

The Servant's Love and Obedience

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[0 : 00] Isaiah chapter 50 at verse 4. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

As you read through Isaiah, and especially following chapter 40, you find there's four parts where they're known as the servant songs or the servant poems.

And the verses that we read here in verse 4 through to verse 9 are the third. It's the third of these servant songs. And as you read through it, what you find is that Isaiah in his day is looking way in the future to another day when the servant of the Lord would come.

And you see it there, especially in verse 6 when it speaks about, I gave my back to those who strike and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard.

And I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. When you look to what Isaiah was seeing there, we find that speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his back, that by his stripes we would be healed.

[1 : 42] So here we have the third of these servant songs. It's most maybe well known, of course, as Isaiah, end of 52 into 53, where it speaks of a very vivid imagery of how Jesus would suffer.

But we find it here and in the other songs too. I'm just going to reflect on some of this chapter together this evening and see what it says to us, a little of the servant that we see here.

I want to begin by asking a question. If you were to go back to the 28th of February 2020, four years ago today, and to think, where do I see myself four years from now?

What kind of reply would you have given? You might think initially about location. Perhaps you've not moved at all.

Perhaps you're living in the same place you were four years ago. Or perhaps, I include myself in this, you're in a different place now. Some of us will have moved during that time. Others, we maybe think of the work situation that we're in.

[2 : 52] Maybe that's changed in that four-year space. There's many different kinds of answers that we could come to, maybe when you think of where do I see myself in such and such a time.

But if you go back to the 28th of February 2020, would the answer have included things like going through a global pandemic, having come through a period of lockdown, where the world was almost brought to a standstill, and then coming out of that to see the last few years and the turmoil of the world in different places, our own nation included.

And we think of other parts of the world where there's conflict and war. We think of natural disasters that we've seen happening on a regular basis.

Would we have been thinking along those lines four years ago? In many of these things, they'd have been the furthest thing from our mind. And yet in God's providence, we've gone through all of these things.

And in some, we're still going through these things at this time. And if we go back further to the day of Isaiah, to the people of God then, if you'd asked them, where do you see yourselves in four years' time prior to them being taken captive by the Assyrian invasion that took them away from their homeland into a foreign country, if you'd asked them where would they see themselves in four years' time, the answer would have been far from being captive in a foreign land because everything was going well with them.

[4 : 39] They were wealthy. They were prospering. They were happy in so many ways. But what was happening was they were forgetting God. And God, as he has reminded us in these last four years, that things can change very quickly.

He was about to remind the people of God in Isaiah's day that things can change very quickly as well. And so you find the book of Isaiah divided into two, where you see initially the first 39 chapters where Isaiah is giving a warning, a warning for the people to listen, to heed the warning, that if they don't turn back to God, that there are going to be consequences coming upon them.

But then from chapter 40 onwards, you see the consequences of not listening and being taken captive. But the amazing thing is that God speaks.

God still speaks to them. As he was warning them to listen before they were taken captive, so he continues to speak to them as they are in captivity.

And he's speaking a word of rescue, a word of salvation, a word of one who would come to save. And especially looking, as we see in these servant songs, to one who would ultimately save his people from all their sins.

[6 : 07] And so it's remarkable how even in disobedience, God shows mercy and continues to speak to us. But as is always the case, the question is, are we listening?

Now when you go back to the early days of the pandemic, one of the most common Google searches was on prayer and how to pray.

Because people were worried, people were anxious, people were fearful of what was ahead. But you think, well, where are we today? Is there still that same urgency with people?

Is there still that same worry with people about their lives, their future, and ultimately eternity? That worry seems to have gone.

And with it has a sense of relying or looking to God gone. But God has warned us again and again. The question so often is, are we listening?

[7 : 06] You see that in verse 10 here of chapter 50. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Who is listening?

When you think of what we would want to see in the future, if you were to see into the future, what would you want to know?

And what would you do differently as a result? We might have all the kinds of different ideas of what we would want to know about the future. What is the world going to be like?

What are our lives going to be like? What is going to affect us in this life? What events are going to come our way? There's lots of things we would maybe like to know.

But God in his wisdom doesn't show us many of these things. And the Old Testament prophets, you find such as Isaiah, they were given an insight into the future, seeing far ahead into the future of what was going to take place by God's providence.

[8 : 12] But what did they tell the people about? Do you see them telling about amazing discoveries that would be made of different lands? Do you see them speak about how communications would develop so that you're able to speak to somebody and see someone on the other side of the world on your screen and talk to them?

Do you think it's speaking about these remarkable journeys into space or anything like that that leaves us fascinated in many ways? Are these the important things that the prophets were telling the people about?

All of these things may be amazing in and of themselves, but there's nothing more amazing than what the prophets were speaking about. They pale into insignificance compared to what Isaiah is speaking about here and the prophets are speaking about throughout the Old Testament.

They were speaking about what is vital, what is crucial, what is of first importance for us as a people and what we should truly stand in awe of and be amazed at.

The very fact that we have turned our back on God, that we have put God's word behind our back as we were thinking about on Sunday evening, how we have rejected God and sinned against God, and yet that God in his wonderful grace would send his servant, his son into this world to provide for his people, to provide a saviour.

[9 : 55] Do we stand in wonder at that? When you think of the hymn, How Great Thou Art, and the words of that hymn that says, O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made, but when I think that God, his son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in, that on the cross, our burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away our sin.

Do we stand in wonder at the servant who gave his back for us? Well, what Isaiah is telling the people here is urgent for them.

And he's telling it to us as well, because it's urgent for us to recognise the one he is speaking about, to recognise how significant it is for ourselves, the one who gave his back for us.

And there's three things just briefly want to take from this passage about the servant that it speaks of. And the first thing is the servant's word. Then secondly, we'll see the servant's obedience.

And then thirdly, the servant's light. So the first thing we want to see is the servant's word. As Isaiah is writing to the people here, it's in the midst of captivity.

[11 : 36] Their world had been turned upside down in so many ways. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. We've been looking at Nehemiah, which would come later on, although it's different order if you look at it in the scriptures.

But the years are Isaiah is writing before Nehemiah. So it's prior to Jerusalem and the people being taken captive and Jerusalem destroyed.

Nehemiah would be writing about the restoration. Well, here Isaiah is writing to them in the midst of them being taken captive. And it's clear as he's writing to them that it's because of their disobedience that they find themselves in this situation.

You see that in verse 1 to verse 3. Just there in the middle of verse 1. Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?

There's this image of them being taken away. Behold, for your iniquities you were sold. And for your transgressions your mother was sent away. They were taken captive because of their sins.

[12 : 45] But in the midst of this, the remarkable thing is the word of God being given. And it's a word of comfort and a word of hope.

When you did wrong in school, you did something wrong in school, you would be told in no uncertain terms that what you had done was wrong.

that it was not acceptable. But if it was left at that, you wouldn't really learn the true lesson. Because a good teacher wouldn't just leave it there.

As well as pointing out what you've done wrong and how it's unacceptable, they would seek to put you on the right path and the right direction. A word of rebuke followed by a word of direction.

And that's really what you see here. God is speaking through Isaiah and he shows both of these sides. He's reminding them strongly with a rebuke that their sin, their transgression has left them where they are and where they've done wrong.

[13 : 58] But he's also speaking to them in a tender way as well. Speaking to them that they might come back and listen and go on the right path once again.

And what we see here in verse 4, it speaks of the servant's word to us. The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.

the Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught. This is not just Isaiah speaking.

He is speaking of the servant of God. The one who God would send into this world for his people. With a tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.

He is saying that God will send someone to come to his people with a word of comfort. It's not just for their day.

[15 : 13] It's for all of God's people. And the most important thing, the best gift that God could give apart from his son is his word.

That he would speak to his people despite our sin, despite our rebellion, that he has not turned away from us. And God's word is precious.

And it should become more and more precious to us day by day that morning by morning we'd be awoken by his word. Stirred up by his word.

just as a servant here is being stirred up as well because he has the word that is able to sustain the weary. And we are to listen to this word.

And that comfort is seen here in verse 4 because we all feel that sense of burden and weariness in this life.

[16 : 16] we all feel that sense of lacking strength, unable to go on at times. But when we know the Lord we know he sent his servant for us who has a word to sustain us, who has a word to keep us.

That Jesus is the one who is the word that became flesh. And so Jesus came into this world that we would listen to him.

When you read in the Gospels in the New Testament for example you have the time of the Transfiguration in Luke 9 verse 35 when the Lord God the Father speaks in the clouds saying this is my son, my chosen one.

Listen to him. Listen to him. And what does Jesus have to say as he speaks? Verses like Matthew 11 verse 28 Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden all who are weary and I will give you rest.

The servant's word. He has a word to speak that sustains him who is weary. That is the wonder of the God we have.

[17 : 39] The servant's word. The second thing we see here is the servant's obedience. He was skilled in God's word but submissive to God's will.

In verse 5 the Lord 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. I was not rebellious. I gave my back to those who strike me.

The servant is obedient to the will of God. And what is God's will for his servant?

Well that's what we've recently remembered as we've sat at the Lord's table. At time of communion and in all our worship we remember what the Lord has done for us through his servant.

[18 : 47] Through the one who gave his life for his people. Who didn't rebel or turn backwards in the sense of shunning what lay ahead of him.

But who bore our sins on the cross. The Father's will was for the servant to come and to give his life.

And you think of the burden of this. The doing of the Father's will. The giving of his back to those who would strike him.

You think of the burden of this as you see it in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew 26 verse 39 where it says, Going a little further he fell on his face and prayed saying, My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. He didn't turn back. He gave his back.

[19 : 58] He set his face as a flint as it says here and you see it in the New Testament. He set his face towards Jerusalem. He didn't turn away. He didn't go backwards.

He was not rebellious. He was obedient. He was the obedient servant. because of God's love for his people gave his back.

And you think of what that entailed. The beating that he bore. The spitting. The disgrace. The striking of his cheeks.

It's all there for us. As I say, as writing 700 years before it came to be. the servant's obedience is there.

The Lord came to take our burdens from us. To bear our burdens. He was obedient.

[21 : 05] He became sin for us. God is there. Do we stand in awe of that? Do we stand in awe of the cross?

Of how they crucified him? How they nailed his hands and feet? How they pushed a crown of thorns on his head? How they mocked him and spat at him? He did not turn backwards.

He was not rebellious. he gave his back. The wonder of that love. But you see too how the Lord was sure of his help.

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 shall not be put to shame.

All of these things he did for us. and it's assuring us too of the Lord's help as we put our trust in him.

[22 : 14] The final thing we want to see from this section is the servant's light. And you see here in the contrast you have at the end in verse 10.

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servants. So this is a challenge for us here. Isaiah is speaking once again to us. Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

So he's telling us there what we are to do. We can walk in darkness and has no light. We have the hope of the Lord. Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

But verse 11 shows the opposite. behold all who kindle a fire who equip yourselves with burning torches. Walk by the light of your fire and by the torches that you have kindled that you may have from my hand.

This you have from my hand you shall lie down in torment. Lie down there is speaking of dying. You shall die in torment if you go by your own light.

[23 : 31] If you go by your own ways. The torch is the light he is talking about. There is just kindling a light for yourself to try and find your own way. It's the complete opposite of the servant's light.

And listening to the servant's voice. Because we have one who came into our darkness and who is the light of the world. he gives us his light.

Because there is no hope for us walking in darkness. But in John 8 verse 12 Jesus spoke to them saying I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

You see it's not our own light. It's his. He is the light of the world. And that is the light.

that we are to walk in. But it comes down to that question. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Who is listening to the servant's word?

[24 : 39] The word that is able to sustain the weary. Who loves the servant because of his obedience? Because he gave his back that we might have life?

Who among us fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? What are we to do if we do let him walk? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

As we hear Isaiah speak of a future, it asks the question of us, what do we want in our own future? Where do we see ourselves in another four years?

Well, the reality is none of us know what our situation will be then in some ways. But in another we do as we put our trust in the Lord.

So we've been reminded in the prayers this evening, he is a God of providence and he is a God of grace who will never leave his people, who will never forsake his people.

[25 : 56] That is why God sent his son, his servant, into this world to give us the light to go on, to go forward and to keep going.

It's not someone who I would regularly quote, but Nat King Cole once wrote a song and sang a song called Unforgettable and the words in it, they kind of resonate with this passage in some ways if we can apply them in the right way.

Unforgettable, he said, that's what you are. Unforgettable though near or far. the people of God had been taken far away from their home, but the Lord should have been unforgettable for them.

The warning that Isaiah had given was you are forgetting the Lord. The same warning that the people had as they went into the promised land in Deuteronomy, be careful when you go into the land and you have all of these good things, do not forget the Lord.

The Lord should be unforgettable, but is he? That song goes on to say, that's why it's incredible that someone so unforgettable thinks that I am unforgettable too.

[27 : 32] In the Lord's Supper, we do this in remembrance of him, because surely it's unforgettable what he has done for us.

And what's more remarkable is that we are unforgettable to him, that he remembers us and sees our need and provides for it in his servant, his son.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart, then shall I bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, my God, how great thou art.

Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that as a people we are precious to you and that though we forget you, that we are unforgettable to you.

And we pray, Lord, that you will remember us in all our different needs. We thank you that you know us personally and individually, that you know, Lord, just what we need and when we need it.

[28 : 51] And we thank you that no matter what our providence, no matter what might change as we look to a future that is so often uncertain, that you do not change, but that you remember us and that we would see how precious you are, how precious your servant is, how precious the word that sustains us when we are weary, how precious the cross and how your servant gave his back, and how precious it is that we would listen to your voice and seek to walk in your paths by your light.

Watch over us, we pray, and guide us by your truth, forgiving all our sin, in Jesus' name. Amen.