

JESUS CAME AS PROMISED MESSIAH

(Isaiah 11.1-16 and Matthew 12.15-23)

Let's start at the very beginning – the very beginning of our passage from Matthew – the first three words. Remember them? They are, *"Aware of this."* Aware of what? To find out we have to go back to the previous verse and that reads, *"But the pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus."* Why? Because his disciples picked and ate corn on the Sabbath and because Jesus healed a man with a disabled hand not only on the Sabbath but in the synagogue.

So, in the passage Mike read to us, Jesus takes himself off, does a lot of making ill people better and finally a man, brought to him and described as demon-possessed, who could neither see nor speak is completely restored by Jesus in both mind and body. The response of the astonished crowd is, *"Could this be the son of David?"*

So, we have the religious leaders out to get rid of Jesus by killing him and the people in the crowd questioning who this man who does miraculous healing really is.

Two opposite and conflicting views about Jesus. The Pharisees wanted to kill him because he ignored, and indeed deliberately broke, the Law laid down in the Old Testament, which they taught and upheld and insisted everyone else should obey to the letter.

Their Messiah would be someone who drove out the hated Roman occupiers of their state. The people, on the other hand, seeing what Jesus was doing, thought that, just possibly, this man was the Messiah promised by Isaiah.

Two completely different expectations – like in the story about Adam's expectations. 'I'm lonely,' Adam told God in the Garden of Eden. 'I need to have someone to keep me company.' 'OK,' replied God, 'I'm going to give you the perfect woman. Beautiful, intelligent and gracious – she'll cook and clean for you and never say a cross word.' 'Sounds good' Adam said expectantly, 'but what's she going to cost me?' 'An arm and a leg'. 'That's pretty steep' countered Adam, his expectation confounded. 'What can I get for just a rib?'

If you were here last Sunday you will have heard John Lambert's 12-point evidence that Isaiah accurately foretold the qualities of the promised Messiah. Today we have heard two passages from Isaiah. One was from chapter 11 and the other, quoted by Matthew, was from chapter 42.

The first of these talked about a champion descended from Jesse. Who was Jesse? He was the father of David the great king. So, this champion was to be a direct descendent of King David. That's why the crowd, seeing what Jesus was doing, thought he might be the one who had been promised them.

We can see from the last seven verses of the Isaiah 11 reading why the Pharisees looked to Israel's messiah as a physical conqueror. It is all about rescuing Israel from its various oppressors and bringing its people together as one nation.

But when we look at the first five verses, we see what sort of conqueror this was to be:

- ✓ He would be full of wisdom.
- ✓ He would be powerful in giving advice.
- ✓ He would be full of knowledge .
- ✓ He would know and respect God.
- ✓ He would not jump to quick conclusions.
- ✓ He would be particularly caring for poor and humble people and would not take advantage of them.
- ✓ His strength against wickedness would be in words rather than in weapons.
- ✓ He would be both righteous and faithful.

Then we get that lengthy passage about the result of what he would do, starting with "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb* and ending with the words *...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" We need to note those words carefully. We will come back to them.

The quote from Isaiah 42 in our Matthew passage emphasises those qualities. God is speaking through Isaiah and describes the Messiah as his servant, his chosen one, his loved one, and having God's Spirit and then we get the words "*he'll announce my justice to the whole wide world.*" We need to take special note of these words too.

Maybe at this point we should see what the word Messiah means. The Oxford English dictionary defines it as: *"The promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible."*

So, was Jesus the promised Messiah? Were the religious bosses wrong? Were the people in the crowd on the right track about him? The answer of course is YES and YES.

He fitted perfectly the predictions of Isaiah but not the expectation of either the chief religious guys or the many people who crowded round him to listen to what he had to say and to seek healing. But... many of them were the same people who shouted for the criminal Barabbas to be freed instead of Jesus and who joked about him and mocked him in his anguish on the cross.

OK – But where does his trial, his crucifixion, his resurrection and his ascension fit in? They are inexplicable and meaningless if Jesus was just the Jewish Messiah. Jesus was so much more than the Jewish Messiah. Let's look again at part of the Isaiah prophesy. *"The earth- THE EARTH -shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"* and *"He'll announce my justice to the whole wide world"* – TO THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD. And we note that that part of Isaiah quoted by Matthew ends with the words, *"In his name the nations"* – THE NATIONS – *"will put their hope."*

So even in Isaiah we see that his prophesy about Jesus was not limited to Israel (even if its leaders thought the whole world lay within its borders) but to the whole of mankind.

If we read what St. Paul said in almost all his letters, we see that he made a clear distinction between all the Old Testament rules, which he called THE LAW, and the freedom, grace and forgiveness which Jesus brought to everyone, everywhere, who accept and put their trust in him.

In many of Paul's letters his frustration is evident as he tries to persuade the Jewish Christians that they are not somehow special because of THE LAW; but that they and non-Jewish Christians are equally special to God because of God's only Son, and they equally enjoy the privileges (and, of course, the obligations) which result from his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

So, back to the title of this talk. Did Jesus Christ come as the Promised Messiah? Yes, he did – the word Christ comes from the Greek for Messiah. Jesus came as the Promised Messiah but much, much, more. He was, and is, the Saviour for you, for me, for the world.

So what?

There are only two responses to this 'much more than Messiah' Jesus – acceptance or rejection. There is no middle way. There is genuine choice. Jesus asks but he never forces. He didn't when he lived on earth. He doesn't now.

To accept him (to quote the evangelist J. John) is to accept his forgiveness, blessing and guidance and, at the same time, to take on willingly whatever responsibility and challenges that gives.

A familiar prayer as we reflect on Jesus, Messiah and so much more:

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ for all the benefits you have won for us:
For all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.
Most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
May we know you more clearly, love you more dearly
And follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen