

Expectation versus Reality

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[0 : 00] I wonder what comes to mind when you hear the expression expectations versus reality.

! We've been disappointed. Perhaps you've visited a fancy restaurant that's had glowing reviews, only to be served up with rather average fare and a rather unaverage bill at the end of it all.

A while back, a huge parcel arrived at our house while I was at work. Anne-Marie was excitedly speculating what wonderful birthday present I might have purchased for her, and she couldn't wait to find out what was inside of this large delivery.

Unfortunately for her, the reality wasn't nearly as exciting. I had spotted a good deal on Amazon and had bulk bought 50 rolls of toilet paper.

The reality did not meet the expectation. But are there not times when we may experience the reverse? We have an expectation.

[1 : 23] It might even be a good expectation. But what eventually transpires is far greater than what we could have imagined. Tonight we're going to look at a biblical example where that is indeed the case.

For hundreds of years, the people of Israel had looked to the hope of a coming righteous king. One who would reign and rule from Israel over the whole world.

They had looked to Saul, but it was not to be him, and his line had been cut off. Then came the great king David, but he too fell short.

He was not permitted to build the temple. And then in 2 Samuel 7, God, through the prophet Nathan, promises to David that he would establish a house for him.

A dynasty that would never end. A throne that would be established forever. After David, the people's hope turned to Solomon.

[2 : 28] He is, on the face of it, successful and wealthy. But he is not the righteous king that they seek. Following Solomon, the kingdom split into north and south.

And the people begin to lose hope in the human king to come. The north kings are corrupt, and most of the southern kings are not much better. All fail at being this righteous king.

And now we come to the time of Isaiah. A time of dark history for Judah. The people are going into captivity. The temple would be destroyed.

Their capital is destroyed. And the northern kingdom is gone. And it is in these dire circumstances that God steps in and gives Isaiah a new revelation about the righteous king to come.

And here we have the reality to that expectation. There would indeed be a coming righteous king. But he would also be a suffering servant.

[3 : 34] Now, on the face of it, we might think a suffering servant falls into the category of reality not living up to expectations.

But as we look at what Isaiah has to say about a suffering servant, we will see that this reality far exceeds the limited expectations that had gone before.

So with that background in mind, let us turn back to our passage for this evening. This passage is actually the last of four such poems in the prophecy of Isaiah, collectively known as the Servant Songs.

You can find other three songs in chapters 42, 49 and 50. The phrase, the servant of the Lord, is used throughout these chapters.

Often it's the title for the people as a whole. But at times it's clear that the servant is a specific person within Israel who is distinct from the whole. One with a calling to serve Israel and beyond.

[4 : 41] In much the same way that in the Davidic covenant, David's heirs represent and embody the people as a whole, the servant is also the representative and embodiment of the whole people.

So sometimes in the book of Isaiah, the servant of the Lord is the people of Israel. Sometimes the servant is the prophet Isaiah himself. But here in our passage this evening, the servant can't be the prophet or the people because the servant is pictured as taking the place of both the prophet and the people.

In verse 4 we read, Surely he, that is the servant, has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. And in verse 5, He was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. So who then is the servant of the Lord? Well, the New Testament answer is that he is Jesus, the Messiah.

In Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading this very passage when Philip joined him on his journey. The eunuch asked Philip, About whom does the prophet say this?

[5 : 58] About himself or about someone else? And Philip's response, He opened his mouth and begins with this, beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

So let's turn to this final song and see what it has to say to us about Jesus, the servant of the Lord. Now this servant song is made up of five stanzas.

As you might know, the chapter divisions in our Bibles are relatively recent editions. And as we can see here, they're not always terribly helpful. Our poem begins at the end of chapter 52, with the first stanza being verses 13 to 15, and then continues in the next chapter.

The second stanza being one to three, and then four to six, seven to nine, and ten to twelve. And I just want to quite simply work through these verses and take a look at each of these stanzas under the following titles.

Five points, but like I say, it's not a long one.

[7 : 26] So firstly, verses 13 to 15, the unexpected servant. Our song opens in a way that perhaps may well have met the expectations of God's people.

My servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up. He shall be exalted. So we read that the servant of the Lord will be exalted.

He will be high and lifted up. This is the sort of message that people could get on board with. This meets their expectations. But there is more in this stanza.

Things that perhaps go beyond their expectations. There's something very different going on.

Something incredibly unusual. Isaiah says that many were astonished by him.

His marred appearance, we read, is beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. This servant is far from what they were expected.

[8 : 32] But it's not merely his appearance that is unexpected, but what his appearance achieves. In verse 15, we read, so shall he sprinkle many nations.

Now, if you were reading this in Isaiah's day, this word sprinkle would immediately jump out at you. For the Jew, this would bring to mind the sprinkling of sacrificial blood.

Blood would be sprinkled over people or objects as an expression of the way in which, through a sacrifice, the sins of the people would be forgiven or an object would be cleansed.

So we have the language of sacrifice and it is here being linked with the servant's marred appearance. But not only that, it is also being connected with his exaltation.

Through this sprinkling, all nations of the world will be part of the exaltation. As we read, kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which he has not been told them, sorry, for that which has not been told them, they see, and that which they have not heard, they understand.

[9 : 52] So Isaiah is showing us a fuller reality than the expectation the people had. The one to come will be high and lifted up and exalted.

But this exaltation will come through unexpected means. It will come through marrying and pain and sacrifice.

And this will be for all the nations. And now to the second stanza, the unrecognized servant.

This begins with an expression of surprise. Who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

We could paraphrase that as something along the lines of no one ever imagined it would be like this. Isaiah is telling us up front that many will misunderstand the servant to come.

[10 : 53] That he will not be recognized for who he truly is. That the reality will not meet their flawed expectations. Praise God that from this side of the cross we can look back on these words and clearly see our Lord Jesus.

Verse 2 describes his beginning. For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground he had no former majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

The servant's beginnings were to be humble. Who would have thought that this son of a carpenter as people thought from Nazareth of all places would figure prominently in the divine plan. there was nothing appealing or attractive in his appearance that would make Israel rally to him. That image a root out of dry ground evokes a barren place a wasteland where life barely clings on. Imagine a traveler passing by seeing this frail shoot. They'd never guess it was the hope of nations. Israel dreamed of a king with banners flying not this.

[12 : 15] Yet God chooses the overlooked. In the Gospels we see Nathaniel he snorts in John 1 can anything good come out of Nazareth?

The Pharisees sneered this man is no prophet he eats with tax collectors and even his own disciples missed it Peter even rebuking the Lord when he talks about his own suffering. They wanted a liberator not a carpenter with no throne. But isn't that God's way? He hid Moses in a basket David among the sheep Elijah in a cave nobodies who became somebodies and Jesus takes it even further a stable not a palace a donkey not a war horse his glory was failed think of him at the well when he goes to see the Samaritan woman she initially saw him just as a firsty Jew not the Messiah or after the resurrection walking with those disciples to Emmaus they didn't know him until he broke bread.

In verse 3 we see the people's reaction to him he was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows unacquainted with grief and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not.

The coming righteous king would come as a humble servant and would not be recognised in fact he would be despised. And now to our third stanza the suffering servant let's read again these verses from 4 to 6 surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by God and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastain that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all and it's here that we have a great moment of recognition the misunderstanding that has gone before now turns to an explanation it's really the only explanation there can be!

[15 : 13] for the essential problem of mankind how can a holy God forgive sinners how can mercy and justice meet how can a righteous God justify the ungodly look through this whole passage and see some of the words that are presented here appalled marred beyond likeness despised rejected man of sorrows esteemed not stricken smitten afflicted pierced crushed cut off assigned a grave with the wicked poured out his life unto death numbered with the transgressors why why such anguish because God laid our sin on his servant!

This is the heart of the gospel of Jesus this is the great message of good news that God has for all who are willing to turn away from their rebellion and towards him if you're not a Christian tonight I have a challenge for you you have sinned you are responsible before God for your actions for your life what you have done and you will give account to him for every sin you ever have or will commit someone else has suffered for your sins someone else has paid the penalty for them if you will only trust the claim of Christ that he has done this and turn from your sin and follow him God made us all in his image to know and love him and yet we have all like sheep gone astray we have all sinned against him and he would be completely just to allow us to go our own way but in his mercy and love he has not he has found a way where mercy and justice can act together and that is the eternal son of

God being made flesh living a perfect life among us and in dying a death he did not deserve in order to bear like the servant here our iniquities our transgressions our wrong acts to bear God's correct and just penalty against them and God raised him up from the dead and highly exalted him to show that he accepted the sacrifice to show that all of Jesus teaching was true!

destruction Now if that third stanza taught us that it was for the sin of the people that the servant suffered the fourth stanza declares that the servant's perfect submission that the servant himself was sinless and yet silently submitted to all injustice laid on him in verse 7 we read he was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth the servant did not

open his mouth but was silent like a sheep led to the slaughter and why was the servant silent and under suffering because he knew the truth he had no guilt of his own and no doubt of God he knew there was no punishment he was enduring for himself but an act of service a service laid on him by God a service freely given by him a service for our redemption a service sure of results that are glorious if anything will enable a person to silently accept their suffering it is this the knowledge that their suffering is in service to God in verse nine we read and he made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth here we see that the prophet reports that the servant was innocent he had done no violence and no deceit was found in him yet he was taken to judgment by tyrannical powers and when they considered that he was lawfully put to death they gave him a convict's grave and on this note this stanza ends he was innocent but he willingly submitted to the oppression an oppression that carried him to a shameful burial from all appearances an innocent man's life ended fruitlessly but nothing could be further from the truth and so to our final stanza the exalted servant in this stanza the prophet makes it clear that it was the lord's will that the servant should suffer and he makes it clear that in his suffering many are counted righteous again the prophet reiterates that the servant shall bear the sins in verse 11 and it is because of this suffering and humility that he is exalted we read in verse 12 therefore I will divide him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoils with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors yet he bore!

he bore the sins of many and makes intercession for the transgressors with these verses the song comes full circle God was pleased with the obedient suffering of the servant who we now know to be our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ because he bore the sins of many God has appointed him to honour and glory and so it was that the servant though brought low reaches the highest exaltation before him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord Israel expected a king to storm in with a crown and a sword crushing their enemies instead they got a servant who knelt in the dust who poured out his soul to death and yet this is victory that word in verse 12 therefore is everything it's the hinge because he suffered because he submitted

[23 : 18] God says I will exalt him the spoil he divides isn't plunder from a battlefield it's the lives he has redeemed you and me among them his exaltation isn't just a throne in the sky it's the power to intercede to stand before God even now pleading for our transgressors the one marred beyond recognition the one despised and rejected now shares the spoils with the strong and who are the strong they are not the mighty of this world but they are those made strong by his grace the weak the broken the sinners that he lifts up Paul echoes this in Philippians 2 where he says he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above all names the cross a symbol of shame becomes a crown the grave a place of defeat becomes a gateway to glory

I wonder what expectations do you have of the Lord Jesus are you able to see him in the fullness described in our passage this evening high lifted up and exalted not in spite of his humility and suffering but because of it or are you missing out on the fullness of his glory are your expectations of Jesus too narrow are there times when you feel that you are struggling along on your own efforts know that in this exalted servant you have all you need are there times when although you know that you are there times when although you know with your mind that you are saved through Jesus that you are still trying in your own efforts to please him or to repay him know that in the exalted servant he has already done it all perhaps you think you've done something so terrible that God could have nothing to do with you know that in this exalted servant you have forgiveness! a righteous king has come and he came as a servant of the Lord so what do we do with this well maybe this week you're about to face disappointment a reality that hasn't matched your expectations bring it to him or perhaps you've been carrying guilt thinking it's too heavy for God's grace lay it at his feet his wounds have already paid for it and if you've never said yes to this servant today is the day step out of your own way and into his he's waiting yes with a crown as king but also with scars that save thanks be to God for the amazing gift of his servant what