

A Root Out of Dry Ground

Isaiah 53:1-3

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? ² For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Who Has Believed Our Report?

Who would have believed it? Can we start with the words, “No way!”? “Not a chance!” “It isn’t going to happen!” (Or as some say, “Never happen, captain!”) “There’s no path to success!” “Finished before He could even get started!”

So let’s start there. If you like an “underdog -- come from behind” story, then you’ve come to the right place. And it’s significant and relevant to our lives today. So if you’ve ever loved reading or watching a “rags to riches” story, you’re going to love this.

As A Root Out of Dry Ground

According to Isaiah 53:2, the prophesied One would grow up. He would grow up before God, but He wouldn’t appear to be anything great. You can see His poor prospects in the imagery of **“as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground: He has no form nor comeliness** (“splendor” or “majesty”). This sure looks like rags with no hope of riches. It appeared to be nothing more than a root in dry ground. So, **“when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.”**

Serious Questions Raised

Isaiah presented the Messiah as a Son who would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). But for the moment, don’t just think about the miracle. Think of the questions that would have raised:

“Born of a virgin?! oh, sure,” you can hear the critics sneering. Even before He was born, this Son was slandered by gossip. After the Pharisees did a “background check,” they mocked Him with the words, **“We were not born of fornication . . .”** (John 8:41).

Oh, but it gets worse: all “the dirty laundry” is aired out in Matthew 1:3-7. In His ancestry you could be find: Tamar, who conceived while pretending to be a woman of ill-repute (Genesis 38:13-26), and another who actually was a woman of ill-repute (Rahab). One of his great grandmothers (named Ruth) was a Moabite (Nehemiah 13:1); Moabites were forbidden in the congregation! And then there was that sordid story of King David with Bathsheba. And don’t forget, David and Bathsheba’s son, Solomon, whose **“wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God”** (1 Kings 11:4). Is this picture dark enough for you yet? Sounds like dry ground with no hope of a good harvest.

Glorious Privileges Abused

It is true that God had given His dynamic promises to mankind (beginning in Genesis 3:15 and carried through such passages as Genesis 49:10, and Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7). But the problem was that people abused their privileges and misused God's promises. This is why the leaders of Israel said, ". . . **Is not the LORD among us? no evil can come upon us**" (Micah 3:11). They were misusing the promises of God and would pay dearly for it: "**Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, . . .**" (Micah 3:12). So here is the problem that we still face today: how should we respond to God's remarkable promises to us?

What Are We Learning?

Since He has promised His blessings, should you and I become apathetic and indifferent? A phrase in Romans 15:12 can really help us to answer this question: ". . . **There shall be a root of Jesse . . .**" This phrase emphasizes the lowly, humble lineage of the Messiah before God's promise was given to David. In 2 Samuel 7, God gave His loyal promise to David's royal line forever. The people gave God the glory, but, in time, they began to take Him for granted. They did not practice faithful obedience to the God who had honored them with His faithful promise. First and Second Kings records the long decline of the kingly line. They were chastened by God for their disobedience. Captivity in Assyria and Babylon apparently made them none the wiser. So by the time of Mary and Joseph, there had been no king in Israel for nearly six hundred years! Was God's faithful promise still true? What are we learning? Hebrews 4:1 counsels us: "**Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.**"

So when you are reading in Isaiah 9:6-7, and see the words, "**For unto us a Child is born . . .**" think of His names: "**Wonderful Counselor.**" If you had been through what He endured, you would have learned a few things about people. You would have learned how to encourage people who are in the depths of despair. He learned "**how to speak a word in season to him that is weary**" (Isaiah 50:4). This Counselor said of Himself, "**my soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death**" (Matthew 26:38). And remember, this is the same One who is offering to be your Shepherd and Guide today. Perhaps you are looking at your life and saying, "no way!" Perhaps you think you have no chance for success. Things have just gone from bad to worse, and you have no hope. If you feel that way, you need a new fresh introduction to "the root out of dry ground."

But let's get back to our story. According to Luke 2:1-7, the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled. The virgin Mary bore a son in a stable in Bethlehem, and laid him in a feed trough. If you and I were designing the path for a new king to rise and reign, would we choose this? No, this looks like "**a root out of dry ground.**" But if you are like me, by this time you are "rooting for the Root." And the reason is that God gave His promises.

There's a bright spot in this story: angels! According to Luke 2:8-20, angels appeared to men to proclaim the birth of God's Chosen One. But there was a problem with that too. To whom did they appear? To Roman kings? To religious leaders? To political leaders in the area? No, they

made that announcement to shepherds. Shepherds? Why did they appear to shepherds? This is in keeping with God's plan for Jesus to appear as **"a root out of dry ground."**

According to recent studies, shepherds were frowned upon in that society. *"Shepherding was considered a despised trade. Joachim Jeremias tells us that shepherds were thought of as thieves. The oral law actually forbade the purchase of milk and wool from shepherds for fear that they had been pilfered. Jeremias further reveals that fathers refused to teach their sons this trade. The trade too easily lent itself to dishonesty and thievery. No doubt, this assessment of shepherding led to the increasing employment of hirelings. Hired hands gradually became the only means an absentee owner could find for providing for his flock."*ⁱ Well, here we go again. The angels' announcement was a bright spot in the story, but news spread by shepherds was probably frowned upon. So it's no surprise that Luke 2:18 records, **"And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds."** Yes, they wondered alright, but many of them probably wondered if the story was really true! Who would believe their report?

Can there be any hope for "the root out of dry ground?" According to 1 Corinthians 1:27, all of this was according to God's master plan: **"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;"**

Then there was the massacre at Bethlehem. Who could ever forget that? King Herod found out about the Promised King. So, he murdered all of the children under two years of age at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18). Joseph, Mary and Jesus escaped only because an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to flee.

And don't forget, that when they returned, they moved back to Nazareth. Nazareth!? That place had a horrible reputation. One of Jesus' own disciples voiced the popular opinion (John 1:46), **"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"** The answer is found in Matthew 2:23: **"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."**

Despised and Rejected of Men

Isaiah 53:3 records, **"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."**

Can you see why this story is about the lowest of the low? With a track record like this, is it any surprise that **"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . .?"** And the people would hide their faces from Him, when He was nailed to a Roman cross and crucified for the sins of mankind. Years before, the angel had appeared to Joseph, who was engaged to Mary. And Joseph had received a promise: **"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:21). Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man was sent to this earth to die for our sins. As we will sing in just a moment, He was "born to die upon Calvary." But remember, that "root out of

dry ground,” rose from the dead. He rose to reign, and He’s coming again. Today, if your prospects look bleak, remember Him. In the face of all the evil you have done, and the evil that has been done to you, there is hope. And all the hope is bound up in this “root out of dry ground.”

So, we’re back to your answer to that first question: **Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?**” Do you believe God’s promise – His report of what would happen, and what did happen? Against all odds, the “root out of dry ground” rose to produce glorious fruit throughout the world – even to this present day. “. . .**the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:** (Colossians 1:5-6).

Here is what you will discover: those who believe this Gospel report will see the arm of the Lord revealed to them. Others may dismiss Jesus as a “root out of dry ground,” with no hope of success. But you will know Him as your Redeemer, the God who delivered you from sin and death.

Then, “No way!” becomes “the new and living Way” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

“No chance” will overflow to change your life.

And that “never happen, captain” will lead to the glorious privilege of following “the Captain of our salvation” (Hebrews 10:10).

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ⁱ Willis Britt, “The Good Shepherd” Jerusalem Institute for Biblical Exploration, accessed at http://www.academia.edu/4808108/The_Good_Shepherd (citing Joachim Jeremias, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joachim_Jeremias)