

The Messiah

Sunday 27th June 2010

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Readings:

Philippians 2: 1 – 11

Psalm 40: 1 – 3

John 4: 1 – 26

As we continue our series of sermons on the theme 'Who is Jesus' we come today to 'Jesus the Messiah'. But what do we mean by 'the Messiah'?

Messiah:

- Anointed one
- The promised one
- The great deliverer who was to come

Messiah is a translation of the Hebrew word meaning, "Anointed one" that was translated into Greek as *Christos* a term used 39 times in the OT.

So throughout the Old Testament there are many prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah and the great work he was to accomplish on earth. The prophecies became more definite and clearer with time - the light shone brighter.

Many reference books have lists or charts of these prophecies and how they were fulfilled in the person of Jesus. There isn't time to look at these but some of the clearest ones are in the suffering servant passages of Isaiah such as Isaiah 53: 5 - 7:

'But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.'

The Jews would have been well aware of these OT prophecies that spoke about the Messiah and his blessings to the nation ... and yet they failed to see that Jesus was that long awaited Messiah, the person who would be their saviour!

To help understand the reading we had from John's gospel it is worth first looking at the groups of people mentioned in the reading - the Jews, the Pharisees and the Samaritans.

Jews:

- Originally used to refer to the tribe of Judah later used to cover the whole nation.
- God's chosen people to whom God gave the law through Moses.

Pharisees:

- An ancient Jewish group devoted to the strict observance of the holy law.

Samaritans:

- Inhabitants of the ancient district of Samaria.
- They were "half-breeds," part Jew and part Gentile.
- They revered the law as revealed to Moses by God.
- Their scripture includes Genesis through to Deuteronomy.
- Regarded themselves as the true heirs to the Mosaic tradition.

As the Samaritans had their own religious system in Samaria that competed with the claims of the Jews one can see that the Jews would have major issues with the Samaritans! Coupled with this the Samaritans were considered outcasts and were despised by the Jews.

In the gospel reading John tells us that the news of Jesus' ministry had reached the ears of the Pharisees and that they knew his ministry was more popular than that of John the Baptist ... and yet when this news reached Jesus we are told he left the region of Judea to go back to Galilee ... why? Surely he would have taken this news as a sign of progress ... so why go away?

The simple answer ... it wasn't God's timing for Jesus' final confrontation with the Pharisees and the other leaders.

But why go via Samaria? Since the Samaritans were hated by the Jews, most strict Jews travelling from Judea to Galilee took a route around Samaria by crossing to the east bank of the River Jordan and travelling through Perea, even though it was a longer journey.

Only if their journey was urgent would the Jews travel through Samaria ... but Jesus' journey was not urgent and yet verse 4 tells us 'he had to go through Samaria'.

Jesus "needed to go through Samaria" (v. 4) because God had planned for him to meet with this sinful Samaritan woman ... and what a meeting it turned out to be!

"Never speak to a woman in the street, even if she be your wife"; "Burn the words of the law rather than teach them to a woman," were maxims then current in Jewish society.

Hence it was almost unheard of for a Jewish man, let alone a rabbi or 'teacher', to ask a favour of any woman, the fact that the woman was a Samaritan, was even more unusual.

This woman knew nothing about Jesus other than that he was a thirsty Jew ... but she was to quickly find out that this was no ordinary man. Jesus speaks to her about living water – the water of life but she understands this to literally mean physical water.

In her ignorance she confuses the physical and the spiritual. So Jesus points out to her that the things of the world only offer temporary satisfaction and so those without Christ will always “thirst again.”

Jesus startles the woman by showing he knows what a sinful life she leads and from this revelation, which was perfectly true; and so she concludes that she is talking to a prophet.

The Samaritan woman shows her knowledge and faith when she says to Jesus, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” (v25)

Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”(v26) Jesus was saying that he was the Messiah – what a claim to make!

In this meeting with the Samaritan woman we see both the human and divine sides of Jesus:

- His human side: he is tired and weary from travelling he needed a rest and he is a thirsty man - just like any other human being would after such a long journey, and
- His divine side, in the way he spoke with her without prejudice, the things he said to her and the fact he knew about her life.

Reading on in the chapter we learn that Jesus stayed with the Samaritans two days and many were brought to faith in Jesus v42:

‘They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”’

The Samaritans had come to the conclusion that so many of the Jews failed to grasp – Jesus was the saviour of the world, the Messiah.

Both the Jews and the Samaritans were eagerly looking forward to the coming of the Messiah but they were looking for a powerful king who would free them from subservience to occupying forces and make the nation the great nation it once was.

But what they got didn’t seem to fit that image of an all powerful king for God sent a humble servant who would suffer for the sins of all people! This didn’t make sense to them and still doesn’t if you consider worldly ways and human pride ... for the Messiah’s strength is shown through humility, suffering and mercy.

How could the Jews have known therefore that Jesus was the promised Messiah? Yes he told the Samaritan woman in as many words that he was indeed the

promised Messiah – but the evidence was in His ministry ... actions speak louder than words!

When John the Baptist sent his followers to ask:

"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7: 19)

Jesus told them:

"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (Luke 7: 22)

These were unquestionable facts, even to the greatest sceptic, for these acts were witnessed by many impartial people ... people who had seen with their very own eyes – and some believed and others just wondered about the miracles they had seen!

These acts though were the ones foretold by the prophets:

'Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy' ... (Isaiah 35: 5 – 6)

'The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners' ... (Isaiah 61: 1)

The 'Encyclopaedia of Bible Facts' edited by Mark Water has this quotation:

"Jesus is the central figure of the Bible. His birth as the Jewish Messiah and Saviour of the world was prophesied by Old Testament authors. Christ fulfilled 100 percent of all the Old Testament predictions of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah." Campus Crusade for Christ

But Jesus the Messiah is not just the saviour of the Jews as many Jews believed for he is the saviour of the world:

'I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.' (Isaiah 49: 6)

Jesus showed none of the trappings of the Messiah, the great leader, or king, the Jews had awaited for so many years and perhaps that is why so many failed to recognise him as their Messiah, despite the miraculous things he did.

Instead Jesus was humble, born to a working class family; he didn't have a great education, he didn't wear fine clothes or stay in the best hostels. He didn't have a great army of people supporting him just a few disciples mostly from poor working class backgrounds - who many would have regarded as a rabble.

But, like it or not, Jesus was the promised Messiah and Paul tells us that we too should have the attitude of Jesus Christ:

'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!' (Philippians 2: 6 - 8)

In the following chapter of Philippians Paul tells his readers that he was religious before he was saved, but his religion alone, based on obeying the law, could not save him. But he was so sincere and confident in his faith that he initially persecuted those who followed Christ believing that it was the right thing to do.

If any man could get to heaven on the basis of character and religion, it was Paul ... but his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus transformed his life and made him realise that it was only through Christ that he could truly be saved.

Likewise the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus transformed her life and the lives of many other Samaritans.

And in the same way he will transform our lives when, like them, we accept Jesus as our Lord and saviour for Jesus is the Messiah the anointed one, the saviour, the redeemer ... our Messiah, our saviour, our redeemer!