

Hallelujah! What a Servant!

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[0:00] Now, if you've been with us for the whole of the four servant songs, you'll notice that the final servant song begins where the first one began with God's call to us to focus our attention! on Jesus. See my servant.

And if we do that, what do we see? Well, in this fourth servant song, when we look at the servant, the first thing we see is this. We see Jesus, the submissive servant. Jesus, the submissive servant. In verse 10, Isaiah mentions the will of the Lord twice. And that's the label that Isaiah gives to God's plan of salvation, which God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit drew up in eternity past. And although all three persons of the Trinity are involved in all the aspects of each of the plan of salvation, each of the three persons of the Trinity takes a different role in a different aspect. God the Father plans it. God the Son carries it out, accomplishes it.

And God the Holy Spirit applies it or makes it real in our experience. So the role that was assigned to God the Son is to carry out the plan. And that's why Jesus is called the servant of the Lord.

God the Son is called the Lord. Because that's what servants are supposed to do. They're supposed to submit to the plan and carry it out. Jesus doesn't freelance. He doesn't follow his own agenda.

[2:12] He doesn't go rogue. He doesn't say, well, I fancy this bit and I'll do it, but I don't fancy that bit, so I'll not do that. No, he's the submissive servant who obeys. He carries out the will of the Lord.

That's how he explained his coming into the world, his birth. In Hebrews 10 verse 7, he quotes from Psalm 40 that we sang. He says, here's the reason I've come into the world. I have come to do your will, oh my God. He explained to the people who listened to him and saw what he did, why he did what he did and said what he said. And he did it in a similar way. John 6, 38, I have come down from heaven to do the will of him who sent me. Again and again, if you read John's gospel, he describes the father as the one who sent him. And he carries out the father's plan. He's a submissive servant. However, Jesus' outstanding act of obedience to the will of the Lord was his death on the cross. When God says to us, see my servant, he's taking us to the hell of the skull just outside

Jerusalem and wants us to focus our attention on Jesus hanging, dying on the cross. Because it's on the hell of the skull that Jesus supremely showed that he was a submissive servant of the Lord by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. So it's clear from the fourth servant song that Jesus is a submissive servant who obeys the Lord's will. And probably, you know, if you're listening to people preaching on this and they've done it, they've said, and do we obey Jesus, God's will in the same way as Jesus did? That's a good question to ask. But it's not the question Isaiah's asking here in this passage. The question, as Isaiah tells us that Jesus is the submissive servant of the Lord, is to ask this question, for whom is Jesus obeying as a submissive servant?

For whom is Jesus obeying as a submissive servant? The Bible's consistent message is this, that performance always determines life. Performance always determines life. God couldn't be clearer about that. We sang Psalm 15 at the start of the service. Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Who can stand in his holy place? Who can approach God? Now, if I sat down beside you and asked you that question, you would probably say to me, well, people whose sins have been forgiven. And that's true. But that's not what Psalm 15 says.

[5:48] Psalm 15 then goes on to say a big list of things, of people who do certain things and don't do certain things, who perform in a certain way. And at the end, it says, that's the sort of person who can approach God. God says performance always determines life. God says if we want to have life, then we have to love him perfectly with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And we have to express that perfect love by obeying flawlessly every single one of God's commands without exception all the time and every time. Because performance always determines life. Now,

Jesus does not need to perform in that way for himself. He doesn't need to do anything to have life himself. After all, he is God the Son, who is not just the source of life, but as life itself. So the question is, for whom is Jesus obeying as the submissive servant? And the answer that the fourth servant song gives is that he is obeying for us.

Now, folks, if performance always determines life, as Psalm 15 seems to indicate, then, as they say, Crow Road, we have a problem. We have a big, big problem because we are disobedient. And the pathetic level of our performance is flagged up at the start of Isaiah 53, verse 6, where he says, We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each one of us has turned to his own way. Now, don't think of sheep, you know, they're nice, cuddly, and cute, aren't they? Or maybe you prefer them roasted with mint sauce, but I shouldn't have said that. In the summertime, we were up in North Eust for three weeks. And we had a great time. We went to agricultural shows. Come on, I'm 70 years, 71 years old. I'm too old for jumping around and partying. And we went to sheepdog trials. If you've never been to sheepdog trials, you really ought to go to sheepdog trials once in your life.

[8:42] It was absolutely brilliant. They get these sheep, five sheep, and these shepherd and his dog, our shepherdess and her dog, they have to guide them, go and fetch them, and bring them up through gates and round this gate.

And then they have to take them to a pen and put them into the pen and close the gate and then sort them out and then take them out through the gate. Well, we were there for about three or four hours. I think we saw 28 shepherds.

And the sheep absolutely hammered the sheepdogs. I think there were three dogs who got them into the pen but didn't finish the course. The sheep were so unruly.

They would just stand there and stare at the dog and stare at the shepherd and stare at the dog. And if the dog moved, they would head off. They just wouldn't do anything.

And I thought, that's Isaiah 53, verse 6. God tells us, this is how you are to live. And we look at him and say, no way.

[9:51] I'm going off here. We're disobedient. And because we're disobedient, our performance deprives us of life.

So we're in big trouble. But what if, what if someone was to come along and love God perfectly with all his heart and soul and mind and strength and to express that perfect love by obeying flawlessly every single one of God's commands without exception all the time and every time.

And what if he performed in that way for us? And what if God treated us on the basis of his performance and not ours?

That would be a completely different ball game, wouldn't it? But hasn't that, isn't that exactly what God has done on the basis of the obedience of Jesus, the submissive servant of the Lord?

That he has obeyed for us so that we might have life. Performance always determines life. life. And we have life.

[11:22] We have life now, not because we have performed, but because of how Jesus has performed. One of my great heroes is a man called Gresham Machen.

He was the founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He died at the age 55 in 19, 1st January 1937 in Bismarck, North Dakota.

He died of pneumonia. And as he lay dying, he sent a telegram. That was high tech in those days. A telegram to his friend John Murray.

And he said, thank God for the obedience of Christ. It is our only hope. And brothers and sisters, the obedience of Jesus, the submissive servant, is our only hope.

Because God deals with us on the basis of Jesus' obedience, of his performance, and because he has performed perfectly and we are united to him by faith, God gives us life.

[12:51] And if we weren't all doer Presbyterians, we would be all going hallelujah, what a servant. Isn't it brilliant?

The submissive servant. Secondly, he is the suffering servant. If we see my servant, who is Jesus? He is the suffering servant. Now, we have already noticed how in each of the servant songs, the servant's suffering is ramped up another notch.

flesh. And we know he's going to suffer. And the brutality of Jesus' physical suffering is flagged up once more in verse 14 of chapter 52.

Isaiah says, many were appalled at him. His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness. The Hebrew verb appalled is a very strong one. The servant is going to be mutilated and tortured and he's going to be so disfigured that he's no longer appears human. And the people who saw Jesus, they shuddered in horror at the sight. [14:02] Some of them were physically sick. It's that level. They had nightmarish flashbacks of what they saw that day. But what the fourth servant song brings to the table is not the fact of Jesus' suffering, but the reason for Jesus' suffering.

The fourth servant song is a very carefully crafted poem. It's made up of five stanzas. Each one is three verses long. And the central stanza is verses four to six. And it explains why Jesus suffered. It informs us of Jesus' spiritual suffering. And its big emphasis is that Jesus died under the judgment of God. And you can see this from the fact that the central stanza of the fourth servant song is just crammed full of words associated with God's judgment. Look at all the verbs that are used. They're associated with God's judgment against people who sin. He strikes them. He smites them. He humiliates them.

[15:10] He afflicts them. He pierces them. He punishes them. And when God acts in judgment because of people's rebellion, their rebellion is described in nouns.

It's rebellion against him. That's the word transgression. Their twistedness, iniquities. And all those against whom God acts in judgment, they find their lives marred with, again, look at the nouns, shame, infirmities, disappointment, grief, suffering, sorrow, anxiety, alienation from God, death. So from the vocabulary of verses four to six, it's not hard to conclude that Jesus appears to be suffering under God's judgment. But we need to be careful at this point, tread carefully. While it's not wrong to see Jesus suffering under God's judgment, it is a mistake to see him suffering for his own sins.

We're explicitly told at the end of verse nine that Jesus is innocent. He has done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth. So for whom was the suffering servant suffering under God's judgment?

[16:44] And to answer that question, we need to look at verses four to six vocabulary, and especially the small words that we skip over so easily, like our, we, us.

you see, those small words punch well above their weight because they tell us that Jesus suffered under God's judgment, not for his own sins, but for our sins.

For those of you who like things in theological packaging, it's the idea of substitution, that on the cross, God, if you like, loads Jesus with all our rebellion against God, and all our failure to obey God, and all our twistedness, and all the things that blight our lives, and all the moral and spiritual wrong and guilt that alienates us from God, and all that deserves God's wrath, everything is loaded upon Jesus, and he dies in our place, and he is crushed under the weight of our sin, as God punishes him for our sin.

But as a result of this judgment-bearing suffering, Jesus brings us peace with God, and removes the weight of guilt from our shoulders, and brings us back, and gives us a renewed, healed humanity, makes us real people again, and restores our all, round well-being.

Hallelujah! What a servant! And there's one more thing we need to see here, a submissive servant, a suffering servant, and the successful servant.

[18:50] Now, Jesus' success is written all over this fourth servant song. Look at verse 13, it says he will, of chapter 12, 52, he will act wisely.

Now, in the Bible, wisdom is not simply knowing stuff, you know, it's not just being able to win the jackpot and pointless, or who wants to be a millionaire, it's not just knowing stuff, it's not just knowing what to do with the stuff we know.

It combines knowledge and effectiveness, knowing exactly what to do in order to bring about the intended results. That's why some translations have he will succeed, he will prosper.

you see, Jesus succeeds. Notice at the start of verse 15 of Isaiah 52, that in the Bible, when people experience God's salvation, the picture of sprinkling with water or blood is often used.

For example, in the Old Testament, sacrifices, when blood was sprinkled, thrown onto the sides of the altar, and the sinner was forgiven.

[20:11] And Ezekiel in chapter 36 talks about the new birth of the Holy Spirit. He says that God will sprinkle us with water and we'll be clean. Sprinkling is the idea of experiencing God's salvation.

And the servant, as we've seen, has been assigned a task by God to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. And verse 15 of Isaiah 52 tells us that Jesus has succeeded.

Because he will sprinkle many nations. Verse 10 of Isaiah 53, everything in God's plan of salvation rests on the servant's obedience and the servant's suffering.

And we say, will the servant be up to it? Will God's salvation plan crash and burn because the servant just can't produce the goods?

And we think, no, no, no, no. Of course not. The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. Jesus succeeds.

[21:18] And how do we know that Jesus has succeeded? Well, look at the end of verse 13 of Isaiah 52.

It says, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. And those three verbs plug into what in theological speak is called Jesus exaltation.

they take us to Jesus resurrection as he is raised from the dead, to Jesus ascension when he's lifted up from earth to heaven, and Jesus reign on the throne as he's highly exalted as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

You see, Jesus' exaltation is God's stamp of approval on all that Jesus did and all that he achieved and that he's achieved all that he set out to do.

He's successful. But we also know that Jesus has succeeded in another way, and it's to do with the church's existence. Look at verse 10 of Isaiah 53, where the servant's success is put this way, he will see his offspring.

[22:41] Isn't that an interesting phrase about Jesus? He will see his offspring. Jesus never married, nor was he ever sexually promiscuous.

So what's Isaiah talking about when he talks about he will see his offspring? Well, he's talking about Jesus' spiritual offspring, people who placed their trust in him, and that's underlined at the start of verse 11.

Now, the Hebrew is difficult to translate. I think that the footnote of the NIV has got it right when it says, he will see the suffering, the results of the suffering of a soul, and be satisfied.

the physical, the emotional, and especially the spiritual suffering that Jesus experienced in order to carry out his task as the servant of the Lord is way beyond us.

But if we said to Jesus, Jesus, was it worth it? He would say to us, of course it was. And then he would point to the church and he would say, that's the reason it was worth it.

[24:01] Isn't that amazing? That Jesus looks at us tonight here and he points at us and says, you're the reason that my suffering was worth it.

Am I enough? Even Christians ask that question. Am I enough? And Jesus says, of course you are. You're worth it. That's why I went to the cross and died for you. And if you need further evidence of the church's existence, it shows that Jesus succeeded, what about the start of verse 12?

It's a picture of a victorious king receiving the spoils of his conquest. Now, the traditional translation is followed by most English translation, I will give him a portion among the great.

That translation just bristles with problems. Not least because it gives the impression that the servant is only one victor among many.

[25:20] What God says to Jesus, the victorious king who has won a decisive game-changing victory over his enemies at the battle of the hill of the skull is this, that when dividing out the spoils of war, God the father says to Jesus, I will allocate to him the many.

many. And who are the many? The people given to Jesus as a sign that he has succeeded. Well, Jesus himself tells us who they are, John 6, 37.

They are the church, you and I, all that the father has given me, says Jesus, will come to me.

That we were given to Jesus by the father as a gift. And the fact that we have come to him is a sign that Jesus has succeeded, that he is victorious.

How can we be sure, how can we be absolutely certain that Jesus has succeeded? Well, there is the historical evidence.

[26:32] We can look back in time and space and history to Jesus, resurrection and ascension and reign. But we can also look around to each other, to the church, because we are the living, breathing sign that Jesus, the servant of the Lord, has succeeded, that he's acted wisely, that the will of the Lord has prospered in his safe, nail-pierced hands.

And why do we need Jesus, why do we need to be certain that Jesus is the successful servant? The reason is quite simple, because isn't it true that very often we don't feel very successful? faithful. We reckon very often we haven't made much of a go of the Christian life. There are times we even doubt if we are Christians.

We faced testing circumstances and constant struggles and fierce temptations. All we can see is dark clouds on the horizon. And when our lives are like this, folks, we need to remember that Jesus has succeeded, that God the Father is delighted with his obedience and his suffering and what they have achieved.

And that means that no matter how you feel about yourself, if you have placed your trust in Jesus, that God has forgiven you, God has not abandoned you, that God treats you as if you have obeyed him perfectly and gives you eternal life.

[28:32] Jesus' success reminds you that God is on the throne and that he is in control of everything. I opened the BBC News app this morning to be told that AI was going to destroy me and humanity.

And the problem was that last week I was told it was the climate change was going to do that. And the week before I was told that it was going to be the Russians or the Chinese or it was going to do something else there.

We're being told the world is out of control. Jesus' success reminds us that God is still on the throne and everything is under his control even our lives as individuals.

And that we might be in a dark place but Jesus' success gives us hope that in spite of our circumstances in spite of ourselves he will keep us safe.

that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. The servant will succeed. All will be well and you will make it because Jesus has been raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

[30:01] Hallelujah. What a servant. See my servant. Can I commend Jesus to you. The one who has lived the life that you should have lived and died the death that you should have died and who will keep you and hold you fast until the end.

Oh, trust in him. No matter what circumstances you're in, trust in him. See my servant. Look to Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, just as you delight in Jesus, the servant of the Lord, we too by your grace also delight in him.

We delight in his obedience which brings us life. We delight in his sufferings which bring us forgiveness. We delight in his success that brings us stability and hope.

Accept our thanks for all that you have done for us through him. Give us your Holy Spirit's help to express our delight in him and our gratitude to him by giving him our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength promptly and sincerely.

[31:22] In his name, Amen.