

That It Might Be Fulfilled

Isaiah 42:1–4, Matthew 12:14–21

Two weeks ago, as I was finishing up a mini-series on the Matthew account of the birth of Christ, I mentioned a curious fact that I had never noticed before. Matthew, alone among the four Gospel writers, uses the phrase “that it might be fulfilled” when he wants to point out that certain circumstances or events in the life of Christ are direct fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy.

Nothing in the Bible is random. Though it is the product of some forty different human authors over a period of about sixteen hundred years, it gives evidence of divine authorship—of God’s guiding hand weaving together all the details of the inspired narrative into a unified, cohesive storyline that culminates in Jesus Christ. This is very significant, when you think about it. For example, Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, called in Hebrew the *Torah*, meaning law. He wrote about 1,500 BC. The son of godly Israelite parents, he was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter, who noticed a little basket set in the bullrushes along the bank of the Nile River as she went down to the river to bathe. When the basket was opened, there was a little child, tenderly tucked in! The baby began to cry. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” There was no baby formula then, so the little infant had to be returned to his mother to be nursed. Thus, Moses’ earliest religious training was at the hands of his godly mother, Jochebed (“Jehovah is her glory”), who, while she nursed him, sang to him and told him the story of the covenant people. Though he would later be trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, his first loyalty was always to the people of God. God would later use Moses to write the first five books of the Hebrew Old Testament, which contain amazing prophecies about the eventual coming of the Seed of the woman who would conquer the serpent and save the people of God from eternal destruction. But Moses had no idea exactly how God would bring these prophecies to pass. Though he was inspired by God, he was a mere man. He did *not* have perfect, comprehensive knowledge of all things, past, present and future. He did not know the whole biblical story.

But the God of heaven does know! Peter writes that “the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”¹ The Old Testament prophets had no idea how the story would turn out—but God did! He knows the end from the beginning.²

¹ 1 Pet. 1:10ff.

² Isa. 46:10

Matthew, of all the New Testament writers, had a profound sense of how amazing it was that the details of the life of Christ had been minutely foretold in holy Scripture. Since he addressed his gospel to the Jews, who were familiar with the public reading of the Scriptures in their synagogues, he knew that his pointing this out would make a great impression on his readers, proving to them that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

But this isn't just ancient history! Here is something that should make an impression on us *as well*. The events and circumstances of Jesus' life were all minutely foretold in holy Scripture, centuries before they took place. Maybe you've heard people make fun of Christians by saying, "Here are people who think the Bible is true—ha, hah." The unstated assumption is that only religious fanatics could possibly believe it. Historians, scholars and people in the know would never believe it. But what is our final authority—man, or God? If God is God—if he is truly all-powerful and all-knowing, then prophecy is possible. He knows the end from the beginning. Though none of the human authors of Holy Scripture have infallible, comprehensive knowledge, at all times the God of heaven had a perfect understanding of the whole story, revealing it to man as he saw fit.

In our text this morning, the religious leaders were angry with Jesus because he healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day. The religious leaders would not receive the Messiah of Israel when he stood before them in human flesh because he had compassion on a suffering man and performed a miracle on the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus' point was that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. So he said to the poor, suffering man, "Stretch out your hand," and the man was healed! The religious leaders, jealous that Jesus was getting attention that they thought belonged exclusively to them, were livid, and called a council to plot how they might destroy Jesus. This was rank unbelief of the most inexcusable kind on the part of men who should have known better. The Old Testament Scriptures had clearly foretold that when the Messiah came, he would perform miracles that would validate that he was indeed the Messiah. When Jesus did these miracles, they did not rejoice that the long-promised Messiah had finally come; rather, they rejected him. Jesus would not continue to teach and do miracles in the face of such deeply rooted unbelief, so he withdrew from Jerusalem and ministered elsewhere.

There's a lesson for us here. God wants us to receive his Son by faith. His Word plainly says: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." If we reject Jesus the Messiah, there is no hope for us. All of us are sinners. We have failed to keep God's law perfectly. We have offended a holy God. He is angry with the wicked every day. If we do not receive him—if we do not cast ourselves upon him as our only hope—then we will be punished eternally. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). If we

reject him because he does not measure up to our idea of what a Savior should be, then we will have rejected him who is our only hope. He is Lord of all. His way is perfect. Our duty is to bring our thinking into conformity with him. He is not obligated to measure up to *our* standards. The religious leaders saw Jesus miraculously heal a man. But rather than rejoice, they “plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.” How tragic! To reject one’s only hope of salvation and dedicate oneself to destroy Christ! This, too, was foretold in Holy Scripture. In the words of Psalm 2, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” The religious leaders of Jesus’ day plotted against Christ but could not derail God’s perfect plan. Jesus reigns as the King of kings and Lord of lords, “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” God has “put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”³ His kingdom is forever. There is no middle ground. If you persist in unbelief and do not receive the Jesus of the Bible on his terms, then you will go to everlasting punishment and miss out on the blessings of his kingship.

“Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.” Jesus continued to teach and preach and do healings and other miracles that proved that he was the Messiah, and the religious leaders forfeited the blessing.

But notice how the text continues: “Yet He warned them not to make Him known, *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name Gentiles will trust.’”

Matthew makes the point that Jesus’ public ministry had been foretold, many years before, by the prophet Isaiah. Now Isaiah lived about 700 years before Christ. Yet, taught by the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Holy Scriptures, he foretells the ministry of Christ. We read this prophecy before the sermon.

³ Eph. 1:21–22

Make no mistake. Matthew is not saying that it was just a coincidence that Jesus happened to do the things that Isaiah had foretold. No! Rather, he did these things precisely because it was God's eternal plan. Look at the particulars:

Jesus is God's "Servant"—intentionally so. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. He did not come to do his own will, but the will of him who sent him. He accepted the assignment that had been given him from eternity past: to come into the world and take on human flesh, to be made like his brethren in every way, yet without sin, so he could go to the cross and suffer and die for those given to him by the Father, so he could make atonement for their sins, that he might bring them to God. Jesus is God's servant, and so we, too, should be God's servants. We are not to live life for our own pleasure. Rather, we are to live intentionally for the glory of God. Whatever we do, we are to do it heartily, as to the Lord, not unto men, so that God can be glorified. We are to be God's servants.

Jesus is God's "beloved." Matthew has already stated this back in chapter 3, where he records the story of Jesus' baptism. There we read that "when He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, '*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*'" At his baptism the Father testified that he was the Messiah. He spoke from heaven, just as he had at Sinai 1500 years before. He spoke in the hearing of the people. There were multiple witnesses of this event. The words the Father spoke had already been recorded in Holy Scripture.

Jesus is the beloved Son, and those who are in him by faith are likewise beloved by the Father. Nothing can separate us from his love. We are his eternally. And that's not all. The Father is well-pleased with the Son. That cannot be said of any other person. All of us are sinners. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But if we look to Christ in faith, we can be assured that our sins have been laid on him. "The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). The punishment that was due to us on account of our sin has fallen on Christ. And not only that, but his perfect righteousness is also credited to us by faith. If we are in Christ, then the Father is well-pleased with us—not because of our own deserving, but because we are "*in Christ.*" If we try to earn heaven by our own good works, we will surely fail, but if we look to him in faith, he cannot help but be well-pleased with us. Think of what that means. If you are looking to Christ for salvation, then God is well pleased with you! You do not have to earn his favor. You are assured that you have it!

Further, we read the Father's promise: "I will put My Spirit upon Him." What Jesus did, he did by the power of the Spirit—"through mighty signs and wonders,

by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:19). Paul would later write to the churches of Galatia, "having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). If you are looking to Jesus in true faith, it can only be because the Spirit has worked in you. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Except a man be born of water *and of the Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). If you believe in Christ, it is because the Holy Spirit of God has supernaturally regenerated you—has given you a heart to know him, opened your blinded eyes so that you could see that you are a sinner, and that Christ is the only Savior. Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine upon them (2 Cor. 4:4). But when God's mighty Spirit regenerates a man, then the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shines into his heart. From that moment on he is ready and willing to accept the gospel and look to Christ in faith. The Father put his Spirit on Christ, so that he in turn could send his Spirit to bring his elect to himself. To him be all the glory!

Next, we read: "And He will declare justice to the Gentiles." In the Hebrew text from which Matthew quotes the word for "Gentiles" is **גּוֹיִם** (*goyim*)—the nations, pagans, heathen, the non-Jews. They would be included in Messiah's ministry! This was an aspect of the Gospel that the Jews of Jesus' day forgot. It was God's plan all along to reveal himself to Israel, *so that they in turn could be a light to the Gentiles*. But the Jews of Jesus' day saw themselves as a superior race. They wrongly thought that God had saved them because of their innate goodness. They saw themselves as an exclusive club from which everyone else was excluded. They took pride in their circumcision. Yet the prophet Isaiah told the truth: Christ would declare "justice"—his perfect righteousness—not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles. His plan of salvation would be for the whole human race! When Jesus came and did exactly that, the Jews were displeased. Why should God care at all about the Gentiles? But Jesus accomplished this perfectly. Before he ascended to heaven he said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19)—πάντα τὰ ἔθνη—all the ethnic groups in the world. It is God's intention that before Christ returns, all the *nations*—not just individuals—will be discipled for Christ!

"He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets." When Christ would come, his purpose would not be to win debates. As we see in our text, he appropriately withdrew from confrontation to concentrate his attentions on those who would receive him. One study Bible puts it this way: "These verses describe the gentleness and forbearance of Christ. He makes no resistance or loud proclamation like an earthly prince."⁴ Jesus does not force himself upon the unwilling, nor cast his pearls before swine. Rather, he is meek and gentle.

⁴ Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/12-19.htm> accessed 1-17-25)

Furthermore, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.” These words emphasize his gentleness and forbearance—something for which we can all be profoundly thankful. Because of remaining sin that dwells in each of us (and must be daily mortified and put to death), and because the unbelieving world is not a friend of grace but an enemy of Christ’s faithful followers, we, his people, can be greatly battered and bruised in this life. We are not always the valiant soldiers of the cross that we ought to be. There may be times when we try to stand up for Christ but get roundly defeated. There are times when we try to live for him but end up slipping back into old patterns of sin. We continually battle the world, the flesh and the devil—and sometimes, in spite of our valiant efforts, the enemy gets the upper hand. We long for victory, but it seems to constantly elude us. The enemy taunts us: “You’re pathetic. You think you are a follower of Christ, but look how you keep failing. Why don’t you just give up!” We witness for Christ but get rebuffed and fall flat on our face. We think to ourselves, *will I ever get this right, will I ever master this?* At such times we ought to recall these words, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.” Think of these word-pictures. Have you ever tried to straighten a reed that is bent over? No matter how hard you try, you cannot get it to stand up on its own. Or maybe you have some cut flowers. One beautiful rose has gotten bent. It still has good color and smells pretty, but it won’t stand up on its own. You try to arrange the group in such a way that the weakened stem is held up by the stronger stems around it, but eventually the weakened stem succumbs, and the rose has to go out to the compost pile. Many times you and I are like that bruised reed. We cannot stand on our own. We don’t have the requisite spiritual strength. But a bruised reed our merciful Savior will not break! He has an amazing amount of patience for us. “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14). Our longsuffering Savior does not immediately pluck up a bruised reed and cast it onto the compost pile. Rather, “he giveth more grace. . . . [He] resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (Jas. 4:6).

Then there is a second word-picture: “smoking flax He will not quench.” If we fail to let our light shine to the degree that we should, it is not our Savior’s purpose to snuff out our dying coal, but fan it into flame so that we can be trophies of his grace. If you belong to Christ—if it is your purpose to live for him—he will come to your aid. He is patient and kind. And that’s the kind of people we, too, should be. When a church member struggles, we should not be quick to condemn, but help as we are able. The Spirit of Christ is the παράκλητος, the “Paraclete,” the one called alongside to help, whom Jesus promises to send as a helper or advocate to be with his people (John 14:16–17).

Jesus’ purpose will ultimately be accomplished, as the last line of our text promises: “till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name Gentiles will

trust.” Christ’s kingdom will indeed be victorious. The Gentiles will indeed come to his light. We in this congregation today are the fruit of this prophecy. Yet this victory comes only by faith—faith in Christ as the mighty Savior who defeats hell and sin and the grave and brings his people to victory. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”⁵

The religious leaders of Christ’s day plotted against him, but he could rest secure in the knowledge that whatever happened to him was all part of the Father’s perfect plan for his life—a plan that was being fulfilled, just as Scripture had foretold. And so it is with us. Everything that our wise heavenly Father has planned for our lives in minute detail will ultimately be fulfilled as well. We have formidable enemies—the world, the flesh and the devil—but our Father’s perfect plan cannot be defeated. It will surely come to pass, for his glory and our good. We are more than conquerors through Christ our Savior. Amen!

⁵ 1 John 5:4