

Matthew 12:18

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[0 : 00] What historical figure, living or dead, would you most like to meet, assuming that were possible? Any thoughts as to who you would like to meet and have the opportunity maybe to have a conversation with or pose questions to? Who would you like to meet? It's a question you sometimes hear posed on celebrity interviews or you see it in magazines and different questions are posed and sometimes that's one of the questions that is posed. Who would you most like to meet?

And different answers are offered. There's quite a large scope in terms of who to choose from. You sometimes hear people say, oh I'd like to meet the Dalai Lama or the Pope or Winston Churchill or Gandhi or Mandela. The list goes on. What about you? Who would you most like to meet? Well, allow me to commend to you the example of some Greeks who were in Jerusalem for the Passover festival at the time or in the days leading up to the death of Jesus. And these men, described to us simply as some Greeks, approached Philip, one of the disciples, and they approached him with a very specific request.

And their request was this, sir, we would like to see Jesus. Sir, we would like to see Jesus. We want to meet with Him. We want to have an interview with Him. We want to speak to Him.

We would like to see Jesus. My hope and my prayer is that this morning you can and do echo the sentiments of these men. Sir, we would like to see Jesus. If you're directing the request to me, you can dispense with sir and just go with, we would like to see Jesus. That will be sufficient.

Now, I hope that I'm able to respond to that request, if indeed that is what you would like to do. And certainly what I hope to be able to do this morning with the help of God's Word is to present you to Jesus. And I'm going to do so with the help of a portrait of Jesus that we are given in Matthew's gospel, though it is a portrait that originates some 700 years before Matthew wrote his gospel and that we find in the writings of the prophet Isaiah. And we read both of the passages concerned. But what we're going to do now is we're going to read again the second passage in Matthew's gospel. That's where we'll be focusing our attention, though we will make occasional reference to the original passage in Isaiah 42. So, turning to Matthew and chapter 12, let's just read from verse 18, the quotation from Isaiah.

[3 : 16] Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out. No one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.

A portrait of the Messiah, a portrait of Jesus. Matthew very clearly brings to bear these words from the prophet with that intention of describing Jesus and finding Jesus described prophetically in the prophet Isaiah. So, we have here in front of us a striking, and in some ways, given the content, a surprising portrait of Jesus. It's a portrait that is certainly worthy of our admiration, but a portrait that merits, indeed demands, more than mere admiration. It's good to admire this portrait of Jesus. That is a good thing.

to do. But it's not enough simply to admire the portrait before us. We'll come a little later on to what we need to do that goes beyond mere admiration. Now, in order to capture the big picture of this portrait that is painted with words, we'll need to try and steer clear of dwelling on the details. It's a fairly significant passage that has been quoted from the prophet, and there's many intriguing details within it. But this morning, we'll have to try and steer clear of those details to try and get an image of the big picture.

I think we can summarize the big picture that is presented to us by this portrait by acknowledging three aspects of the portrait that are revealed, or that the portrait reveals about Jesus. It reveals, first of all, something of His identity, and particularly in relationship with God the Father.

That's the first thing we're going to notice, what the portrait reveals concerning the identity of Jesus, and specifically in relationship with God the Father. But the portrait also reveals something of His mission, the mission of the one designated as God's servant. What service was this servant to render?

[6 : 25] What is the mission that He has been commended by the Father? So, we'll see His identity in relationship to the Father, but also His mission commended to Him by the Father. But then also, this portrait, in very beautiful language, describes something of the manner in which the servant fulfills His mission. So, we don't simply have a bold description.

Well, this is what He has to do, or this is what He will do. We're also told something about the manner in which He does so. And this manner is revealing of God the Father. You see, as we've already mentioned in prayer, Jesus rightly and very helpfully made clear to His disciples, if you've seen me, you have seen the Father. And so, when we discover something of Jesus, and particularly here, the manner in which He fulfills His mission, that tells us something about God the Father. For if we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father.

So, these three elements that we have in this portrait, the identity of Jesus in relationship to the Father, the mission of Jesus commended to Him by the Father, and the manner in which He fulfills the mission, revealing of God the Father.

First then, His identity in relationship with God the Father. And I think three words capture, in significant measure, what we're told about Jesus in relationship with God the Father.

The three words that we find here in the quotation that Matthew employs are the word servant, the word chosen, and the word loved. Then in verse 18, Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love in whom I delight.

[8 : 22] Servant, chosen, and loved. All words that relate Jesus to the Father. First of all, He is God's servant.

God is the one speaking in this passage, and this is what He says, Here is my servant. Here is my servant.

It's clear that Matthew is identifying the one spoken of with Jesus. And the Father says, Jesus is my servant. We're speaking of Jesus.

Jesus' identity, particularly in relation to the Father. And yet, what is placed to the fore here is not His sonship. That is something that is true and that we discover elsewhere.

But here, what is to the fore is His servanthood. He is a servant of God. He is a servant of God the Father. The Father speaks of Him as my servant.

[9 : 22] Jesus is the one who willingly and faithfully submits to the Father's authority and will. Jesus is the one who, as we were thinking about last week, delights to do the Father's will as the Father's servant.

Now, this portrait that we have here in Matthew's gospel was first provided by God through Isaiah as part of a collection of passages that presented the promised Messiah as God's perfect and preeminent servant.

There's a number of passages in Isaiah sometimes referred to as the servant passages. This is one of them where the Messiah that was to come is described in these terms.

This is the preeminent truth that these passages focus on concerning the one who was to come as God's servant. And Jesus, in relationship to God the Father, here is presented as His servant.

He is the King of kings. But He is also, in the words of the hymn that we sometimes sing, our servant, King. Now, even the joining of these two words just breaks down human conceptions of authority and majesty and power.

[10 : 51] And yet they are descriptive of Jesus. They reveal to us His identity. He is the Father's servant. But the other word that we identify here, that we have here in the portrait, is the word chosen.

Here is my servant whom I have chosen. God the Father in eternity chose Jesus for the carrying out of His loving and saving purposes on our behalf.

Jesus did not take upon Himself this mission. He was chosen for the mission that He performed. He was chosen, it has to be said, as the only one capable of fulfilling the mission commended.

The language is the language we find, and we have no difficulty in recognizing that it is true that the Father chose the Son to fulfill this mission. But we also recognize that the Father had a short lead of one when it came to making His election.

There was no one else who could have done what Jesus did. Yes, He was chosen, but He was chosen from a list of one possibility. He alone could fulfill the mission.

[12:09] He was chosen for it, and He fulfilled it. Servant, chosen, but then also the other word that we say with the other two, get across for us, paint for us this aspect of the portrait of His identity.

Servant, chosen, but then also loved. Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love. This truth, perhaps above all others, is at the heart of His identity.

He is loved by the Father. Eternally loved. Intimately loved. Tenderly loved. Jesus is the beloved, the loved one. And one aspect or expression of the Father's love is touched on in what follows.

The Father's delight in His Son. That could have been a fourth word, but I'm taking it really as being an aspect of the Father's love that He bears towards His Son.

That this love is expressed in the Father's delight in His Son. He is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight. The Father's delight in His Son, in Jesus.

[13:23] A demonstration, an expression of His love. He delights in the one He loves. Now that said, this expression of the Father's delight in the Son also points to one particular cause for the Father's delight.

Not simply in the fact that Jesus is His Son. That would be reason enough for the Father to delight. But particularly the delight is to be understood in the light of the Son, servants, faithful fulfilling of the Father's commission.

The Father delights particularly in Jesus because of the manner in which He willingly and faithfully fulfills the commission that He has given.

And we say that not only in the basis of the language that we find here, but particularly as we note how this language of the Father delighting in His servant is the language that we also find.

Very similar language at Jesus' baptism and also in the Mount of Transfiguration. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

[14:36] This is my Son in whom I delight. And at the baptism particularly, it's so clear that the reason, the particular reason for the Father's delight is the Son's willing submission to the task that He has been given.

And here too, this particularly explains the Father's delight. This then is something of what we're able to discover concerning the identity of Jesus from this portrait.

But let's move on to what we discover concerning His mission. And there we are given information in verse 18 in the second half of the verse.

And then towards the end of verse 20 and leading into verse 21, let's just read those two parts of the portrait that touch on very specifically the mission that the servant has been given.

I will put my spirit on him. The Father is continuing to speak concerning this one He has described as my servant. I will put my spirit on him and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

[15:45] And then towards the end, we read, Till he leads justice to victory in his hope the nations will put, sorry, in his name the nations will put their hope.

So in these words, we have something that we're able to discover concerning his mission. And I think it tells us something of what his mission is.

It also tells us something of the empowerment that he has granted in order to fulfill the mission. But it also tells us of the certain outcome of the mission.

What is the mission? Well, there we have it in verse 18. He will proclaim justice to the nations. And the key word here that we need to get our heads around is this word justice.

It's a very important Hebrew word, mishpat. And it's a word that is rich in meaning, which is good, but is also challenging.

[16:46] Because the richer it is, the more challenging to have a good grip on what it means. But let's try and do some justice to what this word means.

It really is at the heart of our understanding, certainly from this passage, what the mission of this chosen servant is. What is this justice that he has been sent to proclaim to the nations?

Justice, as it is conceived in the Bible, has two sides to it. And even this is probably overly simplifying matters.

But nonetheless, let's go with this. Two sides to it. First of all, there is the side, the sense of justice as the execution of judgment on the wicked.

On the unjust, on those who have acted unjustly and wickedly. Justice demands that such be dealt with. And so justice involves this element.

[17 : 47] And it's a very integral element to any biblical conception of justice. Judgment, just punishment on the wicked, on the evildoer, on those who are enemies of God.

And it's interesting that this very portrait that Matthew draws on, he does so in the very context of the Pharisees scheming to kill Jesus.

We read from verse 14 to capture that context. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. And then Matthew speaks of Jesus as the one who has come to proclaim justice. Well, one aspect of that is executing judgment on the wicked, on evildoers, on enemies of God. But the other side to justice, as the Bible conceives of justice, involves the care afforded to the weak or to those who are victims of injustice.

It's not all about punishing the evildoer. It is married with a lifting up, a caring for, a restoring those who are the victims, those who are weak and marginalized and oppressed.

[19 : 00] Justice in a biblical conception cannot limit itself to simply punishing the bad guy. It must be about, is about, lifting up and caring for those who suffer and who are victims of injustice.

Justice, as the Bible conceives justice, as God conceived justice, is about doing the right thing. It is about the ultimate righting of all wrongs.

And that involves punishment, but it also involves restoration. God's servant, Messiah Jesus, is God's answer to the world's plight.

He is the answer. And that could sound terribly simplistic, but it's true. He is God's answer. He has come to proclaim and to do justice.

It's interesting that in Jesus' own conception, this justice is inextricably connected with, we might say, married to love.

[20 : 09] Let's just notice very briefly what Jesus says, speaking to the very Pharisees who are scheming to kill him. We've read that in verse 14. When, on another occasion, he is addressing them.

We find that in Luke chapter 11 and verse 42. And our interest in this verse, I hope, will become immediately apparent when we read it. And we see how Jesus deals with or combines justice with love as two elements that cannot be separated.

In Luke 11 verse 42, we read, Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs. So careful to obey the minutiae of the law.

Indeed, laws that they'd invented for themselves. God hadn't made enough, so they made up some more. But then what does Jesus say in condemning them or in judging them? But you neglect justice and the love of God.

You neglect justice and the love of God. The biblical conception of justice has an integral element.

[21 : 20] The love of God to those who suffer, to those who are victims of wickedness and injustice and oppression. This mission that was commended to Jesus as God's chosen servant.

This mission of proclaiming and securing justice reaches its climax at the cross, at Calvary. At the cross, justice is dispensed.

At the cross, evil and injustice receives its just reward. As Jesus takes upon Himself the sin of the world and is punished for that sin.

But also at the cross, forgiveness and restoration is secured for the weak and the oppressed and the marginalized. Indeed, any who would call on the name of the Lord.

This is His mission to proclaim justice to the nations. But for this mission, He is empowered by the one who commends Him the mission. I will put my spirit on Him, declares the Father.

[22 : 28] I will put my spirit on Him. How is the servant empowered for His mission? Well, He is empowered by the Spirit who is granted to Him.

Or to use the language here, I will put my spirit on Him. Now, what these words mean? Most simply and significantly is the promise and assurance of God's very presence to accompany and empower. These are words that are taken from the Old Testament. And certainly in the Old Testament, when that kind of language would be employed, what God is saying is, I will be with you.

I will put my spirit on Him. It's God's way of saying, I will be with you. I will accompany you. I will empower you. This isn't something that God does at arm's length.

No, this is God's promise of His own presence and empowering for the servant. He is commending this mission to. The mission, empowerment for mission.

[23 : 36] And then very briefly, just note, the outcome of the mission that in this portrait is also made clear to us. And the outcome, if we had to say one word to describe it, it would be the word

certain.

The outcome is certain. In verse 20, it ends that He will do these things till He leads justice to victory. There's no dubiety.

There's no doubt as to the outcome. There's no sense of, well, He'll do His best. And let's see what happens. The enemies are great. And, well, we'll see if He manages. We don't doubt His integrity. We don't doubt the effort that He will put in. We don't doubt His many gifts. But, well, let's just see what happens. No, there's none of that. He will lead justice to victory. That is not in question. That's not open for debate. When that will happen is another matter. But there is no doubt as to the certainty of the outcome. He will lead justice to victory.

[24 : 35] And the quotation ends with another expression of certainty. In His name, the nations will put their hope. They will. This is going to happen.

Of course, we live in a time of great privilege when we can look around the nations and see how it is happening. For Matthew, for Isaiah, this was an expectation that they could look forward to in faith. We live in the privilege of being able to witness for ourselves how this is in some measure, we might even say significant measure, coming to fruition.

But let's move on to see the third aspect of this portrait that we have here in our passage. And that concerns the manner in which God's chosen servant fulfills His mission.

And this matter of the manner in which He does so is dealt with in verses 19 and 20. How will this heaven-sent servant fulfill His global mission?

[25 : 49] Very quietly and very gently. Even just saying that leads us to just pause for a moment. Isn't this a remarkable thing?

Here is one who is given a mission that scope is global, that victory is secure, that involves the defeat of powerful enemies. Great forces ranged against Him.

And yet, how will He fulfill His mission? Very quietly and very gently. This is not about the way in which we would conceive of power and authority and how it finds expression.

No, this servant, God's servant, God's chosen servant, He goes about His business of proclaiming justice, of securing justice for the nations, very quietly and very gently.

He does it very quietly, and that is expressed by means of negatives. In our passage, He will not quarrel or cry out. No one will hear His voice in the streets. The message that He brings carries an intrinsic authority that does not need to be secured or enhanced by amplification.

[27 : 05] Even there, we would do well just to pause and take that on board. His authority is intrinsic. He doesn't need to shout. He doesn't need to gain an audience by devious or psychological means.

No, the message itself has power. The word that He brings has power. The mission that He fulfills has power. Shouting won't make what He says any more true.

If we are looking for the authority that validates His message, if indeed He even needs to point to authority that validates His message, but if we were to be looking for authority that validates His message, it's not to be found in His shouting, but in His serving, in His quiet and unassuming service, there lies His visible authority, peculiar though that may seem to us, and contrary to the wisdom of the world.

The manner in which He fulfills His mission is quietly and gently. We don't really need to distinguish too greatly between these two words, but there is a gentleness in His proclamation, but there is also a gentleness in the manner that He brings justice to the weak and the oppressed.

A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out. He is so gentle that nothing, no one, is so broken as to be beyond His willingness and capacity to restore and make whole again.

[28 : 49] In the economy, in the priorities of God's servant, no one, no one is beyond redemption, no one is disposable, no one is worthless.

as God's chosen servant considers the mission He has been given, and as He looks out over all of us, those He has been sent to save, He doesn't distinguish between us and say, well, this one's beyond redemption, this one's too far gone, there's no purpose in securing justice for this one. Best to just cast them aside and focus on more promising material. That goes wholly contrary to the manner in which He operates.

Bruised reeds and smoldering wicks are of value to Messiah Jesus. There is an intriguing aspect to Jesus' gentleness towards the bruised and the broken that I want to very quickly draw your

attention to.

In the original passage in Isaiah, the words bruised and faintly burning, that's the way they're translated in Isaiah chapter 42. We're going to, just going back to Isaiah, we're moving from Matthew back to Isaiah and going back to source, as it were, for this passage.

[30 : 17] And there in verse 3 of Isaiah 42, we have the words, they're familiar to us from Matthew, a bruised reed he will not break. Notice the word bruised. And then a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

That verse is almost word for word found in Matthew. The two words that are significant there are bruised and smoldering. And the reason why they're very interesting is that they are then paralleled. These two words, bruised and smoldering, faintly burning, as they can also be translated, they're paralleled in verse 4 in something that is said concerning the servant.

Verse 4 of Isaiah 42. This verse we don't find in Matthew's use of the passage. But then in verse 4, it begins, he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.

The equivalent in Matthew is, he will lead justice to victory. But there's this element in Isaiah, he will not falter or be discouraged. Now the very curious aspect to this is that these two words, falter and discouraged, are the same words in Hebrew as the words bruised and smoldering.

[31 : 28] But they're used of the servant. And he's described using this language of bruised and smoldering or lightly or faintly burning.

Now it's true that it's said that he will not be bruised, he will not smolder, he will not faintly burn, unlike those that he is attending to.

And yet the equivalence of language in the light of the incarnation, in the light of the multiple trials and sufferings of Jesus, I think allows us to understand the language that is employed as pointing to this reality.

That Jesus, though subject to all that would bruise and near extinguish, as he was, as he came into this world, he was not defeated.

And he deals with those who are bruised as one bruised but not broken. He deals with the faint and the fragile as one who remains standing, though subject to frailty and fragility.

[32 : 43] It's not simply that he has the power to help, but he has the experience to know what it's like to be where you are in that weak and frail and fragile and bruised and indeed in that broken place.

And so he is eminently and uniquely equipped to deal gently with you. We have then a portrait of Jesus, his identity as God's servant, chosen and loved, his mission to proclaim and secure justice for the nations, the manner in which he goes about his mission quietly and gently.

And it's all very admirable. It's all worthy of our admiration. But let's return to where we began. Are we just to admire? We must do more than admire.

Do you know why? Because the work that he is spoken of here in this passage is a work that is not finished. One aspect of the work of God's chosen servant, a fundamental aspect of his work, was finished.

It was finished on the cross. Hence the cry of victory. It is finished. But the work of the servant, grounded in and flowing from his work on the cross, continues.

[34 : 10] What have we read? In the portrait we read, in his name, the nations will put their trust. This is a continuing work that has been spoken of.

It is a work that was not completed by Jesus during his time on earth. So who will carry out this work? This work, the outcome of which is certain, who will carry out this work?

Now in all that we've said this morning, we've simply taken as a given that the servant, my servant, that we read of there in our passage, my servant is Jesus.

And that is true. Matthew evidently is using the passage and identifying Jesus with the character presented. So it's been entirely legitimate to consider the passage as speaking of Jesus.

He is the servant. And yet as we return to source and the original prophecy, we can rightly identify another servant.

[35 : 12] And the two are not mutually exclusive. We only need to turn to the previous chapter, two chapters before in Isaiah chapter 40 and verses 8 to 10.

Or rather 41, sorry. Just one chapter before. Isaiah 41 and verses 8 to 10. Really just reading the verses that will be sufficient without commentary.

Who is the servant that is spoken of in the following chapter? Well, what does Isaiah say in chapter 41? God is speaking through Isaiah and this is what we read.

But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham, my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners, I called you.

I said, You are my servant. I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you.

[36 : 12] I will uphold you by my righteous right hand. Who is God's servant in the light of what we've read just in the previous chapter? Israel.

Or as we apply the language to the New Testament age? The church. We are God's servant. Jesus is God's preeminent servant. But those called by Jesus to be like Jesus are individually and very especially corporately God's servant.

We are, you are, God's servant. We are chosen. We are loved. God delights in us. Difficult though it may be for us to conceive that that could be so.

And we are, as God's servant, to participate in the same mission of proclaiming justice to the nations, empowered and accompanied by God.

How are we to serve? Well, in the same manner as the servant whose portrait is painted for us by Isaiah and then picked up on by Matthew.

[37 : 19] We are to serve quietly and gently persuaded that all including ourselves however broken are precious. Precious in God's sight and so they can be no less so in ours.

And we would do well to just pause and ponder and we don't have the time to do that right now but I would encourage you to do so even as you think about these things. Is that how you serve? Is that how you serve the God who has chosen you to be part of this great mission?

Do you serve quietly and gently with that perspective on the value of those round about you however bruised, however broken, however difficult they might be or we might be?

And as we serve, as Jesus served and continues to serve through us, we will see and celebrate the glorious and certain outcome anticipated by Isaiah.

In his name, the nations will put their trust. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you. We thank you. Thank you.