

## **Sermon: "As it was written".**

Was the crucifixion and resurrection prophesied in the Old Testament?

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for Easter 2015

I would like to invite you into one of the great puzzles of the Christian faith ... did the Hebrew scriptures predict that the Messiah would rise from the dead? Answering this question is not obvious to us ... though it was to Jesus!

### Bible readings:

Acts 3: 12-19

Luke 24:36-49

I'm quite keen on maps. We have the full set of AA maps covering the whole of the country, and we have some smaller detail maps for places we love to explore, like Lake Taupo. I like looking at a map for pointers that there might be something interesting ... a park by a river, somewhere off the beaten track.

One time, when we lived in Taupo & had one small baby, easy to transport, we had a weekend free and wondered where to go. We laid out a map of the Waikato on the dining table I closed my eyes and turned around and put my finger blindly on the map ... so we ended up going to somewhere called Kawhia. Anyone been there? To be honest, not the most exciting place ... kind of muddy and swampy and the motor camp was the most archaic motor camp I've even stayed in. We had to exchange buy old shillings to put into the heater, I kid you not! But our trusty map got us there and got us safely home again without getting lost.

Have you ever found yourself off the map? Have you ever found yourself somewhere and the information on the map is out of date or useless?

My in-laws live in Wadestown in Wellington. Quite steep hills, up and down all over the place. The funny thing about Wadestown is that the town planners in England laid out and named the streets. So when they came to build the roads the road makers did their best to impose the map they had onto the landscape. So Wade St starts out nice and straight but then it sort of peters out and they put some steps up the REALLY steep bit then there's some more of Wade St up the top.

It is very hard for us to know where we are if we don't have a map, or if our map is out of date or just does not fit the terrain we find ourselves in.

This is the situation that the friends of Jesus found themselves in that first Easter. Luke's telling of the Easter story places a strong emphasis on the claim that the events of Jesus' death and resurrection were foretold, were part of God's plan all along, and were written about in the Hebrew scriptures. This is what I'd like to talk about this morning, so if you'll bear with me we are going to look back through the Old Testament and explore how it looked ahead to Christ, the Messiah.

So, what did the Old Testament prophesy about the coming salvation of God through the Messiah? There are two strong themes in the Old Testament ... and they don't necessarily sit that comfortably together.

The first is the 'dominant view', the strongest voice in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah, the anointed one. Here it is proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah:

23:5 <sup>5</sup>“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,  
a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.  
<sup>6</sup>In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.

Ezekiel prophesied of God drawing his sword, to bring judgement on the nations:

<sup>5</sup>Then all people will know that I the LORD have drawn my sword from its sheath; it will not return again.'

Ezekiel also prophesied that God would come as a good shepherd, who will rescue his sheep and feed them and care for them

<sup>16</sup>I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the rich and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

This is a strong recurring theme through the Old Testament, that one day God will be fully present with his people, one day he will overthrow the wicked, release his people from their chains, destroy their enemies and restore the reign of God on earth, continuing the kingdom of David.

So, in Jesus' time, the people longed for a Messiah who would cast out the Romans, who would allow them to worship whole and pure and free. This is what their road map laid out for them, and this is what they prayed and hoped for.

But there was another type of prophecy about the coming Messiah, mostly from the prophet Isaiah. Through and through his writings are glimpses of one who is to come... 9:6-7

For unto us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne

and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.

but mixed in with the glorious hope are more puzzling, darker notes ...

52:13 See, my servant will act wisely;

he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

<sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were appalled at him—

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being  
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

and into chapter 53:

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by mankind,

a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

So against the backdrop of the hopes for a messiah of power and victory was this more disturbing prophecy about a Messiah who would be crushed, which is all brought together in this verse from Isaiah: 53:10

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and

though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,

he will see his offspring and prolong his days,

and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup> After he has suffered,

he will see the light of life and be satisfied;

So, these are the verses that Jesus was talking about when he says this, after his resurrection:

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the

Scriptures.<sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will

suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for

the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all

nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Luke describes Jesus as being deeply in love with and in line with the whole of the Old Testament writings. Luke describes Jesus as being eager to open up his disciples' minds to what was right in front of them, the pointers in their scriptures to help them understand what was happening.

For Jesus, clearly, it was blatantly obvious, that he was living out what had been revealed by God to his people over hundreds, even thousands of years beforehand.

But, hang on a minute ... back the truck up, as they say.

“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day’

This is where I start scratching my head and getting puzzled. Jesus read the same scriptures that we have here. Where did he read that the Messiah would rise from the dead on the third day?

Because, actually, sorry folks but actually it really doesn't ever say that in the Old Testament. It really doesn't.

There are a few hints, ... and clearly as a Presbyterian Minister I am simply not allowed to say that Jesus was wrong ... but ... it just isn't obvious.

What was obvious to all and sundry was the Messiah would come with sword and all the might of the Lord of heaven and smite the heathen. We've had more than enough suffering, cried the Jews, we certainly don't need a suffering Messiah thank you very much.

It was blasphemous to suggest that God could suffer and die.

Paul described it as a 'stumbling block' to Jews, the notion of the crucified Christ ... that's putting it mildly.

Feel free to study this for yourself, but my belief from my own study is that Jesus read his scriptures in a radically different way from everybody else, and his conclusion, that the Messiah must suffer, die and rise again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, that is an entirely new road map that he drew up all by himself.

There is another place in scripture that Jesus was clearly basing his claim on, and this is the Psalms.

Psalms 16:10-11

you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,  
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalms 22

Psalms 40:2

He lifted me out of the slimy pit,  
out of the mud and mire;

he set my feet on a rock  
and gave me a firm place to stand.

Where did he get the '3<sup>rd</sup> day' thing from? Any thoughts on that one? It is something of a Biblical mystery. The only thing quoted in evidence by the early church was that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days. Jesus was only in the tomb for half that time.

What's at issue here is how we read the Bible.

If you are looking for chapter and verse all neat and precise like map co-ordinates on a GPS, then to be honest you might be disappointed when you go looking for prophecies of the resurrection.

But what might happen if we put the map down and keep our eyes on Jesus?

What if this book here is about a relationship?

What if we let Jesus tell it to us the way he sees it?

How about we let ourselves start from the starting point that Jesus understood this book better than anyone ever did or ever has, after all he is himself the living Word, from the beginning ...

Jesus lived prophecy, he lived all revelation. Everything about God was revealed in him.

Jesus did not rely on specific texts to show him who God was or what it meant for him to be the anointed one. Jesus read this through every word of scripture. Jesus also read it in every blade of grass, every child, every Roman sword.

and to him it was obvious ... that God would save his people, but that salvation was going to be something of a disappointment to his people.

And so Jesus prophesied his own suffering and rejection, his own death in humiliation, much to his followers' shock and horror.

But every word of scripture also spoke to Jesus of the inevitability of victory. His life resonated with confidence in God. In utter trust Jesus healed the sick, confronted the religious authorities, and spoke of forgiveness. In utter trust Jesus walked toward the cross, yielding his body up to be beaten and killed. Jesus alone of any man ever lived, lived free from anxiety. This is how he fulfilled the hopes and prophecies of his people, by being fully God-with-us, fully aware of past present and future, and fully confident in God's victory. Specifically, this meant that it was obvious to him that death would not be the end, that he would be raised from the dead and that God wouldn't take long about it. What other outcome could there possibly be?

So, if you are looking for specific prophecies that laid down a road map for the events of Easter you might find that the map gets a bit sketchy

There are enough clues that the Early Church was able to make some sense of what had happened to them. But mostly they lived with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, knowing Jesus walking beside them, and they drew new maps into new territory.

I am left wondering ...

I wonder what we do in our lives when we feel as though we've come to the edge of our old familiar maps

I wonder how Jesus, the risen, glorified Jesus, is there with you through your everyday life

I wonder how your life might be different if you knew completely and utterly that God is alive, that love will win, that victory is inevitable ... if there was no room at all for anxiety in your heart

Prophecies of the Resurrection:

Jonah ... 3 days in the fish

Psalm 16:10-11

Psalm 22:21, 29

Psalm 40:2

Isaiah 53:10-12

Hosea 6:2 (but this is never quoted in the New Testament)

Let's start with the risen Jesus himself. What an excellent place to start.

Luke 24:44,45

Luke 24:25-27

John 20:8-9