people. Beyond the first century that revealing continues. Jesus said,

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."⁶

If we know him, we bear his light. And that light is to shine out for the world to see.

Do you know him? Has the Spirit of God revealed him to you? Who will you tell next?

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⁶ Matthew 5:14-16