

The Servant Songs: The Servant for the Weary

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[0:00] Now we're going to read from the Bible, God's Word, the Old Testament section from Isaiah chapter 50. It's the third of the four servant songs, verses 4 to 11.

! Isaiah 50 verses 4 to 11. Now let's pray before we read and think about this passage together. Lord Jesus, you are the source of God's wisdom. So as we turn to your Word, the Scriptures, the Holy Scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation, help us to listen to you as you speak to us in your Word, that you might sustain us and reinvigorate us so that we might live and glorify you. We pray once again that by your Holy Spirit you would open our eyes, that we would see wonderful truths in your law. And we ask it as we always do in your name and for your sake. Amen.

Now Isaiah chapter 50 and verse 4. The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.

[1:41] Morning by morning he awakens. He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious.

I turned not backwards. I gave my back to those who strike and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

But the Lord God helps me. Therefore I have not been disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint. And I know that I will not be put to shame.

He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.

Behold, the Lord God helps me. Who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment. The moth will eat them up.

[2:39] Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches. Walk in the light of your fire and by the torches you have kindled. This you have from my hand.

You shall lie down in torment. Amen. Amen. I was talking to somebody this week and he was just back from his holidays.

And I asked him how his holidays had gone. And he said, he said it was fine. But as soon as I walked through the doors at work, and he works in a very stressful situation, all the good my holiday did evaporated.

And it was as if I had never been on holiday. He wanted to come back from holiday reinvigorated. But he came back just as flat as when he left for his holidays.

[3:54] And sometimes we know even as Christians that we can be so worn out by all that we have to deal with, to deal with that weariness just sets into our lives.

Those of us involved in Christian work, we often say, Lord, we often pray, Lord, I'm not tired of your work, but sometimes I'm tired in your work. And sometimes we can just be so overwhelmed by our weariness that it generates the feeling that God just doesn't even remember that we exist.

And that he's left us. We're like the people to whom Isaiah was speaking, because in verse 14 of the previous chapter, this is what they said.

They said, the Lord has forsaken me. My Lord has forgotten me. Ever felt like that? I'm sure everybody here in this room has felt like that.

And maybe you're at church tonight and you're feeling just that way. How does God deal with us when we experience this despair generating weariness?

[5:06] Well, the answer is found in the third servant song. That because in it we're introduced to Jesus as the servant for the weary.

Servant for the weary. Listen to that. Who is he the servant for? He's not for the perfect. He's not for those who've got their lives all sorted out.

He's not for those who have got their act together. He's the servant for the weary, the overwhelmed, the hurting, the despairing.

He is the servant for people who have got their acts together and are doing well in their Christian lives. But he's especially the servant for the weary. His invitation is to come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

So how is Jesus the servant for the weary? Well, let's look at Isaiah 54 to 10. And the first thing we notice is this, that Jesus is the servant who sustains the weary.

[6:20] He's the servant who sustains the weary. Now, we know from the first servant song the good news. We've already heard the good news that Jesus, the servant of the Lord, is someone who will not crush a bruised reed.

And he'll not snuff out a smoldering, flickering wick. And the opening verse of this third servant song reminds us of that good news again, that Jesus sustains the weary.

I'm often accused of repeating myself in my sermons. But that's true. But let me repeat myself again.

Jesus is the servant who sustains the weary. The weary. Folks, we buy in constantly to Satan's malicious, slandering, and crushing suggestion that God is only interested in us when we are perfect.

And when we give him no hassle. And we are continually taken in by his perverted, twisted spin that if we are weary, or hurting, or struggling, or overwhelmed, or despaired, God really has no time for us at all.

[7:49] We're just a burden to him. When you hear those thoughts in your head, as I said before, listen for the hiss of the snake. Listen for the hiss.

Because those are from the evil one. Satan is a liar. He tells lies all the time. Everything he says is a lie. Don't believe him.

Think about Jesus. Think of what you know about Jesus, how he behaved during his time on earth, when people who were hurting came to him with all sorts of issues.

What did Jesus do? He didn't chase them. He didn't tell them to stop bothering him. There were times when the disciples said to Jesus, look, tell these lot to clear off.

And Jesus said, no, bring them to me. He didn't put them down. He didn't mock them because they were weak and in despair. He didn't scold them for not being perfect.

[8:53] The good news is that Jesus always is. The truth is the reality always is.

Because Jesus defines what reality is. The reality is always this. That Jesus, the servant of the Lord, sustains the weary. Now, how does he sustain the weary?

Well, we're given the answer in verse 4. He sustains the weary by his word. My script's from the NIV, but you can follow the ESV.

The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. That's how Jesus sustains the weary, by using his tongue, by what he says.

Now, we don't think that way in our culture. For us in our culture, talk is cheap. It's just blah, blah, blah.

[10:06] But not Jesus' words. What Jesus says has power. When Jesus speaks, the weary are sustained and reinvigorated and reassured and re-energized and revitalized.

Think of how Jesus' words impacted the woman who'd suffered 12 years of long-term pain due to a long-term illness.

Mark 5, 34. Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace. Go in peace.

Think of how Jesus' words impacted a widow and a mother from the village of Nain, who was overwhelmed with grief because she was heading to the cemetery to bury her only son.

Do not cry, Jesus said to her, and then raised her son back to life. You can read the story in Luke 7. Think about how Jesus' words impacted a prostitute who came to him crushed by her guilt because of her lifestyle.

[11:18] Again, Luke 7. Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace. Jesus sustains the weary by his words.

And why are Jesus' words able to sustain the weary? Because Jesus' words, when Jesus speaks, he's speaking as God from God.

The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue. And notice the end of verse 4, the process by which this happened. And he, the sovereign Lord, awakens me morning by morning, awakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

Now, all that Jesus learned was not dumped upon him in one go. It wasn't.

He was fully human. Think how we learn as humans. We learn bit by bit. You know, we learn math. You know, you're not doing quantum physics in primary one.

[12 : 26] You maybe get to one in one or two. But some of us didn't even get there. But bit by bit. And that's the same with Jesus. Each day, morning by morning, Jesus applied himself to learning and memorizing the Bible, the Old Testament.

He came to know God's word bit by bit. And slowly but surely, the Bible shaped his thinking, his desires, his actions, his sense of identity, his words.

And so, because he knew God's word, when weary people came to him, he was able to speak God's word appropriately into their situation so that weary people were sustained.

His mind was filled with God's word, and he was able to pull out the right bit of God's word that would sustain that person at that time. But that was the past.

How does Jesus sustain the weary today? How does he sustain us today, the start of the 21st century? Well, let me suggest you a number of ways.

[13 : 43] He does it through our words to each other. Now, our words do not carry with them the same potency as Jesus' words.

He spoke as God the Son, and we don't. Nevertheless, our words do have some significance. Think of how a kind word can make our day.

Or think about how a harsh word can leave us humiliated. Our words have a certain amount of potency. So we need to make sure that we are building up our understanding of God's word so that the Bible shapes our words more and more and more.

And this will help us to sustain others with our words and not to deflate them. It is only if, like Jesus, we open our ears to God's word that we will be in the position to obey God's instruction in Ephesians 4.25.

Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words. The kind that build up others so that what you say will do good to those who hear.

[15 : 01] That's what we want people to do. We want people who, when they meet us, say, I'm glad I met him. I'm glad I met her.

They really encourage me. But we only can speak those kinds of words, helpful words, if the word of God dwells richly in our thinking.

And like Jesus, we build up our understanding of God's word. Another way in which Jesus' words sustain the weary today is that as we read the Bible for ourselves, Andrew Bonner, or Bonner, I think it is Bonner, yeah, Andrew Bonner, one of the free church founding fathers, has a very moving entry in his diary of the Saturday, the 15th of August, 15th of October, 1864.

Here's what he writes in his diary. What a wound. Last night, most suddenly, my dear Isabella, that was his wife, was taken from me.

Lord, pour in comfort. And how has he brought comfort? Well, he tells us. He tells us that earlier in that day, part of a systematic reading of the Bible, he'd come across Nahum 1, verse 7.

[16 : 27] The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. Now, you don't come across Nahum 1, verse 7 unless you read the Bible systematically. You know, I don't think there's anybody in this room whose favorite book in the Bible is Nahum.

So he reads the Bible systematically. And that day, the day his wife died, he'd been reading Nahum 1, verse 7. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.

Little did I think he wrote in his diary, I would need it so soon. What was happening to Andrew Bonner? Jesus was sustaining him with his word.

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. Does Jesus' word take away the pain and the sorrow and the sadness?

No, it doesn't. But it sustains us in the midst of our sadness and sorrow and pain and weariness.

[17 : 32] That's why regular systematic reading of the Bible is so important. It's how Jesus sustains the weary. But let me suggest to you that the main way in which Jesus sustains the weary today is in public worship.

Kim, not her real name, was going through a particularly tough time. She had surgery for cancer and was undergoing follow-up chemotherapy when her mother died.

Kim was a prolific reader of good literature and she especially loved to read the Bible. But she confided in me that she was so physically exhausted by her treatment and its side effects.

And she was so emotionally destabilized by her grief that she couldn't concentrate to read even the Bible. Did you ever find yourself like that?

She couldn't concentrate to read even the Bible. And I said to her, how did you keep going? And she said, by coming to church every Sunday morning and Sunday evening.

[18:44] She said, at this moment I am not able to read the Bible for myself. But each Sunday in public worship I hear the Bible being read. I hear the Bible being prayed.

I hear the Bible being sung in the Psalms and the Bible-based hymns. And I hear the Bible being preached. That's how the Lord sustained Kim when she was weary.

And that's the way, the main way in which the Lord sustains us when we are weary. By coming to public worship that is saturated in the Word of God.

So we're constantly exposed to Jesus' Word that sustains the weary. When we grasp this, that this is the main way in which Jesus sustains the weary, it makes us realize why Satan tries his worst to keep us away from church.

He doesn't want us to hear Jesus' sustaining Word. He wants to keep us crushed. He wants to keep us away from church.

[20:00] You know, oh, you're feeling tired or down or anxious or whatever. He said, yes, give church a miss. That's the last thing we need to do.

Is to give church a miss. Because if we do, we will be the ones who will miss out. We'll miss out in hearing Jesus' words that sustain the weary.

Maybe they're not here yet. But soon there's going to be a whole clatter of new students and Glasgow Christian students. We need to encourage them to come to church in the morning and in the evening to hear the Word of Jesus.

To sustain them because coming to university for the first time is far more of an upsetting and changing situation than they actually realize.

So if you've got any contact with new students, get them here to hear the Word because that's how Jesus will sustain them. He sustains the weary.

[21:06] He sustains the weary. So how does the servant, how is Jesus the servant for the weary? He sustains the weary. Then secondly, Jesus is the servant who sympathizes with the weary, who sympathizes with the weary.

Now, I don't have time to go into the details, but I do want you to see that compared to the first two servant songs, Jesus' suffering takes up more space in the third servant song.

We're told, first of all, about Jesus' physical suffering. The sovereign Lord has opened my ears. So he says, I've listened to what God wanted me to do.

He says, I've not been rebellious. I've not drawn back. I've obeyed what God wanted me to do. However, my obedience resulted in how I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard.

I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. So Jesus' physical suffering is here. It was brutal. It was savage. It was intense. It was humiliating. It was fueled by diabolical hatred.

[22:10] And the third servant song underlines Jesus' emotional sufferings. It's hinted in the first servant song. It's mentioned in the second servant song.

But here in the third servant song, Jesus' emotional suffering intensifies. Now, before I can point this out to you, I do have to do a bit of housekeeping as far as translating Hebrew text of verse 10 as concerned.

Now, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is no punctuation. So the question in verse 10 is this. Where do you put the question mark?

Because where you put the question mark determines who is walking around in the dark with no light. Now, the ESV and the NIV as well, they put the question mark after the word servant.

So they read it. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Question mark. Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

[23:14] Okay? Now, by doing that, the ESV interprets. And please remember, there is no translation without interpretation.

It interprets Isaiah as saying that even though everything is dark all around us, we still must trust in God. Now, that's very, very true.

We live by faith, not by sight. So even if we can't work out what's happening to us, we are still to trust in God. But that's not what Isaiah 50 verse 10 is saying.

It says that in other parts of the Bible, but not here. Without going again in all the ins and outs, the question mark should be placed after the word light. So the verse should read, Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant?

Who walks in the dark, who has no light? Question mark. Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Now, by placing the question mark there, it's the servant who at times feels as if he's walking in darkness without a glimmer of light.

[24 : 28] It's an intensification of Jesus' suffering. Now, why this focus on the servant's suffering, whether it's physical or emotional?

It's because Jesus wants us to know that he understands. And so he is able to help us.

To use Bible speak, Jesus sympathizes with us. Sympathy in the Bible is not Jesus just come along, put his arm around us and said, There, there, I know how you feel.

It is that, but it's more than that. He helps us. He helps us. And it's so important, especially when we're suffering emotionally, to realize this, that Jesus' sympathy is one of the ways in which God upholds us, in which God grips us tight and supports us.

So we say to Jesus, I'm being tempted. And he replies, I was tempted too. And because I understand what it's like, I can help you.

[25 : 36] So come to me and trust in me. And Jesus says, I was physically attacked and abused. And we say to Jesus, I've been mocked and humiliated. And Jesus says, I was mocked and humiliated too.

And because I understand what it's like, I can help you. So come to me and trust in me and come to me. And we say to Jesus, I've been physically attacked and abused.

And Jesus says, I was physically attacked and abused. And because I understand what it's like, I can help you. So come to me and trust in me.

Or we say to Jesus, I've been overwhelmed by sorrow and discouragement. And he replies, I know that horrible feeling too. And because I understand what that's like, I can help you.

So come to me and trust in me. And we say to Jesus, I'm in a dark place. I feel as if God has abandoned me, as if I don't matter to him.

[26 : 42] And Jesus replies, I've been there too. And because I understand what this is like, I can help you. In fact, on the cross, I was in the darkest place possible.

I was actually abandoned by God. So come to me and trust in me. There was a group of American churches who decided to organize an evening for their young Christian adults on the theme of God's sovereignty.

And the headline for the meeting was, The God Who Makes No Mistakes. And the speaker wasn't a theological professor or even a minister.

But it was a lady called Johnny Erickson Tata. Some of you will know that name. Some of you won't. Johnny was 17 when she had a diving accident in Chesapeake Bay.

And it left her paralyzed from the neck downwards. So imagine you're 17. Your life's in front of you. And you get paralyzed in an accident.

[27 : 49] And you think to yourself, well, do young Christian adults need to hear theological lectures and sermons about God's sovereignty?

And yes, I think that we do. But they don't pack the same punch as hearing about a God who makes no mistakes from someone like Johnny, a quadriplegic speaking from a wheelchair about her life-changing disability.

Jesus, the servant, understands because he's been there and experienced that. And so he's able to help. And it's his sympathy with the weary that gives weight to his words, which are able to sustain the weary.

So come to him and trust in him. So how is Jesus the servant for the weary? He's the servant who sustains the weary. He sympathizes with the weary.

And then in the third place, Jesus is the servant who strengthens the weary. The servant who strengthens the weary. Even though he's suffering and in darkness without a glimmer of light, the servant keeps on trusting in God.

[29:08] And as he does so, he discovers, verse 7, the sovereign Lord helps me. Now, if you look at verses 7, 8, and 9, you will see that keeping on trusting in God and experiencing his help brings strength for the present.

The sovereign Lord helps me. Therefore, I've set my face like a flint. The Hebrew verb means to carry things through to success. Not the exact words, but the same idea are used of Jesus in Luke 9, 51, where he resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem to die on the cross.

Strengthen the present to keep on going. If you look again at verses 7, 8, and 9, you'll see that keeping on trusting in God and experiencing his help also gives you confidence for the future.

He says, Yes, he's going to suffer, but that won't be the end of him.

God will vindicate him. There's defiance in the servant's voice as he speaks in verses 8 and 9. He's confident about the future. He seems to be saying to his enemies, He's like the British heavyweight boxer who was all mouth and no talk yesterday.

[30:35] Bring it on, bring it on. I can do it. He's saying to his enemies, Come on, come on. Who's going to accuse me of anything? He bombards them with questions, questions that he knows the answer to.

He's telling them that no matter what charges or accusations or allegations they make against him, that God will vindicate him. God will dismissively reject any attempts to condemn him.

His enemies aren't going to have the last word because with God's help, the servant is going to be the last man standing. They will all wear out like a garment. The moths will eat them up.

We see this confidence for the future in Jesus. There were three occasions when he explained to his disciples what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem.

He always made it clear that he was going to the cross to die. But he also made it clear that on the third day he was going to rise again.

[31:39] Okay, the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was driving at. And while disappointing, their slowness did not diminish Jesus' confidence about his future.

God would vindicate him. And our present might be dark. We might be weary for all sorts of reasons and on the point of giving up or at least pressing the pause button.

Jesus, the servant who trusted in the Lord, was given strength for the present. And he tells us to trust in the name of the Lord and to rely on God too.

And when we do that, in spite of our weariness, in spite of our dark circumstances, he will give us the strength to keep going. Because earlier on, he had said these words, those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40, 31. But maybe you say to me, Roger, I am so weary.

[32:53] I am so crushed. I'm not sure if I can even walk. Well, don't despair. Because Jesus, the servant, is the good shepherd who gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.

He strengthens us in the present. And what about the future? For all sorts of reasons, we can be so weary that we wonder if we're ever going to make it to heaven.

And when those doubts wear us down, Jesus, the servant who trusted in the Lord and was given confidence for the future, tells us to look away from ourselves and to trust in the name of the Lord and to rely on God.

And if the words in Isaiah 50, verses 8 and 9 sound familiar, that's because they are familiar, because Paul was definitely thinking about them when he wrote Romans 8, 33 and 34.

And in that passage at the end of Romans 8, he's dealing with the whole issue of assurance of salvation. How, in spite of our circumstances, how, in spite of our feelings, how, in spite of what's going on, in spite of temptation, we can be confident about our future, certain that we will be with Jesus in heaven.

[34:21] And in Romans 8, 33 and 34, Paul picks up on Isaiah 58 and 9 and asks us this question.

He says, come on. Come on, guys. He says, do you seriously think that Jesus, the one who died for us, the one who rose for us, the one who reigns for us, the one who intercedes for us, do you seriously think that having done all that, he will now turn around and condemn us?

To quote the words of that great theologian, John McEnroe, Paul is saying to us, you cannot be serious. Of course Jesus won't do that.

That in spite of how weary we might get, there is absolutely no way that we will not make it to heaven. Sorry for the East Belfast double negative, but there's absolutely no way we will not make it to heaven because he will hold us fast.

Because he loves us, he will hold us fast. We have confidence about the future because of all that Jesus has done for us. So when we're weary, what does God offer us?

[35:41] He offers us Jesus, his son, our savior, the servant of the Lord. He says to us, see my servant, the one who sustains and sympathizes and strengthens.

He's all you need. He's all you need. He's everything that you'll ever want. So come to him and trust in him.

No matter how weary you are, listen to his words of invitation. Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.

That's his promise. If you're weary tonight, come to Jesus. He's all you need and all you will ever want. Let's pray for a moment.

Lord Jesus, the servant of the Lord who sympathizes and sustains and strengthens the weary, we come to you for rest.

[36:50] Help us to trust in you, to rely on you, so that we might have strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. And we ask this in your name.

Amen.