

w/b 16th April 2017 (Easter Sunday)

God's plan for mankind

LAUNCH

The story of the three trees was acted out beautifully for us on Sunday.

The first tree wanted to hold treasure, but was made into a feeding trough for animals. However it was destined to hold the greatest treasure the world has known - Jesus.

The second tree wanted to be a great ship but was made into a fishing boat; although confined to lakes it became swept up in a great storm and was hardly able to carry its crew. Yet when one man on board woke up, spoke to the storm and it immediately abated, that tree knew she was carrying the King of Kings.

The third tree just wanted to become the tallest tree in the world and point people to heaven; yet she was cut down and dumped in a timber yard till she was fashioned into a cross for a cruel execution. When the crucified man rose from the grave, that cross pointed all mankind to heaven.

What does this story mean for us? In what ways does God take our expectations, change them and finally reveal His magnificent purposes in them?

Read: Isaiah 52 v13-53v12

DISCOVERY & UNDERSTANDING

Over Easter we have, as is right at this time of the year, been considering the events leading up to the crucifixion, Jesus' death and his glorious resurrection. It was the culmination of God's magnificent plan for mankind. Yet many were expecting the Messiah to come in a different form and to rescue the Jewish people from oppression, particularly from the Romans.

God's plan did not fit in with man's preconceptions; just as those trees were disappointed that it seemed to them that their expectations were not being met. Yet again, like those trees, God's fulfilment of the plan turned out to be much greater: he rescued *all* mankind from *all* oppression.

Yet God had spelt out his plan very explicitly, especially so in Isaiah 52-53. Isaiah began his ministry 'in the year that King Uzziah died' (Is 6 v1), which was 740bc. This passage was written towards the end of Isaiah's ministry: he died in 681bc so these words were written at least 700 years before Jesus' crucifixion.

Almost every verse of this passage predicts different events in the New Testament, both in the Gospels and the Epistles, that we know to be true about Jesus. Have a look at the following verses (next page) and see what parallels there are in the New Testament.

Discuss how these New Testament scriptures represent the fulfilment of the prophecy spoken through Isaiah. (There are plenty of other ones so feel free to add some of your own. And we are under grace, so if you run out of time, don't feel you must plough through all of them, especially if you're having a good discussion. You could always set some as homework!)

Isaiah	New Testament
52:13	Philippians 2:8-11
52:14	Matthew 27:27-31; Luke 23:35-39
52:15	1 Peter 1:1b-2; Hebrews 10:19-22; Colossians 1:19-20
53:2	Luke 2:40; Luke 5:4-10 (<i>nothing special in Jesus' appearance; his disciples were convinced by him because he could find fish!</i>)
53:3	Luke 4:28-29: right at the start of his ministry; Matthew 13:54-57; Luke 6:7-11, 22:60, 23:4-5, 18-25 Familiar with suffering: John 11:35; Matthew 26:36-38
53:4	Matthew 8:16-17; Acts 3:3-6
53:5a	John 19:18, 33-34
53:5b-6	Hebrews 9:11-14; 1 Peter 2:24-25
53:7-8	Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:8-11, 13-24
53:9	John 19:38-42
53:10a	Luke 22:42-43
53:10b-12	John 17:20, 24; Acts 2:46-47

APPLICATION

The Gospel story is the absolute basis of our faith. What difference does it make to us not only to have contemporary gospel accounts but accurate accounts of gospel events written 700 years *before* they happened? (And if you want further reading, see how accurately Psalm 22 reflects aspects of the crucifixion a good 1,000 years before the event.)

How can this make our telling of the gospel to others more effective?