

My Servant Whom I Have Chosen

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[0 : 00] Today we're going to slow down. We don't quite stop, but we do slow down. And we slow down because I think we've come to a central question for which the Gospels were written. You see, they were written to confront us with a question. Their writers wanted us to hear about a particular religious figure in history, and they wanted us to consider what we thought about him. In fact, they really wanted more than that. They wanted us to make a decision about him.

In today's passage, the writer of Matthew's Gospel stops, as it were. In the middle of recounting the story of Jesus, he interrupts the story and inserts something of his own. Well, actually, not of his own, something from God in the Old Testament. He inserts this in his story, a large slab from the Old Testament. And in doing so, he gives us a perspective on Jesus. And so, because this is such an important perspective, we're going to stop. We're going to have a look at what Matthew's doing and why he's doing and what he's doing. And we'll listen to Matthew as he listens to God. And we'll get God's perspective on Jesus. So with that in mind, I want you to open your Bibles and look at this passage today. The page number is 977.

If you're looking for it, we're going to look at Matthew 12 verses 15 to 20. Now, if you look at the passage, you'll see exactly what I said. That is, there is this big quotation from the Old Testament. It's where we're going to spend most of our time. It is the longest Old Testament quotation in Matthew's gospel. Therefore, it's significant. You see, what happens with a writer is when they stop telling the story and they interrupt it for a moment, and particularly in the New Testament, when they then insert some scripture in it, they're telling you, stop, take a good look at what I'm about to do. This is very important. But if we want to understand exactly what he's doing, we need to understand two other things that will form the meaning of this passage. First, we need to understand what gave rise to Jesus, to Matthew using it of Jesus at this point. And second, we need to understand a bit about the importance of this passage in its Old Testament context. So first, let's deal with the setting. Perhaps you remember what's been going on in this last week or two. In chapter 10, Jesus instructed his disciples to go on a mission to Israel, proclaiming that the kingdom had come in him. In chapter 11, we hear of Jesus setting an example to his disciples by going on a mission himself. He goes into Galilee and he preaches and receives various reactions to his preaching. We hear of a cautious questioning John the Baptist. Then we hear of violent Herod and his spiritual successors. Then we hear of cities that are just simply indifferent. And finally, we hear about some who get it right. They are spiritual babes to whom God the Father has been pleased to reveal himself. So that's chapter 11. And then in chapter 12, we open the chapter with disciples picking grain on a Sabbath. And that opens up a debate between Jesus and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of his day, on the question of the Sabbath and what Jews should do with it. And that steps up a notch or two when Jesus enters into their home territory.

You see, he goes into what is called emphatically their synagogue, that is their home territory. And he heals a man with a withered hand. But the encounter ends badly for Jesus and his relationship with the Pharisees. Have a look at verse 14. We're told that the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. And that's where you ended last week. Pharisees go out of their synagogue.

[3 : 55] They plot in the darkness of the night as to how they might kill this man. But what about Jesus? What does he do? Well, look at verse 15. Look at the verbs that are used for him. First, he's aware, that is, he knows the Pharisees. He's fully cognizant of their scheming and of them. Second, he withdraws. That is, he withdraws from that place. I presume he withdraws from their synagogue.

I think that's what probably what that is talking about. But he doesn't withdraw to do evil in the dark like they do. No, he withdraws to do good in the light, as it were, where things are really visible. A large crowd follows him, which prompts him to do a third action. That is, he heals those who were ill.

Then the fourth verb, he warns. He warns all that are there and are healed. And he warns them, don't tell others about me. Why would he do that? Well, it could be for a number of reasons. He might not want to inflame the Pharisees anymore. That is, he wouldn't want to get up their nose, as it were, any more than he already has. Or he might want to define himself, other than having some of these people just go and say, well, you know, Jesus is this. Perhaps he wants to define himself rather than have other people define him. But then the actions of Jesus are not mentioned anymore after that in this little section. Instead, what happens is Matthew himself steps into the limelight.

He tells us that this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets. Now, what could the this refer to? That is, this quote that he's about to give.

Or sorry, these things that happened. Well, it could refer to the healings. Jesus does healings. And so Matthew says, this was to fulfill and goes on to give a prophecy. Or it could refer to what's happened with the Pharisees and their rejection of Jesus and their plotting to kill. And he might say, and this. What do you think? Well, let's see if we can work it out together.

[5 : 52] Now, let's start by doing some background thinking about this quotation from Isaiah. Now, I need to tell you that the translation here is not, is different from all translations that we could find in the first century. It's relatively independent, could go back to Jesus himself, could go back to Matthew. We don't quite know, but we do know what it's a translation of.

We read it in our Old Testament reading. It's a quotation from Isaiah 42 verses 1 to 4. Third thing is, this quotation focuses on one particular figure who turns up in the second half of the book of Isaiah quite regularly. You can see him referred to in verse 18. Can you see it there? His name is The Servant. Here he's referred to as My Servant. Now, if you look at the key passages in Isaiah, you can learn lots and lots about this particular servant figure. Here is my brief summary.

When you put together a composite picture of the servant in Isaiah, you will find out that he is, he appears to be an individual largely. He's an individual who does what Israel was meant to do.

That is, he listens to God's word. He speaks God's word. He obeys God's word. But there's more.

Now, Isaiah 52 and 53, which we will probably read at Easter, he's also an individual who suffers on behalf of those who failed to live rightly before God.

And through his suffering, through his actions on behalf of the people of God, he brings wholeness and healing and restoration to them. He fulfills God's purpose for his people. And even if he suffers, we're told in Isaiah 53, he'll finally be vindicated before God because of his humility, his obedience, his suffering for others.

[7 : 44] Anyway, there's the big picture of the servant in Isaiah. Now, this is the figure that Matthew identifies Jesus with. And but Matthew hones in on one particular passage about the servant, the one that happens in Isaiah 42.

And if we look closely, we can see that Matthew is telling us six things about Jesus in this passage. Now, my suggestion is I've given you an out. I hope you have an outline. But if you have the outline, you'll see I've got six statements.

Jesus is what I encourage you to do if you've got a pen is to write the rest of the heading. And in the next week, you could read this passage from Isaiah again and again each day.

So read it once each day and see if you can see if you can memorize that heading about Jesus.

OK, here we go. The first thing we're told about Jesus from this prophecy is that Jesus is the chosen one of God.

Jesus is the chosen one of God. Can you see it in verse 17? Isaiah records God speaking and God says, here is my servant whom I have chosen.

[8 : 58] Now, this could be spelled out further. He's God's chosen one in whom God is also well pleased. In verse 23, later on, the power, the crowds will ponder who Jesus is.

Well, what this passage tells us is who God thinks he is. He is God's chosen one in whom he is well pleased, in whom he delights. Now, just remember the context.

There's been a debate about the Sabbath. And the point is very clear when you consider that context. Against the background of the two main parties in the debate about the Sabbath, Jesus and the Pharisees, Matthew is making very clear who God is for.

He is well pleased with Jesus, his chosen one. Jesus is the one he loves, the one in whom he delights. God had indicated this right at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

If you were to go back to Matthew 3, you'd find that John the Baptist calls the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers. He indicated that God was opposed to them and that his acts of

judgment was about to be headed to chop down the tree that was them.

[10:16] And then, against that background of scribes and Pharisees, of Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus comes down to be baptized by John the Baptist.

And as he's coming out of the water, heaven is opened and the spirit of God descends on him like a dove and a voice comes from heaven and God speaks and uses the very same words that are used here from Isaiah.

And he says this, This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased. You see, friends, God's endorsement of Jesus could not be stronger, could it?

You see, Jesus sides with Jesus, not the Pharisees. Jesus comes from him, the Father. He comes in fulfillment of God's plans announced by the Father in Scripture.

He is the one that Israel is waiting for. He is God's chosen one, the servant. God loves him. He's well pleased with him. He delights in him. That's the first thing we're told about Jesus.

[11:22] Now turn to the second. And I wonder if you can guess it yourself. Have a look at the passage. Second half of verse 18. Here is my way of summarizing it. Matthew tells us that according to Isaiah 42, Jesus is the bearer of God's spirit.

The bearer of God's spirit. Now we need to hear this in the context again that has just gone on in the preceding chapters. Back in chapter 9, verse 33, the Pharisees said of Jesus these words. It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons. In other words, can you see what the Pharisees were doing back in chapter 9? They wanted to identify the source of power that Jesus had.

And they said it comes not from God, but from the prince of demons. And Jesus himself later on picks that up. In chapter 10, verse 26, he tells his disciples that as they cast out demons, they too will have the source identified as Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Same thing is going to happen to them. Now, if you read on in our chapter, go down to verse 24, you'll see the Pharisees repeating the charge. They will accuse Jesus of being under the control of Beelzebub, the prince of demons and casting out demons in his power.

[12:41] So I wonder if you can see what Matthew is doing here. In citing Isaiah, he's citing God. And he's saying that the source of Jesus's authority is God himself.

Jesus bears not the prince of demons, but God's spirit. And so God's spirit is behind his actions. God is behind what he does.

God's spirit is the source of what he does. And that is a huge criticism of the Pharisees. Because if they are opposing him, they are opposing God's spirit.

You see, this God being behind Jesus is evident in what he does. It was evident at his baptism. It's evident in his dispute with the Pharisees. It's evident in his deeds.

He is the bearer of God's spirit. So that's the second thing we learn about Jesus from this prophecy of scripture. But there's a third thing. Let's move on to it. The third thing, according to God, through his prophet Isaiah, is this.

[13:47] Jesus is the humble and non-assertive one. Friends, just think of the background to which Jesus comes. Here you have the people of God, the Jews, under oppressive Roman rule, looking for a military Messiah.

You see, what they want, more than anything else, is an assertive, warring leader who will give them back their place and rid them of Rome. But here God indicates that Jesus is not here to do that.

He won't be an aggressive quarreller with a raised voice. He won't, in other words, be a sword-wielding conqueror.

As verse 20 indicates, he won't even break a bruised reed. He won't snuff out a smouldering wick. Now, you know what a smouldering wick is.

Imagine a candle. It's just sort of just that last bit of it. It's been blown out. It's just smouldering and you just do that to it. He won't even do that.

[14:56] No shouting loudmouth. No sword-bearing conqueror. No, just someone who, you know, he won't even break a bruised reed or snuff out a smouldering wick.

Friends, I think that this assertion is not only in the words of the passage, it's also in the words of Jesus himself. For example, just flip back to the end of chapter 11.

And Jesus speaks of himself yoking himself, that is, putting on a yoke together with the weary and the burdened. He describes himself as gentle and humble of heart.

But it's also seen in his actions as well as his words. So what happens when the unendorsed Pharisees plot and scheme? He doesn't retaliate.

He doesn't say to his mates, right, they've got their plan, we've got ours. They're going to get us, we're going to get them. No, he doesn't seek publicity. Instead, he withdraws and he cares for the ill and heals them.

[16:02] So this is then the third thing we learn about Jesus from God through Isaiah. He is the humble and non-assertive one. But there's more, there's a fourth thing. Through Isaiah the prophet, we learn that Jesus is the unheard man of justice.

Andrew in his prayers mentioned this great theme of justice that's in the passage. Did you see the multiple references to justice here? It's in verse 18. He'll bring justice to the nations.

But look at verse 20. As the servant, Jesus will bring justice to victory. Jesus will be, in many ways, the man of victory, of justice, I mean.

And look at verse 19. His voice will not be heard in the streets. And now literally that could be translated, nor will anyone hear.

In other words, what's being said is he will be met by the people of God with deliberate rejection. Only a few will hear in the sense of responding positively.

[17:05] He won't be utterly silent. No, we know that already. He's been preaching away. But he will be largely unheard by his people. So as this mission to the Gentiles goes on, it will largely be met with rejection.

He will be the unheard man of justice. Now the fourth thing, that's the fourth thing, fifth thing. Did you spot this one? Look at verse 18. Then look at verse 21.

And what word occurs in both? What do they have in common? Well, you'll see the word nations there. In the Hebrew of Isaiah, the first reference is the Hebrew term that was used for outsiders of Israel.

The Hebrew term is *hagoyim*. It wasn't a positive word to use. It was a word you use for saying, you know, the riffraffer outside of Israel, the Gentiles. Then the second reference is to distant islands in the original book of Isaiah.

But in the Greek translations, they use the term for Gentiles again. The impact is stark. You see, both have references to the nations or to Gentiles. Remember the background?

[18:14] Jesus is the unheard man of justice among his own people. But what will he be among the Gentiles? He will be the one who is received by them.

He will proclaim justice to the nations and they will respond. He will be the name in which the Gentiles will put their hope. Unheard man of justice among the Jews responded to by the Gentiles. But there's a sixth thing we learn about Jesus here. In the immediately preceding verse, verse 15, we saw large crowds following Jesus. He healed them.

We've already seen that the Isaiah prophecy speaks into the context of Jesus and his conflict with the Pharisees. But it also speaks into the context of his healing ministry. His healing ministry, the ministry of Jesus to heal people, fulfills the prophecy of the servant in Isaiah.

Look at verse 20. Bruised reeds, he does not break. Smouldering wicks, he does not put snuff out. So he comes to whom? Those without power.

[19:22] The sick. Back in the previous chapter, the dependent children. The ones who have no power. And he doesn't crush them.

Rather, he offers healing and wellness. You see, he is Jesus, the great healer of the poor, the bruised, the disadvantaged. That's the sixth thing we learn. Jesus is the great healer of the poor, the bruised, the disadvantaged.

Friends, I hope that has helped you grasp the central thrust of this passage. It's Jesus and who he is. It's on Jesus as God sees him. However, I want to draw some practical implications and then I want to return to that theme.

First, I want you to notice where the thrust of Jesus' ministry resides. Now, we know where it resides for the Pharisees, don't we? Where does it reside? It resides in wielding power.

And they're going to do it right through until they kill him. They are going to wield power as they can. It's plotting. It resides in siding with Roman enemies to do away with God's endorsed man.

[20:32] But that's not where it lies for Jesus, is it? It resides for him in retiring, in humility, in gentleness, in compassion, in care for the disadvantaged and the bruised, in the company of the lowly.

Friends, we need to hear this. You see, we are tempted, particularly in the contemporary world, to think as the world thinks. We are tempted to think that success and numbers and fame and impressiveness and the like are the gauge or the measure of success.

Or we're tempted to think that influence, having the ear of great ones, keeping their company will ensure success. And as you've seen, I think this passage is deliberately drawing a contrast between the Pharisees and Jesus.

They have power. It is their synagogue. Their power to speak into the public domain. Their influence is respected by the people.

But Matthew deliberately contrasts the power and plotting of the Pharisees with the picture of the suffering servant. His tranquility, his quiet withdrawal, his urging people not to speak of him when matched with the words of the prophet Isaiah, I think, rebuke us as contemporary Christians.

[21 : 58] His way, you see, is God's way. There is something we need to hear in our world. The power of the gospel, the power of Jesus, the message of the kingdom, the power of God is found in back alleys, in humble service, in humility, in quiet compassion, in yielding your neck to the knife and putting your faith and trust in someone who died for you.

Now, I know that some of you know this because I see you doing it and Andrew and I, as your pastors, love it when we see it.

For then you are being like your Lord. But others among you may want the limelight and recognition. That's not the way of our Lord. His way is characterized by service, self-sacrifice and humility.

It's the way of his servants is exactly the same as him. And I thank and praise God for those of you who know and do this and I see it constantly. And I pray there will be more of you.

I pray that there will be more of me in this. But I want to say one more thing. That's the first point for us. Let's observe our Lord here. Let's ensure that our ministry personally and corporately is like that of the Lord, full of service, full of self-sacrifice, full of humility.

[23 : 21] But there's another observation to make. The observation is that the way of humiliation is eventually crowned with exaltation.

You see, Jesus doesn't engage in humiliation so that he might gain a crown one day. No. Rather, he engages in humiliation for the sake of others.

He takes the path of service because that's the way of God. It's not recognized. Oh, it will be one day and when it is, it will be crowned with glory. Later in his ministry, Jesus will make the point that what is true for him will be true for his followers.

He will say that his way of the cross is a way of the servants of him. It will lead to exaltation for them as it will for him.

I want you to just listen to Matthew 16. Don't look it up at the moment, but Jesus says these words to his disciples. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

[24 : 24] In other words, you've got to do what I do. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. Whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for you, for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their own soul?

What can anyone give in exchange for their soul? And then, here we go. For the Son of Man is going to come in the Father's glory. The crown will be there with his angels and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

So there will be a crown also for the people of God who are like the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Apostle Paul speaks in much the same way. Toward the end of his life, so when he's looking at that final goal, he says this, For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time of my departure has come.

I've fought the good fight. I've finished the race. I've kept the faith. And now there's in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all those who have longed for his appearing.

Now let me tell you, in his life, since he came to know the Lord Jesus, he's been like his Lord. And if you want to read 2 Corinthians 11 and 12, you'll find out all the stuff he went through. Being like his Lord.

[25 : 45] But now he knows that there's a crown for him. He hasn't done it so he might get the crown in one sense. He's done it to serve his Lord and be like his Lord. But there's one more thing I want to do.

In summing up this passage, we've got those two things that we should take on board for ourselves and shape our lives. As disciples of a humble Lord Jesus, we should recognise that the power of ministry doesn't reside in power itself.

It resides in humility and in service and in giving rather than receiving in a cross rather than a crown. However, we should recognise that the way of the cross will end in a crown. A crown not awarded by humans but awarded by God.

But I cannot finish there. You see, we must not neglect where the central thrust of this passage is. It is on Jesus and who he is. Matthew has been bundling us along and suddenly he's stopped. And he's cited this Old Testament passage. He's saying to us, this is who you are dealing with. He interrupts his narrative flow.

[26 : 53] He quotes God on Jesus. And the impact is clear. Jesus is incredibly special. He is God's person.

He is different from every person who preceded him. He is different from every person who will come after him. He is the chosen one of God, the bearer of God's spirit, the humble, non-assertive one, the unheard man of justice, the name in which Gentiles will put their hope.

He is the great healer of the poor, the bruised, the disadvantaged. Friends, the power of this quotation is enormous. Its impact is profound.

You see, this man who wandered Galilee teaching for three years was no ordinary man. He was the one promised by God in the Old Testament.

He was announced by God at his baptism to be the son of God. He is the only human being that God has been pleased to dwell in or with in this way.

[27 : 58] He is the one whom God has chosen. He is the one God loves. He is the one in whom God delights. He is the saviour of the world.

And the impact is when you put it all together like that, that he is God in the flesh. Paul knew this. Listen to this quotation.

It comes from Romans 9. It's speaking of the glories of Israel. And it says of Israel, theirs is the adoption to sonship. Theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and its promises.

Theirs are the patriarchs. In other words, Israel's grand. And then he says, and from them, Israel, is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised.

Amen. Did you hear it? From them, Israel, is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised.

[29 : 12] Amen. And John, the apostle John, who'd spent the three years with Jesus, he knew it. Listen to what he has to say. John 1, 14 and 18. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the father has made him known.

Did you hear that last sentence? No one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the father has made him known.

Friends, I want to say to you this morning that if your view of Jesus is anything less than this, it is not Christian. Jesus is not just a good man.

He's not even the best man in history. Well, he is, but you know what I mean. That's not all he is.

[30 : 24] He was fully human, but he is also God's own son, fully divine, fully God.

As the creed says, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made. He is God's servant, the one God loves, the one in whom God delights, the bearer of God's spirit, the only name in whom the nations can put their hope.

Please, if you have a lesser view of Jesus, discard it, abandon it, throw it out, because it's not God's view. Take on God's view about his son, and cherish it, and trust in it.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your son, your servant, the one you love, the one in whom you delight, the bearer of your spirit, the man of justice, the carer for the disadvantaged and the bruised, and the only name in whom we can put our hope.

Father, please keep us faithful to your son, and help us to hear your word about him and to take it on and live by it. We pray this in Jesus' name.

[32 : 08] Amen.