

The book of the servant

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Date: 03 September 2017

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[0:00] And I have an introduction. And the introduction says, do you have servants?! It's not actually expecting hands to go up.! It would be, in our culture, fairly unusual to have a live-in servant or a maid.

In Sri Lanka, it would be fairly normal. So I can ask the question, do you have servants? If you are hungry, do you cook your own food?

Or do you eat out with a chef and a waiter to serve you?

Do you say, when you go to wherever you go, McDonald's, El Campo, Café Rouge, I would like some of your finest salmon. Bring it to me.

I will pay. Let's be clear, I'm going to pay. If you or your house or your clothes are dirty, do you clean it all yourself?

[1:07] Or do you get a cleaner in to deal with the mess? And you say to the cleaner, excuse me, cleaner, I vomited over here the day before yesterday. But that's your problem now.

And the children have painted all over the walls. That's your problem now. Of course, I'll pay, but you clean up the mess. Do you have a cleaner?

On a journey, do you say, I'm going to Newcastle today. I need to get to Gatwick Airport. I'll just get out my finest walking shoes and walk up to Gatwick.

Do you walk there? Or do you get somebody to take you? Perhaps you get a taxi. Perhaps you say to the taxi driver, I'd like to go to Gatwick Airport this morning.

Make it snappy. Of course, I'll pay. Actually, most of us have people who serve us for certain purposes, under certain circumstances.

[2:12] And servants do hard work for their employer. Well, that's the plan anyway. Cooking, cleaning, taking, bringing. And God has servants to serve him and to do his work.

And the bit of Isaiah that we're looking at this morning is about the servants of God. That's what we're going to think about this morning. Let me remind you context of the book of Isaiah.

It's like a very large cheese, and we tried to divide it up a bit. There's a little mouse trying to eat a large cheese. The end bit, chapters 56 to 66, the anointed conqueror.

The bit in the middle, 40 to 55, the book of the servant. The bit at the beginning, the book of the king. So says Alex Matea. And we divided that into two pieces, and we looked at those two pieces.

And today, we're going to look at that bit there. The servant, that's that bit. The book of the servant. And that's where we are. Number two. Yes.

[3:23] Now, very quickly, context, history, as David so helpfully reminded us. And he had a good map as well. Northern kingdom and southern kingdom. Timeline going down there.

The northern kingdom was invaded by Assyria and wiped out. The southern kingdom, in the end, was invaded and wiped out by Babylon. But in the time when the prophet Isaiah was writing, they were seeing the problems with Assyria.

And the whole thing about how they would react to that is part of what the book is all about. Will they trust the Lord to fight for them or not?

Here's the geography. Here's the geography. And David had a nice map of that as well. We had Jerusalem, God's headquarters. We have Egypt, which offers.

That's the place where they were rescued from slavery. Egypt is saying, if you stick with us, we'll help you against the threats of Assyria, that one, and the threats of Babylon.

[4:24] Of course, Babylon only became a threat at a later point. So that's the history and the geography. Previously, we looked at, first part, the city of God and the two futures.

Remember that God accused his people of serious crimes and pointed out that that leads to destruction.

He also told us about the city, which was a corrupt city becoming the faithful city. You get that in chapter 2, chapter 1 and chapter 2.

Zion being Jerusalem and her king, the eternal city. We looked at that in the first section. And then we looked at the idea of pregnancy and the people who will bring forth a child who will be king. And we have all those prophecies about the virgin will give birth, we'll call him Emmanuel. Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father.

[5:32] We looked at those in the first parts of Isaiah. We looked the other time at the nations and the spread of the nations and their creator. Assyria, the threat that was repulsed.

And he's actually, Assyria is actually in the Lord's hands. Babylon and her gods who will appear in future to triumph over the Lord and his people.

But he's actually going to be defeated by the Lord. Israel, the faithless city that will become faithful because the Lord will not abandon his people.

And then we had that sandwiched between the specific of Ahaz, the king who refused to trust God, and his son Hezekiah, who when push came to shove did trust the Lord and saw the Lord work in a mighty way.

So, that was a very quick journey through Isaiah to bring us to the bit about the servant, which is what we're going to look at today.

[6:34] So, I'm just not going to try to do too much detail, but to introduce you to some of the servants of the Lord. The servants of the Lord have a two-fold problem.

The nations. There's a nation. Proud. Idolatrous. Worshipping idols.

Pretending to be God. We will be the most high. But, actually limited. They are not God, in fact. Their idols, whom they worship, are bits of tree.

Second problem is Israel. Israel does not trust in God. Is tempted to trust the plans of the politicians.

Making alliances. Making alliances. Seeking security in deals. Instead of in the promises of God. Disobedient.

[7:42] And even following the idols of the nations. Her God is not an idol. Her God is the creator of all things. And here is the issue. How can God bless his rubbish people?

And how can God bless the nations? Is he interested in doing so? Apparently, yes. How can he bless the nations too? And that, the answer to this, lies in the service and the work done by the servants that we're going to look at this morning.

So, let's look first of all at one servant, just to get us going. This is in Isaiah chapter 20. Isaiah chapter 20.

And it introduces us to the thought that Isaiah himself is a little bit like the nation to which he ministers.

That, I'm not going to push that too hard. But let's look at this, these few verses, just to get us going. Isaiah chapter 20. In the year that the supreme commander sent by Sargon, king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked it and captured it.

[8:58] At that time, the Lord spoke through Isaiah, son of Amos. He said to him, take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.

And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot. Then the Lord said, just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away, stripped and barefoot, the Egyptian captives and the Cushite exiles, young and old, with backs bared, to Israel's shame.

And those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame. And in that day, the people who live on this coast will say, see what has happened to those we relied on, those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria.

How then can we escape? So let's pick out a few things on this of Isaiah, who is said to be... Where does it say, Isaiah my servant?

Thank you very much. Isaiah my servant. So this servant is under the word of the Lord, because the Lord speaks to him. Important thing about the servant?

[10:17] Under the word of the Lord. Then it says, when the Lord spoke to him, he did so. So he does the word of the Lord. He doesn't just hear it.

He does it. And in this case, he goes around stripped and barefoot, like the slaves are going to be, or the captives, or the prisoners of war, who are going to be led far away with bare bottoms and nothing on their feet.

And Isaiah goes around looking like that. And it is to appear in shame. And the word shame is there. Did I put the verse that it was in?

I said verse 3? No? End of verse 4 it says shame. And end of verse 5 it says shame.

And presumably as Isaiah looked back on this, presumably later on when he was older, his kids would have said, Dad, did you really spend three years going around with everybody seeing your bottom?

[11:23] And he'd say, well I did actually, yes. It was rather I was put to shame for that period of time. He appears in shame.

And he's to be a sign to the nation. Verse 3. Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush.

So he's a sign. People are supposed to look at him, notice something, learn something, be challenged about something by looking at this man, the servant of the Lord. Excuse me, I'm a little bit croaky this morning for some reason.

And it's meant to show the shame of the two nations or the dual nation in which the Israelites are invited to trust because they'll be put to shame and those who trust in them will be put to shame. It's interesting the vocabulary of shame, isn't it? It is a shameful thing if you go around. Do you ever have those horrible dreams where you wake up and think, I've gone to work in my pajamas and I just feel completely ashamed of myself.

[12:30] And perhaps it's just me. Wish I hadn't said that now. But here is Isaiah bearing shame for a reason.

I won't push that any further, but there's one of God's servants, Isaiah. Let's look at the second person who's called his servant. This is in chapter 37, verse 35.

Isaiah 37, verse 35, in which the promise comes to Hezekiah that God will defend his city.

And the verse says, Isaiah 37, verse 35, I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of David, my servant.

So we learn from that that David the king was one of the servants of the Lord. So we give him a crown and we'll remind ourselves that this, the idea of being the king is that he is the anointed, in Hebrew the Messiah, we use that in English, don't we, Messiah, or if you put it into Greek it would be the Christ.

[13:56] So David the anointed, he's the Messiah, he's the Christ, and he is also the servant. So let's anoint him with some oil as well. And the job of the king is to rule and to bring justice.

So I'm going to have to give you a Hebrew word, mishpat. It means something like, I think it means something like, order, getting everything right with good decisions being made and harmony established.

And that's what the king is going to do. He's going to produce mishpat. That's what this servant does. And in this text we learn that the king is linked to the city because it says, I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.

So obviously as the Lord looks on David his servant he thinks about the city and says, the city and David belong together, I will save it for the sake of my servant. So there's the city and there's the king, I'm sorry, there's the people that the king has as his people.

This servant is also linked to the Lord because the Lord says, I will save this city for my sake and the sake of David my servant. So there seems to be a parallel or a link between what God says of

himself, his glory, his purposes, his sake and the sake of David, his servant.

[15:27] So they seem to be linked together in some way. And so he serves God because he's the servant of the Lord and there is a commitment from God to him.

So it isn't just that God says, you know, like we would say, get me a cup of coffee and then you'd never see that person again. I wouldn't expect to see the person again necessarily, but God says to David, you're my servant but I'm committed to you.

I have a bond with you. Your city, your city, I will save. So there's a commitment between the employer and the servant and because of him the Lord saves the city.

So there's David, the king, one of the servants of the Lord and the king is the reason that the city is saved.

We have the son of David, don't we? Do we know the son of David? Same relationship. For his sake, the Lord saves his people and he has, he is the builder of a great city whose architect is God, a city with foundations that we're looking forward to.

[16:54] So there's a link here in this whole business of the servant David to Jesus himself, the great saviour. Now then, let's think of another servant and this is the servant Israel.

So we need to go out of Isaiah to the book of Deuteronomy right back in the beginnings of Israel and this is what David was, David Rigglesworth I mean rather than King David, was referring to in the children's talk and here is the text that talks about this.

Deuteronomy chapter 4 verses 5 to 8. Deuteronomy chapter 4 verses 5 to 8.

So there's my little map, Mediterranean, Egypt, Jerusalem, there's my map and in that particular place God brings his servant, puts the servant, so I've done the servant as a person in a particular geographical place and it says here in Deuteronomy 4 verses 5 to 8, see I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, this is Moses speaking to the people, that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.

Observe them carefully for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations who will hear about all these decrees and say surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

[18:35] What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him and what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I Moses am setting before you today.

So that's part of Israel's understanding of why she's put there and what her role is. She's under God's word like Isaiah was.

She's to obey the Lord's word and she's to be the envy of the nations because God hears her prayers. She's to be the envy of the nations because of the way of life and the quality of the community under the word of God.

And we had some words here in verse 8. Other nation is so great as to have righteous decrees and laws this body of laws.

So we had a word for righteous we had a word for decrees which I think is linked with the idea of wisdom and one of those words in there is the word mishpat again.

[19:53] So here is the servant Israel doesn't say servant but we're going to say that in a minute and she is put there if I may say to be a light to the nations I put some little yellow light signs do they show yeah sort of so she's there to be a light to the nations the nations are supposed to look on and say wow what a great God what a wise God what a wonderful God just like David said we want some of that that that's what Israel is intended to be let's find out where she was where she ended up by the time we get to Isaiah 42 please will you come with me to Isaiah 42 which was read to us oh this bit wasn't read Isaiah 42 from verse 18 and this is now what is said about

Israel Isaiah 42 verse 18 hear you deaf look you blind and see who is blind but my servant and deaf like the messenger I send who is blind like the one committed to me and blind like the servant of the Lord you have seen many things but have paid no attention your ears are open but you hear nothing it pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious but

this is a people plundered and looted all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons they have become plunder with no one to rescue them they have been made loot with no one to say send them back and it goes on to say in verse 24 who handed

Jacob over to become loot and Israel to the plunderers was it not the Lord against whom we have sinned for they would not follow his ways they did not obey his law so he poured out on them his burning anger the violence of war it enveloped them in flames yet they did not understand it consumed!

God's servant Israel now described as deaf not listening can't hear described as blind what do you see can't see anything can you see what God's doing no can't see it at all impoverished verse 22 plundered and looted instead of glory and splendor they are in the gutter impoverished and they are imprisoned they are trapped in pits and hidden away in prisons probably thinking of the Babylonian captivity they're in a detention center in Babylon under lock and key in some dark horrible place that's where this servant has ended up far away in Babylon and why verse 24 because they were disobedient they were under the word of God but wouldn't do the word of God we would not follow his ways we did not obey his law and what did

God do he wrapped them in the flames of judgment verse 25 it enveloped them in flames and still they did not understand still they did not take it to heart it's a very bleak picture of what has happened to the nation that God took to be his servant to be a light to the other nations to be the envy of other nations and here they are deaf blind impoverished imprisoned disobedient far off headed for flames of judgment and ladies and gentlemen this is a picture of the human condition it's not simply meant for us as a historical description although it is that it is a prophetic description and it is a description which completely suits the human condition what are people like what are we like if we're left to ourselves answer we are deaf we cannot hear what

[24:42] God says to us unless there is a miracle unless he opens our ears we do not hear Jesus experienced this in his ministry he talked to thousands and thousands of people and at the end the number of people who heard was really very small deaf blind we cannot see what actually is obvious we have problems seeing that God made everything but he did we have problems seeing the truth of what it says in the Bible but it's true we are impoverished human nature human humanity the human condition is not that we are rich in the things that matter we are poor we are in the gutter with the spiritual things that matter we are imprisoned there is a slavery which grasps men and women boys and girls unless God does something about it a slavery which the

New Testament says a slavery to sin just as really as those captives in Babylon were slaves we too are slaves we can't escape from sin and we are far away spiritually we are far away from God like the prodigal son who went off to a distant land to get away from his father so we as a race we as human beings have emigrated far away from the holiness and righteousness and truth of God to a place of sin and selfishness and our own little world far away from God we don't love God by nature we don't want to do what he says unless it suits us for our own purposes and the flames of judgment are as real for us as for them it's a picture of the spiritual condition of men and women it's a very bleak picture it's a very stark picture and I'm going to ask you this morning whether you agree with that picture because this is the picture that God paints this is the picture that Jesus paints of our need for him and unless we're agreed on this point then the rest of it doesn't make any sense because this is what he rescues us from and if we don't think that's where you are then you won't particularly want to be rescued deaf blind impoverished far off disobedient headed for judgment let's look now at another servant let's go to the beginning of the chapter of chapter 42 where the Lord says here is my servant and here's so is it the same servant as we've seen before or yet another servant well let's read it here is my servant whom I uphold my chosen one in whom I delight I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations he will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets a bruised reed he will not break a smoldering wick he will not snuff out in faithfulness he will bring forth justice meaning mishpat he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth in his word in his law the islands meaning the continents will put their hope who is this servant what does it say about him it says that

God delights in him so God isn't looking at him as he looked at his deaf blind servant he's looking at him as the servant that he delights in the spirit of the Lord is on him so he has a special link with the

Lord a special enabling power from the Lord he has a work to do he will bring mishpat justice to the nations is that what it says it does it says to the nations that's a big agenda he will be gentle and self effacing as we read and it says of him in verse six I will keep you and make you a covenant for the people so that's his own people for Israel so for them he is in himself the agreement the place of making a bond together that's who he is a covenant for the people

Israel and a light for the Gentiles that's this servant so we've got the the Jews and the Gentiles both of them have a are the target if you like of the work of this servant and it says somewhere let's just see did I put the reference it's in verse seven this servant will open the eyes that are blind he will free captives from prison he will remove people from the dungeon those who sit in darkness isn't that brilliant he is the very one who will deal with the problem of the servant that we were talking about a moment ago and he does what Israel was supposed to do he's the light to the Gentiles he's the obedient servant who is he who is this mystery servant he's not

[31:14] Israel he's Israel's rescuer but he's in the same mold as Israel he was he does what she was supposed to do Isaiah 42 verse 18 and following that's the death blind imprisoned far away servant that's the picture of the human condition and God says I will not let my people stay there so I've zipped over to 43 verse 14 where it says this is what the Lord says your redeemer the holy one of Israel for your sake I will send to Babylon bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians in the ships in which they took pride I the Lord your I am the Lord your holy one Israel's creator your king he is the redeemer!

people free you from slavery I buy you out of slavery I shatter the chains that bind you in your prison I bring you from darkness into the light I I deliver you this word redeem is such a powerful rich strong word and no wonder the people who are redeemed shout for joy as it were and just to take this theme a little bit further in chapter 43 he says in verse 19

I am doing a new thing I am making a way in the desert it springs up don't you perceive it I am making streams in the wasteland the wild animals honor me because I provide water in the desert and give streams in the wasteland to give drink to my people my chosen the people I formed myself that they may proclaim my praise and he says I am bringing you home I am bringing you home it all wonderful good news in verse 25 he says I even I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and remembers your sins no more wow their sins he says that is completely forgotten my sins yes what sins are you!

talking! about completely forgotten what you were talking about what was that sin I have completely wiped out I will remember their sins no more what a change as God redeems his failed servant and we still ask how does he do it how does he do it how can God make his failed rebellious servant into his favoured obedient servant and the answer is through that mystery servant that we looked at a moment ago who turns out to be the suffering servant please turn to Isaiah 53 where we find in this chapter it actually begins at verse 52 verse 13 see my servant will act wisely and rather than read the whole thing because it's not only wonderful but also long let's dip into verse 6 where it says end of the previous verse by his wounds we are healed and in verse 6 it says we like sheep have gone astray yep that's right that was us each of us has turned to his own way that's right and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all see what we're saying the wretched failing servant his wandering his foolishness his iniquity the Lord has taken that and laid it on the obedient servant the gentle servant to make him the suffering servant the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all by his wounds we're healed so there's the good servant beginning of Isaiah 42 and he becomes like the captive servant in the gutter because the Lord lays on him the iniquity of us all who would have thought that who would have thought that God would do that to bring into play this mysterious figure who does what

[36:40] Israel was supposed to do and then as a reward for his obedience as it were gets slammed with all the sins and the guilt and the shame that wretched people incurred and deserved and he bears that for them who would have thought such a thing what other God has invented a way of salvation like that is it not the most glorious thing that God should have a servant like this and who is this servant who is this mysterious servant in the new testament one of the letters of Jesus his own disciples 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 24 refers to

Jesus he refers to Jesus of Nazareth the man who was born in Bethlehem lived in the northern part of Israel made friends with fishermen who fished around the sea of Galilee and when he was still a young man walked down to Jerusalem with his disciples was arrested by the Roman authorities given a very peculiar unfair trial and then nailed to a cross this Jesus is whom he's referring to he says about this Jesus 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 23 when they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate when he suffered he made no threats instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly and then he says he himself bore!

he he won't cry out the bruised!

he won't break that's Jesus he himself bore! our sins in his body on the tree by his wounds we are healed that's who it is that's who Jesus is that's what he that's what he did he's the hope of Israel the whole story of the Old Testament focuses up to Jesus the plight of the nations is solved in Jesus and it isn't just you see it isn't just Israel who looks to Jesus as the saviour he isn't just the saviour of Israel if you're Swiss he's the saviour of the Swiss people there is no other if you are German he is the saviour of the German people there is no other if you are English he is the saviour of the English people there is no other if you are African the wonderful African continent that's the only saviour to look to whatever nation he is the saviour for you the plight of the nations is solved in

Jesus if you like he's the servant who cleans up the mess that we've made he's like the waiter who serves us he's like the cleaner who cleans up the mess we made he's like the taxi driver who takes us home and this amazing thing that Jesus who is actually simultaneously the son of David so he's the great king and the great prophet that this Jesus is prepared to serve us like we would say cappuccino please glass of water and the deal with the pastry as well please yes certainly that

[41:32] Jesus is prepared I'll do that what do you need you! need forgiveness cleansing new life yeah I'll do that for you he's prepared to serve us he's prepared to clean us there's some vomit in my life there's some muck in my life it's disgusting and horrible Jesus says I will clean that I'll clean that he's the taxi driver who will bring us home I need to get home I need to get home somebody take me and he says I'll take you take you all the way home just jump in I'm prepared to do that and we say okay we'll pay and Jesus says no you won't that's that's the thing isn't it I made the mess Jesus I'll pay you to clean that up and Jesus says no you won't because you can't pay you don't have what's necessary to pay

I pay or it doesn't get done I'll do the hard work says Jesus to clean you to bring you home to serve you what you need and you know I pay the whole thing I'll pay and I'll pay in blood because that's what he did when he died on the cross you know the apostle Peter when he was when Jesus said he would wash him Jesus says no no no you don't need to do that that's a bit humiliating have you ever been so ill that you needed people to wipe your bottom for you very humiliating I haven't been as ill as that yet nobody would say no I don't want to you can't do that I always do that for myself that Jesus says I've got to wipe you and you've got to let me do it it's a humbling thing

I cleanse you I pay I do it or it doesn't get done do you need the service of Jesus Christ is your life in such a mess that you say I can't solve this myself my eyes are open to that I hear what's going on I need what only Jesus can do is that you do you need his service do you need what only he can do and only what he did on the cross is that what you need that nothing else will do no one else can do it it must be him and what he did on the cross is that where you're at this morning and have you come to the point where you're humble enough to let him pay to say to him

I know this is awful but you're going to have to do this okay I'll just let you do this Lord are you at the point where you are asking him to do that perhaps you've been there many times but perhaps this is the first time why not this moment say to Jesus that's what I need you're what I need you must serve me or I die and you must serve me with what you achieved when you died on the cross because nothing else will do take a moment to do that now and then we'll sing a song let's pray let's let's let's