

CHRIST, A TENDER PLANT
Isaiah 53:2

Intro: The main theme of the Bible is Christ. Our Lord Himself made that clear when, with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection He comforted them by beginning with Moses and all the prophets, "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Later he did the same thing with the eleven apostles. They were terrified at His presence thinking that a spirit was appearing before them. But after He showed them His hands and His feet, and had eaten before them, He said,

These are the words which I spake unto you,
while I was yet with you,
that all things must be fulfilled,
which were written in the law of Moses,
and in the prophets, and in the psalms,
concerning me (Luke 24:44).

On an earlier occasion when the Lord was speaking with "the Jews," that is, some of the Jewish leaders, He said concerning the Scriptures, "And they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

And earlier than that, after the Lord "found" Philip, Philip went and got Nathanael, and said to him,

We have found him,
of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,
Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (John 1:45).

Christ is the Key to the Scriptures. Unless we realize that the Scriptures were speaking of Him, they will never make sense to us. I have told many of you about a course I took in university entitled, Christ in the Pentateuch, and I still remember the blessing after blessing I experienced as my professor, took us through the five books of Moses, showing us Christ.

I have in my library at home a book by F. B. Meyer with the title, Christ In Isaiah. The Old Testament anticipated His coming. In the Gospels we read of His ministry on earth. In the book of Acts we read about how the Gospel of Christ was spread throughout the Roman Empire. In the Epistles we have the doctrine of Christ. In the book of the Revelation we see how our Lord will finally take His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Bible is a book about Christ! And of all of the passages we could turn to in the OT to learn about Christ, none can surpass Isaiah 53! When we go there, we are truly on holy ground.

The words from Isaiah 53 which I have taken as my text for tonight, "A Tender Plant," are the translation of one Hebrew word which speaks of Christ. The same is true of the words which follow in Isa. 53:2: "a root out of a dry ground." They, too, are a description of Christ. The Spirit of God has used figures of speech to show us here the humiliation of Christ when He came to the earth. He was like "a tender plant." Let us look more closely into the meaning of this word.

I. "A TENDER PLANT" (Isa. 53:2).

We all know now that when the Lord Jesus came to earth, He did not come in a blaze of glory. He was not born in a palace, although the royal blood of David was in His veins. When a child is born to the royal family in England, for example, the whole world waits to hear the news. That was not the case with the Lord Jesus. Angels announced His birth to shepherds, and wise men came to see Him, but His birth was not even noticed by most Jews, and certainly not by the powerful Gentiles of the Roman government.

But there is something special which Isaiah did say about His birth, and His life afterwards. Isaiah said that He would grow up "before Him," meaning the Father. His birth was exactly as the Father had determined that it would be, and the Father was overseeing it all--not just His birth, but His whole life after He was born. We know very little about Jesus of Nazareth until He entered His public ministry when He was thirty, but the Father never missed a day of all of those years in between. He didn't even miss a single moment. It was all exactly as the Father had determined that it should be, and it was all done with the full approval of the Lord Jesus Himself.

The word, "a tender plant," is what we might describe as a volunteer. The word was sometimes used to describe a twig on a tree, or a shoot coming of a decayed stump. The word is sometimes translated as a sucker which we might break off of a tree, and throw it away. But here it probably means a volunteer. The Holy Spirit had Isaiah use this word to indicate something which in the eyes of men was not at all important. It was a plant which, it would appear, could have been so easily crushed by someone's foot, so that it would never have become a tree, a Branch, as the prophets sometimes described the Messiah.

We know that both Joseph and Mary had royal blood in their veins, but no one paid any attention to that in those days. The monarchy of Israel was, it appeared, a thing of the past. Joseph was a carpenter. It has been suggested that he may

have been a boat builder, and that our Lord came into contact with His first disciples through the business that Joseph had. Everything about the birth of our Lord, and His early life, spoke not only of lowliness, but of insignificance, and unimportance. He Whom angels worshipped and Who was the eternal delight of His Father, slipped into this world not only in a most humbling way, but in a most humiliating way. He was born in a manger because every room in the inn was already occupied.

But there is a parallel expression that Isaiah was directed by the Holy Spirit to use. Our Lord was:

II. "A ROOT OUT OF A DRY GROUND."

Franz Delitzsch says in his commentary on Isaiah that this expression was

intended to depict "the miserable character of the external circumstances in the midst of which the birth and growth of the Servant would take place." The "dry ground" describes the then-existing state of the enslaved and degraded nation; i.e., "He was subject to all the conditions inseparable from a nation that had been given up to the power of the world, and was in utter ignorance; in a word, the dry ground is the corrupt character of the age (quoted by David Baron in The Servant of Jehovah, p. 72).

And so the description which Isaiah has given us here speaks not of a lush forest with many trees and thick underbrush, with many such sprouts, but of a lonely sprout in a desert scene which seemed to indicate that there was no possibility that "the tender plant" could possibly survive. Humanly speaking, the birth of our Lord was not as important as many who were born at the same time. But with the Father's eye upon Him constantly, there never had been, and never will be, a greater or more important birth than that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But this is not all that Isaiah had to say about the coming of our Lord, and his description is all a part of helping us to understand what it meant that He was "a tender plant."

III. "HE HATH NO FORM NOR COMELINESS."

Not only did our Lord have a lowly, insignificant beginning, but there was nothing about His appearance that would be attractive to the people of the world. People had trouble believing that He was the promised Messiah. David Baron said in his commentary on this chapter that "everything was so

different from what they had pictured or anticipated" (p. 73). And then David Baron went on to quote another expositor who said this:

There may have been in His aspect, power, grace, majesty, blended with sorrow and meekness. The heart of the thing, that men did not see the beauty that was there; He did not answer to their ideal' He wanted [lacked] the qualities which they admired; His greatness was not shaped to their thoughts. Having misread the prophecies, having imagined another Deliverer than God had promised, being blind to the heavenly, while their souls lay open to the carnal and earthly, they found nothing worth gazing upon in Jehovah's Servant when He came. They would have welcome a plumed and mail-clad warrior, riding forth to battle against the oppressor, would have shouted before him, 'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and with thy majesty!' They have no admiration and no welcome for One who comes, meek and lowly, to make His soul an offering for sin, and to be God's salvation to the end of the earth. It was not sin that troubled them: how should a Saviour from sin delight them? What was there in a Bringer-in of righteousness to inspire such hearts (a quotation from Culross in Baron's commentary on Isaiah 53, p. 73).

Concl: What a commentary this verse in Isaiah 53 is on

Paul's description of our Lord's humiliation in Philippians 2:5-7! How can we explain the Lord's way in the coming of His Son? There is in all of us the feeling that if more of our Lord's glory could have been seen, surely His acceptance with people would have been much greater. Why did He come as "a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground"? And why was there not something about His appearance that made people know that He was the Son of God Who had become a man.

There are several answers to that question.

The appearance of our Lord was consistent with His mission to the earth. He came to be an offering for sin, and that never has been, and never will be, something that is, in the least, attractive to people in their sins. His humiliation was designed to impress upon sinners the awfulness of their sin. When He went to the Cross, as Isaiah has told us, His body which was not glorious to men to begin with, was mutilated to the point that He no longer looked human. Beyond that His soul was made an offering for sin--a truth which was hidden

from the eyes of all men. He was made sin for us. And so it was fitting that our Lord's pilgrimage on earth would be consistent with the work that He had come to do.

But there is another reason which is just as important.

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was such that it took a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the case of every sinner who was to be saved, before they would recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God, the Savior of sinners. People don't understand us when we speak in such loving terms about our Lord Jesus Christ. They don't understand what we see in Him because their eyes are still blinded. But what a glorious day it was when we, made conscious of our own sinfulness were made to realize the indescribable beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so what is the result? We have to admit that all of the glory for our salvation belongs to God. We did not discover Who He is; God has opened our eyes to see that He is the Redeemer, the only One Who can possibly save us from our sins.

The whole story is not given in this one verse which I have taken as my text tonight, but it gives us the foundation. May our hearts forever be lifted to our God in praise that His love for us was so great that He would not even spare His only begotten Son, knowing that there was no one else who could ever save us from our sins.

It is forever to God's glory that we can say what the Apostle John wrote in John 1:14. (Read from v. 10.) Behind the cloak of despised humanity is the glory of the eternal Son, who took upon Him our flesh that He might be our Savior.