

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, bring Your miraculous power to bear on the lives of those who need you most. Heal those who suffer, liberate those who are in bondage, raise up those who are dead in their sins and declare Your Good News for all humanity. May we be ready to hear Your Word and do Your will, O Lord: AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Internet Church

People across the world are starting up new ventures on the internet all the time. Pray for the Lord to bless those ventures of internet churches that freely share the Gospel.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for rest and sleep
- Pray for the people and government of Afghanistan
- Pray about the economic problems felt by your country

Meditation

Do not worry, the Lord will provide for you,
Whatever you do and wherever you go.
Do not stray, the Lord has shown you His path,
A safe route to follow, tried and tested.
Do not delay, the Lord calls you onwards,
There's no security if you stay where you are.
Do not sin, the Lord has warned you before,
Turn to Him if you have trouble, not to Satan.
Do not fear, the Lord will keep you secure,
He has bound all that frightens you.
Do not weep, the Lord has seen your distress,
The source of your pain has been covered.
Do not be fickle, the Lord will not change,
Be secure in the One who cares for you.

Bible Study - Matthew 12:15-21

¹⁵ Jesus, aware of this, left there. Crowds followed him, and he healed them all; ¹⁶ warning them not to make him known.

¹⁷ This was to fulfil what the prophet Isaiah had said:

¹⁸ 'Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved in whom my soul delights.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he shall announce justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹ He will not contend or shout aloud,
and no one will hear his voice in the streets;

²⁰ he will not break a bruised reed
or snuff out a smouldering wick,
until he makes justice victorious

²¹ and the Gentiles have hope in his name.'

Review

At the end of the previous incident, the Pharisees vowed together to destroy Jesus. They had come to their decision about Him and now had to make their plans. As Matthew's Gospel proceeds, we will find out what they did, and how they eventually took their opportunity to arrest Jesus when He came to Jerusalem for the annual Passover festival (Matt 21f.) In a touching and moving phrase, Matthew records that Jesus turned and 'left there'. He surely knew the heart of the Pharisees, and understood that there was no point in further discussion unless they challenged Him again.

In response to this, Jesus calmly turned back to the crowds who followed Him and ministered to them. He knew their need of Him, and He knew that He could not continue to do this for long (12:15); but He did not show upset or anger at what had happened and he was never in danger of losing control of Himself, His life or His ministry. The brief episode described here is expanded in Mark 3:7-12, where we can read of the great crush of a crowd which forced Jesus into a boat (Mark 3:9), but Jesus persisted to minister by delivering unclean spirits and healing 'many people'.

Matthew, however, breaks into the story line of the Gospel and gives a brief eulogy to Jesus, using the words of the prophet Isaiah (12:18-21). It is the longest quote from the Old Testament in Matthew's Gospel, and confirms the core message of the Gospel that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the chosen one of God. When Matthew previously quoted Isaiah in order to describe Jesus' ministry, He used the great 'messenger' motif from Isaiah 40:3-11 (see Matt 11:10 – and also Mal 3:1), and before that he used the instructions to ministry found in Isaiah 61:1,2 (see Matt 10:1, 8; 11:5). These powerful prophecies explained Jesus' ministry according to the one prophet of the Old Testament who spoke most about what God would do through His chosen One. The word 'Messiah' (or 'Anointed One') is not used much in the Old Testament, but by the time of Jesus, the word drew together all the different expectations surrounding God's chosen and anointed servant, summarising the work of the prophets and other scriptures. So when Matthew quotes Isaiah here, the passage does not mention the word 'Messiah', but we may be certain that Matthew intended the quote to explain who the Messiah was.

Matthew spotted, quite clearly, that what Jesus did after the healing of the man with the withered arm and the dispute with the Pharisees, was best described by the great prophetic theme from Isaiah of the 'Suffering Servant'. He therefore quoted from the very first 'Servant Song' in Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4 and Matt 12:18-21). Most of the quote is close to the Hebrew original, with the few differences easily explained by the possible use of an Aramaic 'Targum' of Isaiah (an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew) use in Jesus' day.

The quote begins by affirming Jesus' identity through the blessing of God 'This is my Servant ... I will put my Spirit on Him' (12:18). When we realise that the Greek word for 'servant' here is also the same word for 'son', then you can see how these words remind us of Jesus' baptism, and also point forward to the transfiguration (Matt 17:5). The 'Servant' figure in Isaiah 42 was previously thought to refer to Israel and her calling, but when we identify Jesus as the Servant and Son of God instead of Israel, then the passage takes on new meaning. Israel had failed in its mission of bringing 'Good News' to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6), and so Jesus would do what Israel could not, in order to fulfil the Old Testament.

But it is the manner in which this is done that is extraordinary. Verse 19 says 'he will not contend or shout' and this reminds us of Jesus' turning away from the arguments with the Pharisees(12:15), as Matthew had already observed. Further, when the prophet says 'no one will hear His voice in the streets', we are thrust forward in Matthew's Gospel to the time when no one would stand with Jesus, who was silent in front of His accusers. Next, the 'bruised reed' and the 'smouldering wick' (12:20) could either refer to the almost extinct faith of Israel that Jesus alone ensured would not fail in its task, or the meagre faith of the disciples and the people which Jesus nurtured during His ministry. Either is possible. However, this verse describes the Messiah leading people through from faltering faith to the victory of justice foretold in nearly all the prophets (see Isaiah 1, Hosea 6, Amos 5, Micah 6 etc.). Moreover, despite the priority of the Jewish mission (see 10:6), Matthew had

in mind the ultimate goal of the mission to all Gentiles and to the whole world (12:21); a mission He personally gave to the disciples when He was raised from the dead (28:19).

From both a wonderful miracle and the disturbing breakdown between Jesus and the Pharisees, Matthew saw evidence in Jesus of His true character (11:29) which fulfilled the ancient prophecy about the coming of the Messiah as the 'Suffering Servant'. The authority of Jesus therefore showed in his humility; of healing a man on the Sabbath day and withdrawing from confrontation with the Pharisees knowing what they planned to do. It also showed in His pity for the crowds at a time when He must have felt dreadful about what was happening around Him. But Matthew says to us, 'this is our Jesus!'

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How easy is it to respond to rejection with the meekness and control that Jesus showed? How can we copy this?
2. Read through some of the Old Testament texts quoted and discuss how they help us understand Jesus; who He is and what He does.
3. When you use the word 'Messiah', what comes to mind, and is it the same as the Messiah as described in the New Testament?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This passage is rather like a personal reflection on the part of Matthew, but one which, consistent with his entire Gospel, points almost exclusively to Jesus. I have often wondered what I can do to 'point to Jesus' in my own life, and always conclude that I can only do this by a mixture of 'who I am'; and 'what I do'. It sounds simple, but it is very hard to put into effect.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Read through some of the servant songs of Isaiah 42-53 or take a look at the companion studies to this series in Isaiah, and familiarise yourself with what the Old Testament prophets say about Jesus.
- Do you know when to 'turn away' in a situation, because your own contribution is not something which can bear fruit due to the wrongful intentions or opinions of others? It is hard to do, but worthwhile ensuring that you can discipline yourself to it.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may we keep ourselves free from sin by being obedient to Your will, serving the people around us and seeking to honour You through all we do. Then, when we fall foul of evil's trickery, may we have the courage to come back for your forgiveness and help. Keep us on the narrow way, Lord Jesus; AMEN