

Songs can be very powerful, and reading the scripture is very powerful – and I think we've had a very powerful experience this morning: Isaiah 53 and the songs that we've been singing; you can just feel that the Spirit is speaking. There is a famous hymn “Man of Sorrows, what a name for the Son of God who came ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah, what a Saviour”, I'm sure you know it. And, of course, Man of Sorrows is the theme of this service in this series that we're pursuing towards Easter. We looked at the Day of Atonement couple of weeks ago; we looked at Psalm 22 “My God my God, why have you forsaken me?” last week, and this week we look as “Man of Sorrows”.

It was back in 1892 that a Biblical scholar called Bernard Duhm (unfortunate name: D-U-H-M), he wrote a commentary on Isaiah and he was the first person to feel that he saw in at least four passages in the second half of Isaiah 40, chapters 40 to 66, a description of the Servant – a servant was going to come – and in these four songs, some shorter than others, and the fourth servant song is the one that we read, or had read for us by Steve. It moves up, a kind of pyramid: who is this servant? And in the earlier ones it seems to be the people of God, they are the servant who are going to take god's message into the world; and then it move up into those who are believing (not all of God's people were really in touch with God – those who are really in touch with God out of the nation of Israel, they were the Servant of God). And then he moves up and becomes so so personal, because in Isaiah 53 it speaks about someone who is going to come and they're known as “The Servant of God”. And he called these the Four Servant songs. And others have felt that perhaps he was right; others put a fifth one in from later on in Isaiah, but Biblical scholars will always do that.

And the passage that we were due to look at, or think about this Sunday, is Isaiah 53. This was written by Isaiah about 750 BC, but I want to jump forward about 800 years because I want to go to Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians in about 50 AD. So about 800 years to another passage of scripture that speaks about the Servant – it's another song about a servant, a servant of God. And it's a familiar passage but I want to start halfway down that passage, and you'll recognise the passage.

[Reading Philippians 2:9-11]

Now someone has said, humorously in a way, that when you see the word “therefore” in a passage you should ask what it's there for? I think they were being a bit light hearted, but it's true because that word actually means as a result of what's gone before, or as a result of what's to come: “Therefore for this reason...” This is the reason: as a result of this, this will happen. [Rereads Philippians 2:9-11] For this reason – that's why God exalted him. And I think we can go back to the beginning of this Passage in verse 5, Philippians 2:5-11 is the passage. And I can see at least three things – nice three point sermon – as to why God exalted Jesus to the highest place, why he gave him a name above every name (that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the Earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the father).

And the first reason that God highly exalted Jesus comes at the beginning. Who existing in the form of God let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who existing in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. This is the first reason why God

exalted Jesus so highly: because although he was existing in the form of God, he didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped. And I like to look up the meaning of words, particularly in scripture (perhaps go to the Greek – I'm not a Greek scholar: I can read the text and I know a bit of the grammar) – go to the Greek New Testament and look at the word and look it up in a lexicon and see what it means. Though he was in the form of God he did not think equality with God (and he was equal with God) a thing to be grasped. And here is a definition of what “grasped” means: to seize on with avidity, eagerly, to appropriate; a thing retained with an eager grasp, or eagerly claimed and conspicuously exercised. And you're right, I didn't know what “avidity” meant either; so I had to look up that word, but it means: greedy, greedily. Though he was in the form of God, though he was equal with God, though he is of the same nature as God, he didn't think that equality with God (which he had) was a thing to be grasped and held onto, and to be torn away kicking and screaming when God outlined the Plan of Salvation that Jesus was to fulfil. Not something eagerly to be claimed or conspicuously exercised.

And it reminded me of the archetypal big boss – the Boss – who's the boss and he knows he's the boss, and he wants everybody to know he's the boss. And he knows he's important – he knows how important he is – and he wants to show everybody that importance; and he comes storming out of his office and he goes up to this hapless, shaking colleague sitting at his laptop, and says, shouting so that all the office can hear, “In my office now!” And he storms back and leaves the shaking man to follow him into the office, because he wants everybody to know he's the boss and he's upset – this clerk has done something that's upset him – and he wants to tell him off. But it's not how you should react, is it? You should go up to the person person quietly and say “Can I have a word with you in my office now” and then let him follow. Jesus did not have that attitude; he knew who eternally he was, he knew his position with God, he knew that he was equal with God, but he didn't consider equality with God something that he had to hold on to and grasp, and show everybody how important he was.

And secondly. So what what did he do? What did Jesus do that made God exalt him to the highest place and give the name above all names that at his name should every knee shall bow in heaven and under the Earth? Well we go back to the beginning: Who existing in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being born in the likeness of man, being made in human likeness. He emptied himself taking the form of a servant. And so you can see why I feel that this is a New Testament servant song like the ones that we have so powerfully in the Old Testament. He took on the form of a servant. He had the very nature of God but he took on the form of a servant, taking the very nature of servanthood.

It's easy to get confused. Jesus didn't take on the very nature of humanity – if he had he would have come under the curse of the of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He was born in the likeness of men. He was in the form of God: he shared God's “DNA”. And he emptied himself of his glory, although he was divine, he was equal with God. He emptied himself of that glory and those prerogatives, and took upon himself the very “DNA” of servanthood. He became a servant of God to fulfil God's plan of salvation. Being born in the likeness of men. Similar, similar to but not the same as mankind. There are two Greek words (It's probably not the time to bring some Greek, but they're important), two words tat are so similar: *homoiousias* and *homoousias*, and *homoousias* means “exactly the same as” but *homoiousias* means “similar to, like but not the same as”.

And the early church in the early centuries after Jesus lived and died, they had to discuss how

were Jesus and the father related, was he was *homoiousias* "similar to God" or was he *homoousias* "identical with God" (and they came up with the right answer as it happens). Jesus had the very nature of God but when he came down to earth he was like mankind, he was in the likeness, similar to us. An illustration: if you look in a mirror you get an image and you could say "Ah, that's me!" But it's not, is it because if you think about it, it's on the wrong side; if you turn your face round and look in the mirror you find that everything is on the other side because what you've got is a mirror image that is like you but it's not actually you. Which is what you see as I stand here, but in a mirror you've got a back to front image; and that was what Jesus took on – he took on the likeness of mankind. Jesus wasn't the same as us in one way: he didn't share our "DNA", he wasn't the same as us, in the very form of us because he had a special job to do. That's very difficult to understand, it's easy to become confused. (In fact I have to confess that I did become confused in the house group when we were going through the letter to Philippians and we were looking at this passage, and because in my mind I was confusing where a particular Greek word was used I found myself saying that Jesus was in very nature God, had God's "DNA", and when he came down to earth he took on our "DNA", but that's not true, and I had to correct it the following week, because it's very difficult understand.) Jesus was in all ways like us in the way that things that he suffered, things that he experienced (hunger, thirst and temptation which he never succumbed to) but he had a very special relationship. He had a job to do, and as a result he took on human flesh and became like us in the ways in which we feel and we act.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above all names so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth,, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the God the Father. God highly exalted Jesus because, although he was in the form of God in the first place, he didn't think that equality with God was a thing to be held onto, grasped. He was willing to give that up, to give up his glory, to give up his rights (in a sense) to being equal with the Father. And secondly, what did he do that made God highly exalt him? Well, he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant, of servanthood. He was in the form of God, having the very nature of God, but he took on the form of a servant, taking the very nature of servanthood, and being born in the likeness of men he performed God's plan of salvation.

There's a verse in Hebrews that says a similar thing: "For this reason..." (in what's said before) "...Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way." And it's easy to become, as I say, confused. For this reason Jesus had to be made like us, to be able to experience what we experience: hunger and thirst and all the emotions of life.

But thirdly he became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore it was for this reason that God has highly exalted him, who existing in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form 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. He became obedient unto death. He was obedient to the Father because the Father's plan of salvation was that Jesus should be the sacrifice, the lamb of God sacrificed, taking away the sins of the world. And because Jesus became obedient to the Father in God's plan of salvation, even to dying on a cross, therefore it was for that very reason that God has highly exalted him.

In the past few years I've have been reading through the Bible in a year with the various translations – I'm just reading through the Bible in a year on the New Living translation at the moment. And it's chronological so the books of the Bible are in the place where they were

actually written (which is an interesting way of setting that out) and of course it always starts with the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and the book of Leviticus is full of laws, and Levites, and sin offerings, and peace offerings, and cereal offerings, and it's easy just to run your eye down, "yeah... yeah... yeah... confession... yeah... yeah... killing... yeah... yeah... blood... yeah... yeah..." It's easy to just gloss over it, but I was trying to be a bit more in depth, to look at it in a new way in a way. And two things stood out for me suddenly after so many years of reading these laws - these offerings, these sin offerings, peace offerings, cereal offerings - and suddenly something jumped out at me: Blood and Fire - shed blood and consuming flame.

And I suddenly saw in this Old Testament picture of God's first attempt to bring people back into relationship with himself. What was involved? Shed blood and consuming fire. And you could see that it was all there, what we see in Isaiah 53, what we see in the Gospels, what we see when Jesus was arrested, convicted, sentenced to death and executed as a criminal on the cross. Because in the Old Testament picture there was a living creature, there was a living animal, and there was confession of sin, placing your hand on that animal and confessing sin. And then the animal is killed and the blood is shed and sprinkled on the altar, etc.

And then there is the burning of parts of the animal - an acceptable sacrificial offering to God - and there was atonement which means (someone has said) "At one with God, a relationship restored". And it's all there in the Old Testament which the Jews, kind of, brought it down to a rite, acts "this is what you do" rather than understanding the hidden meaning behind it. There was a living creature, there was confession of sin, there was death and the shedding of blood, there was an acceptable sacrificial offering to God and there was atonement, a relationship restored, and there was a coming anointed servant of God who was coming to fulfil God's ultimate plan of salvation with all these things; a living creature confessing bloodshed and a sacrifice being offered to bring people back into a relationship with God.

And down through these chapters on offerings in Leviticus sixteen times as a phrase "an aroma pleasing to the Lord." The animal is killed, the blood is shed, the animal is burned, smoke rises and it's an aroma pleasing to God, or a pleasing odour to the Lord (in other places it's mentioned.) And the smoke of the offering coming up from the burning of the sacrifice into God's nostrils, it was pleasing to him because it spoke of a substitute. In place of those who had sinned and confessed, and laid their hands on the animal. It is true that it's very easy to think of God as "he likes a good sacrifice, he likes someone to die, he likes a burnt offering". The smoke is not pleasing to him, it's what lies behind it - the smoke rising from the sacrifice into God's nostrils said: "these people, they've confessed, someone has died in their place so that they can come into that relationship with myself."

And in John's gospel, in particular, Jesus spoke his hour not yet having come, or his hour having come. Because his hour was the time when he was going to become the sacrifice, he was going to be offered, he was to be killed, his blood was going to be shed, and he was going to be an offering to God for the sins of people who were repentance and confessed their sins and trust in the sacrifice of Jesus to bring them into that relationship with God. He was the final sacrifice. Jesus was God's final plan of salvation. It was all there in the Old Testament in symbolism, but when Jesus came he became the sacrifice that brings us into that relationship with God. And he speaks about his hour:

At the wedding in Cana in Galilee said to his mother "Woman why you telling me they've got no wine, my hour has not yet come." But he was willing to meet that need.

At the Feast of Tabernacles again it said that they were outraged at what he said and they wanted to kill him, to throw him off the cliff and stone him to death, and it says he walked right through them because his hour had not yet come.

And you remember when the Greeks said "Sir, we want to see Jesus" and then Jesus was saying "Father, the hour has come and what shall I say? Save me from this hour? For this reason I came into the world. This is my hour." And speaks about "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies then it doesn't do anything." But if it dies then life can come out of it.

And at the last Passover, remember when they had to find a meal and it says that "Jesus realising, knowing that his hour had come, took off his clothes, put on a towel and washed the disciples' feet." Because his hour had come; this was the hour for which he lived.

And his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in John 17, he says "Father the hour has come. It's here." Now, we know that Jesus as a man didn't want to die, didn't want to suffer: "Father if it's possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not what I want but what you want."

And on the cross you remember in John's gospel he says the final words "It is finished!" it's finished - not in the sense of it all over, I can't hold on any longer, I'm at the end of my life; no it's the word is "it is accomplished! It's completed!" "I did exactly what I set out to do" Jesus says. This was his hour and he didn't turn away from it - the cross. The cross is a symbol of sacrifice, it's a symbol of guilt removed. Remember that John the Baptist said "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And that's why the symbol of Christianity is the cross. It must always be central to our message. "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This was the reason why Jesus came into the world, this was the reason why God highly exalted him.

Paul writing to the Philippian believers. He talks about those who are enemies of the cross, and I sort of felt that that was an interesting phrase: "They are enemies of the cross." Not particularly enemies of Jesus of Nazareth, not particular enemies of a wandering prophet who went about preaching love and forgiveness, telling little stories and telling people to love each other. No! They were enemies of the cross because the cross of Christ demands a response and they were not willing to make that response. The cross is the central message that we have to take to the world - if we have no message of the cross to take to the world then we have no message.

That great hymn "Man of Sorrows"; I would liked to have told you the story behind that hymn if I had time, but I don't have time. I would liked to have told it to you even though I didn't have time - it's too emotional. When you go home look up Philip Bliss - Philip Paul Bliss - "Man of Sorrows", because it's just a great hymn and a great story behind it:

*Lifted up was He to die,  
"It is finished" was His cry;  
Now in heaven exalted high;  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!*

Let's say it together: "Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

Amen.