

Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Theme: Despised, rejected and not esteemed.

When King Alfred, before he became King Alfred the Great, was initially defeated and went on the run. He was sheltered by loyal subjects and there is the well-known incident of him burning the cakes, being told off by the woman of the house as a useless lump of a man - until her husband told her to hush and respect her king! This gave her a great shock - she never expected her king as a commoner. Who would have believed it?

This final Servant song speaks of the suffering and the glory of the Servant - one who was not just a king, but God the Son and He had the Spirit without measure. In the first 3 verses of this song in 52:13-15 we have an overture, the theme of the song that will be developed, laid before us and opened up in chapter 53. In v1-3 we will see the Servant is misunderstood because of His seeming insignificance. I want us to note 4 things from these three verses:

1. The Astonished Expression at Unbelief. (v1)

The message of the immense glory of the Servant and the terrible sufferings by which He will achieve the cleansing, sprinkling of many nations would cause even kings to be amazed and stunned (52:14-15). Incredibly not all will believe - whether kings or people. We see v1 opens up with not just a question, but a questioning exclamation of astonishment "*Who has believed our message?*" ESV says "*Who has believed what they heard from us?*"

Isaiah shows he is staggered that people can hear of this Servant, all He is, all He has done and yet they do not believe it! Isaiah considered this as something astonishing - that he could speak of this One, all His glory, awful sufferings, great work to purify, sprinkle many nations and yet there would be those who did not believe what he told them! Sadly, the astonishing fact of unbelief has gone on throughout all ages, even now and even with some of you here. The

gospel message of the Servant, Jesus, is freely and openly proclaimed here week by week. Some of you have heard it many times, been confronted by it, shaken by it, amazed that it - for it is amazing, but you have not believed, trusted this Saviour as your own Saviour.

The Jews in Jesus' time were often searching OT Scriptures, looking at prophecies like these in Isaiah; they desired the Messiah, the Christ and anticipated His coming. Yet when He was there among them, they did not recognise Him or believe in Him. The Messenger brought THE message and they did not believe it (John 12:37-38; Romans 10:16; John 1:10-11). We should not look at them and wonder why they did not believe, but we are to examine our own lives to question if we have believed and if not, why not? Those of us who have believed, we should not be shocked by people's indifference and unbelief, but we should sorrow and pray for family, friends, people and society. Being aware of the fact that people will remain in unbelief, should not cause us to despair, for better ones than us, even the Lord Jesus, have proclaimed the gospel and people did not believe. Now see:

2. The Apparent Reason for Unbelief. (v2)

The Jews of Jesus' time were expecting a mighty deliverer but they viewed Jesus as a nobody and did not believe. They looked on Him from the physical and military point of view and He seemed as a nobody. They saw nothing in Him for any hope, so He was not worth believing in. He came and didn't look like a Saviour, Messiah or Deliverer. He was, in terms of their idealised picture of the deliverer, a real disappointment - a nobody and insignificant. This is what Isaiah said would be their reaction and was the apparent reason for not believing the message which they had been told and shown.

He was as a tender shoot - the word means "*sucker, suckling, tender plant or shoot*". It is something not wanted. Suckers at the base of a

rose bush are not wanted and are removed. Suckers on trees, plants are not important and of no consequence, they are just a nuisance, so they are removed because they're not wanted. They appear so silently and may even be unnoticed. This Servant would come quietly, unnoticed and when noticed He would seem as of no consequence and was not wanted.

He is described as a root out of dry ground. A root **in** dry ground is considered of little use, but out of it, a dry root is such a totally useless object - it may be a bit of interest in its shape and texture, but a root out of dry ground is not of much use and considered worthless.

This One is viewed as useless, is unattractive to the natural mind which is further emphasised in 2nd part of v2. He was not a dramatic figure an impressive, slick personality oozing style, charm, talent and potential. He is viewed as worthless and as a nobody from the point of view of people who saw Him and He had nothing desirable in His appearance.

Read the Gospels and see how and why many people followed Jesus - often out of curiosity, for free food, or to see miracles or in need of a miracle. People reacted against His teaching and even went back from following Him when they saw He was not the political Deliverer they longed for. Jesus did not court popularity, nor was concerned when people did not flock after Him, for He knew what was in people's hearts and minds.

We read of the chanting, excited crowds on Palm Sunday, but that soon gave way to the baying mob on Good Friday "*We will not have this man rule over us.*" But what is **OUR** reaction to Jesus? What would be our reasons for our unbelief? You know who Jesus claims to be; you've heard of Him and all He's done, but perhaps you are still not believing! Is He as nothing, a nobody to you in your

estimation? You may feel, know even, He is the Saviour, the Deliverer and yet you still refuse to believe!

Yet to those of us here who have believed, what a wonderful and glorious person we have come to know - One who is precious to God the Father and Holy Spirit, One who is so lovely and precious to us. We have tasted that the Lord is good and we delight in Him and want others to know Him, to experience His love and care. We can be even looking forward to the time when will fully enjoy Him, His love and company in heaven. This seemingly insignificant One is the One who is altogether lovely and we see Him not as a sucker, a tender plant and dry root of no consequence, but we see Him as they honoured of God (11:1-2). When the house of David and Jesse seemed all gone, this One arose from it and even though as a dry root, when planted in His death, He will be fruitful. Yes, this One may seem insignificant to many here on earth, but He is the most significant One in heaven and eternity. Let's move on and see:

3. The Active Evil of Unbelief. (v3)

The apparent reasons for unbelief was that He seemed as nothing, a nobody, but this verse exposes an active evil - as we see revealed the active hostility of people toward Him. It wasn't that they could not be bothered, but there was a conscious and deliberate course of action taken, for He was not viewed as anyone special and He was not desired, but the negative "*not desired*" is here now positively put - "*he was despised and rejected by men*". Unbelief is not a neutral thing - morally or spiritually, for it is an active rebellion, despising and rejection - it is active wickedness, evil and sin.

The Lord Jesus, the Servant was just not ignored, neither were people neutral about Him or waiting to make their mind up one day, but He was and is actively despised and rejected. His own people did this, whether silently or openly! Many have done the same throughout history in the same ways. My concern is about us here? We are in a

church, we sing of and hear of Jesus, and yet some of you here do not believe, will not believe - this is not a neutral thing, but an active, despising and rejection of Jesus. Perhaps not consciously or openly, but He does not seem worth believing in - the cost to one's life and lifestyle, what family and friends might say, and so unbelief is held onto and all that Jesus is and has done is effectively despised and rejected.

In His life and ministry, He became a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. He the glorious One of heaven (52:13) entered this world, didn't cling to His glorious rights and status, but He hid them from view, He became a man, a Servant and as He lived among us, what sorrows He as God incarnate knew - He saw sin right up close and all its out workings in people's lives, He saw sin's consequences - disease, death, demon possession, lives lived away from God, religious ritualism and pride etc. All these must have grieved Him as God and brought sorrow to His heart and life.

We have a number of accounts of Jesus reactions to situations - we read of Him weeping, sorrowing, but never once do we read of Him laughing! It is not wrong to laugh, to enjoy life and all God gives us, but we are not to be glib, superficial and senseless. The Son of God who knew total joy and delight in heaven, yet He left all that to become the suffering Servant and Deliverer of His people. In doing so He became a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Always before Him was the cross - His death and suffering were present to His divine consciousness, yet it was His goal, His consuming goal and aim in life to lay down His life for His sheep - as the only way they could be saved and safe.

He was a true man, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh and in that humanity, He was despised and rejected by men - by the very ones He came to save. In His manhood He knew suffering - physical, emotional and suffering for our sin's guilt as He took our punishment

for our sin - all the wrath and judgement of God was poured out upon Him in our place. He knew and experienced the eternal fullness of suffering - the hell we deserved and should receive.

Yet this one was viewed, considered as One to hide our faces from. He became such a nauseating thing in our view, we couldn't face Him. Thank God for the hours of darkness on the cross, that the One suffering hell's torments was thankfully hidden from our view. Consider all the horrors that mankind has inflicted on mankind - napalm, radiation burns, bombings, gas attacks, genocide, biological warfare etc. - sadly photos of the consequences of such have sickened so many. Yet none of us can begin to imagine what horror and suffering the Son of God went through when the wrath of God, the righteous Judge, was poured out upon Him on the cross and He suffered for the likes of you and me. What did we do in response to such? We simply turned away and despised Him, did not esteem Him as anything. The word "*esteem*" is an accounting term - adding up a column to find out the total. We did that with all Jesus is, was, went through and our answer comes out as zero when we do not believe in Him as our Saviour.

These words in v2-3 are not to make us feel sorry and pity Jesus, not even for the fact that people do not and will not believe, but they are to shock us, to shame us. Put first-person pronouns in *these verses* (I, me) ... See there the active evil of unbelief in your life if you do not trust this One as your Saviour. We are to realise that by nature we do not deserve Him, we despised Him, we rejected Him, we hid our faces from Him and we esteemed Him as nothing!

Thankfully, the message of the gospel comes to such ones as us who despise Jesus and says "*whosoever will believe shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*" To remain in unbelief is to refuse and reject this Saviour, is an insult to God - the most expensive and only exclusive way of salvation He could ever provide. We are to consider

this active evil of unbelief most seriously, make sure it is not true of us. We see finally:

4. The Antidote Presented for Unbelief.

It is amazing that people then or now will not believe. There is God's Son - the Servant Supreme in all His glory after His suffering so much to make salvation possible. Incredibly He will freely and delightfully give this salvation to whoever will believe, but people do not, will not believe and will actively despise and reject Him and the so great salvation He has provided.

Can't such ones see, hear or understand? Surely, you'd have to be dead to ignore such an offer? Actually, such ones, even you, cannot see, or understand because they are spiritually blind, spiritually deaf, spiritually darkened in their understanding and they are spiritually dead! You would be wasting your time to show a frozen chicken a beautiful sunset or sunrise, or play to it the most wonderful piece of music, or read great poems to it or show it great films or plays, or take it out to an art gallery see the world's most wonderful paintings. It is dead to all stimuli. It is like that when we proclaim the gospel message, for people are by nature dead spiritually, cannot see, hear or understand of the Lord Jesus. They cannot savingly believe because of that. We can give the facts and people may grasp the facts and be able to give the right answers in a "*How to come to salvation*" quiz, but being a Christian, a believer is more than mere intellectual knowledge. It needs to be understood, applied to ourselves. Yes, it enters through the ears to the mind, but it is more than an intellectual process. For there needs to be more than an information transfer; there needs to be life put in the soul, blind eyes opened, deaf ears unstopped, the spiritual darkness of the mind be replaced with God given light. Without this we are all helpless and hopeless.

What we need is God to work - the arm of the Lord needs to be revealed. This is a way of saying that God needs to work in power,

saving power (52:10). No one can come to God unless God draws them and works in them. If you find you are seeking, questioning, have a hunger for the things of God, then realise that God is at work in you - as a hymn by Joseph Hart says *“Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream; all the fitness He requireth, is to feel your need of Him: this He gives you; 'tis the Spirit's rising beam!”* It means we call on God to work in us, bring us to Himself in faith. As Christians we are to pray for God to work, make bare His arm, to reveal the Saviour and the power of salvation - for God to work in saving power.

Yes, we need tell the message of the Servant by our words, life and good deeds, but we are to realise that we and they are totally dependent upon God to save - to open blind eyes, to give new life, to open deaf ears and we are to remember Isaiah 59:1(NKJV) *“Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.”*

We all need God's power - to proclaim what to believe. Left to ourselves, heaven's best, us telling heaven's way of salvation here on earth, will not be desired, but will be despised and rejected. With God at work, there is hope as His power is the antidote presented for unbelief. Pray our God would be active in our days, in our lives and the lives of our family and friends. Our duty is to call on God and believe, even to ask Him to help our unbelief.