

PPT Fulfilling Prophecy

Matthew 12:15-21

How do you deal with conflict? Do you arc up, force the issue and go into combat mode? Do you compromise and do anything to get peace? Do you seek to accommodate, not totally rolling over but being willing to make sacrifices in order to resolve the conflict? Do you try to collaborate, taking in all the concerns and aim to work through the differences to resolve the situation? Do you choose avoidance, deny there is a problem, hide or run away from the situation?

Picking up from where we finished last week:

PPT ... *the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place.* Matthew 12:14-15

At first glance, Jesus looks like an 'avoider'. He turns and runs, but to reach this conclusion would be wrong. At this point, Jesus makes what we might call a tactical withdrawal. It's not in his nature to run and hide. Jesus withdrew at the time to avoid provocation. He wasn't cowardly. He would die courageously when the right time came. He certainly didn't sneak away quietly. He didn't go into hiding either. His movements were open, and we know this because we are told many followed him.

PPT *Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him ...* Matthew 12:15

Jesus was avoiding the point of conflict and would not engage in needless provocation of his enemies. He would engage his enemies more directly when he chose but this wasn't the time.

We learn several things about Jesus, the Messiah, in this passage in Matthew. We are once more reminded of his power, authority and his compassion. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick (15). Many came because they had illnesses and wanted his help. He healed them all. *All* indicates there were no failures. So, as many as there were who came to Jesus for healing, they received it. The power of God was at work.

Again, we are reminded of the coming one, the Messiah. Looking back to the beginning of chapter 11, when the disciples of John came to him, we learn that Jesus was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy because the blind see, the lame walk, and the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached.

Jesus continued to bring life and healing to the sick and demon possessed, just as Isaiah had prophesied, but in keeping with his mission, he was also proclaiming the kingdom of

heaven. Jesus did not want publicity for his healing. That would be a distraction from his primary purpose.

PPT *Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was. Matthew 12:15-16*

Jesus was not a publicity seeker. He was not someone who played to an audience seeking his own benefit. For Jesus, it was not “look at me.” He didn’t seek fame and the trappings that often go with it. As his followers, neither should we.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us not to trumpet our achievements and not to draw attention to our generosity, prayer or piety. We are not to advertise how good we are or what great deeds we have done. We are not to big note our work for God’s kingdom in the ministry in which we serve, nor draw attention to our wonderful and encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bible. We shouldn’t “accidentally” let slip how much we gave to the rectory fund or to our favourite charity or how many ‘little old ladies’ we’ve guided across the road. Those things are to be between us and God.

We should also remember the importance of sharing the kingdom of heaven with others – the good deeds are meaningless without the message.

Jesus wanted his deeds kept quiet. That was hard given the size of the crowd in toe and the amazing nature of what he did. However, there were other aspects of the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus fulfilled.

In Isaiah 42:1-4 we read:

PPT *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."*

Matthew quotes this passage. It highlights the contrast between the violent opposition of the Pharisees and the gentleness of the Lord’s servant. This quote draws attention to the character of the healer rather than the healings.

For those who might find this kind of detail interesting, the quotation from Isaiah is not exact. Matthew is either making his own translation or citing some other Greek version not known to us.

Significantly, he is drawing to our attention some different characteristics of the prophesied Messiah and at the same time, he challenges popular notions of the day about what the Messiah would be like.

The first idea which challenges conventional thinking is that he was a *servant*.

PPT “Here is my servant whom I have chosen” Matthew 12:18

It is not often in NT that Jesus is described as God’s servant. In fact, other than here, it occurs only in early chapters of Acts. It’s an unusual portrayal of the Messiah.

This is not the mighty warrior that many wanted. It is not the military hero riding on his chariot and liberating God’s people. It is not the Messiah of popular expectation, exercising his authority by crushing his adversaries. Instead, Jesus showed his authority in his concern for the helpless and downtrodden. He was a servant to those in need.

Again, this is an area of our lives in which we should follow his example. We too are called to serve; to wash the feet of others, and to do good as we have opportunity.

The expression *I chose* points to God’s action that sets this servant apart from ALL others. God has chosen him for a special task. This servant has a divine destiny.

He is also set apart by the description *beloved* (NIV *the one I love*). Matthew uses this term only three times and on all three occasions it refers to Jesus as beloved by God. Jesus is loved by the Father like no other. He is loved as the one and only Son, unique in nature and in character. He clearly has a special relationship with God the Father.

PPT *My beloved in whom my soul delights*, provides a clear echo of the voice of the Father at Jesus’ baptism.

This servant has God’s Spirit in a special way, enabling him to proclaim justice to the nations. Typically, among the Jews the nations were despised because the people of God saw themselves as specially favoured, but the prophet regarded all the world’s peoples as having worth before God. The servant will make sure justice is done for all. The salvation Jesus brought was available to people of all nations and by the time Matthew penned the Gospel this prophecy was becoming more and more evident.

PPT *He will not quarrel or cry out; no-one will hear his voice in the streets.*

Matthew 12:19

He will do his work quietly, making no loud claims to underline his importance. There will be no fanfare and no loud, self-aggrandising speeches. By way of contrast, often those who lead the nations are overbearing characters, with a strong drive to get their own way. They will argue and lose their cool if they aren't getting their own way. We can think of extreme examples from the past like Hitler, Idi Amin, Pol Pot or Saddam Hussein. I imagine you can think of contemporary examples as well. I'll let you fill in the blank.

God's servant is not set in this mould: *He will not quarrel*. His mission is one of peace. It does not mean he will not strongly oppose evil or those who do evil but he will not try to ruthlessly impose his will on others regardless of their desires. His mode, by contrast, is gentle.

Significantly, the verbs in v.19-20 are mostly negative. He does not quarrel, does not cry out, does not break a bruised reed. What Jesus did *not* do clearly provides a strong contrast with the Pharisees. Jesus did not 'shout back' at the Pharisees when they plotted against him, just as he didn't curse them when he was on the cross.

The description here in Isaiah fits well the unassertive character of Jesus as well as his recent description of himself (11:29) as 'gentle and lowly'. Jesus does not overpower people and lord it over them but draws them to himself.

Once more, in our leadership, here is an example to follow. Whether in the church, the home, the workplace, or organisations to which we belong, we are not to bully or coerce. We are not to manipulate or abuse. We are to lead gentle and humbly.

The weak and vulnerable, the bruised reed and the smouldering wick, are the special object of Jesus' mission. He deals with them with all the gentleness offered to the overburdened (11:28-30).

The illustration of *a reed he will not shatter* is fitting. Reeds were common and plentiful at the time. They grew in every marsh and beside every river. They were cheap and expendable and had many uses in the ancient world. The natural thing was to discard an old imperfect one and replace it with a better new one, but the Lord's servant does not discard those who can be likened to shattered reeds

The same truth is brought out with the reference to a smoking wick. The smouldering wick would not give good light and created smoke. The simple thing was to snuff it out

and throw it away. A little bit of flax did not cost much, so replacing it was the normal procedure.

Making something out of a bruised reed or a smoking wick took time and patience. People in general would not take the trouble.

Most of us do not regard the world's down and outs as worth troubling ourselves over. We don't see how anything can be made of them but Jesus does. Love and care can do wonders.

God's servant will persevere. He changes lives. He does not just protect them from being broken, he will lead them to *victory*, for in him they will find *justice*.

The OT meaning of this word is not simply legal justice. It means setting right whatever is not as it should be. We know from other parts of the Bible that this means setting people free from sin and its consequences and bringing them into God's kingdom. God's servant brings new life and puts things right.

In his name the nations will put their hope. Matthew 12:21

Matthew again points us to the saviour of the world: The Son of God who redeems and forgives sin. Will we trust him? Will we follow? Here is our true Messiah.