**The Second Servant Song** Isaiah 49:1-13bible-sermons.org Sept. 13, 2015

Our subject today is the second Suffering Servant Song. We call it a song because it is written in prose about God’s servant who is rejected by the nation. The first such song we studied in Isaiah 42, and there are several more later in Isaiah.2 Together they paint a picture of the Messiah that was to come. This marks a transition in Isaiah from the previous section focused on promises of raising up Cyrus to send the Jews back to their homeland to this section which focusses on the coming Messiah and His ministry to the world.

*1 Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.* Isaiah 49:1 The message God is speaking through Isaiah is for the world of mankind. That is the meaning of “coastlands” and “peoples from afar.” Unlike many Bible prophecies to specific nations, God declared that He is addressing the entire world (Isaiah 45:22). This universal call makes this message of the utmost importance for all mankind throughout time.

The message begins in the voice of the Servant of the Lord declaring He is called from the womb. Since this voice is in the first person, this Servant was alive at the time of Isaiah and was at that moment speaking through Isaiah. That is one reason that John the Beloved could say that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John 1:1-2 Jesus was speaking 700 years before His birth in Bethlehem.

While it is true that others were called and named before their birth, like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5) and King Cyrus, it was uniquely applicable to Jesus. The angel Gabriel told Mary this child would be conceived through the Holy Spirit. He declared the child’s name would be Jesus and that His kingdom would never end (Luke 1:26-33).

*2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.* Isaiah 49:2 In contrast to Cyrus, whose coming Isaiah had predicted, the Servant would use spiritual weapons of His words and His life. John wrote in the Revelation that out of Jesus' mouth came a sharp two edged sword (Revelation 1:16). The author of Hebrews tells us this sword is the all-powerful Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). Those words can create and they can destroy in judgment.

He was hidden in the shadow of the Almighty's hand. I think of all the attempts on Jesus' life, from Herod the Great to the Pharisees. All were inspired by the destroyer to stop Jesus from fulfilling His mission. Imagine how desperately Satan tried to kill Jesus when He was an infant (Matthew 2:16). But God hid Him in the shadow of His hand. Jesus could say, "My time has not yet come" (John 7:6).

Like a polished arrow Jesus was hidden away. I don't think Satan really knew that arrow was strung and the bow of the cross was bent and aimed straight at him. It gives the word “crossbow” a new meaning. Satan could not perceive that in Jesus giving His life as a sacrifice that arrow would destroy the works of darkness and set innumerable captives of Satan free. One polished arrow could accomplish so much because it was hidden in the hand of Almighty God.

Jesus is still conquering souls today as His Word wins our hearts. But that sharp sword of His mouth will also slay His enemies at Armageddon (Revelation 19:15,21; compare with John 12:48).

*3 And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”* Isaiah 49:3 The use of the word “servant” alerts us to this as one of the Suffering Servant Songs. Yet, it is also why many Jews claim that this is about the Jewish people. Remember, the name “Israel” means "one who prevails with God." Jacob was simply a foreshadowing of Jesus. What Israel failed to become was fulfilled in Jesus, the ultimate Israel.

Isaiah is writing to the Jews in captivity and telling them of their return, but also telling them of their ultimate freedom through the Messiah (Isaiah 42:7). We read in Nehemiah and Ezra that, even upon the return, they gave their Gentile neighbors reason to reproach their faith because they did not help one another (Nehemiah 5:8-10). They charged interest on food loaned in time of famine, married the pagans around them (something forbidden in the Law), and even bought children of their poor neighbors as slaves.

Verse five tells us that part of the Servant's calling is to gather Israel back to the LORD. That tells us the Servant Israel can't be the people of Israel. That would be like saying Pastor Paul is called to bring Paul Wallace back to God. The individual referred to as Israel is called to bring wayward Israel back to God.

Isaiah is not the only prophet who applies this term “servant” to the covenant people. Jeremiah and Ezekiel do as well (Jeremiah 30:10; Jeremiah 46:27-28; Ezekiel 28:25). Those same prophets apply “servant” to David, the Messiah of promise (Jeremiah 33:21-22, 26; Ezekiel 34:23-24; Ezekiel 37:24-25). It is also used for David's descendant, Zerubbabel, in Haggai 2:23. Of special interest is its connection with the messianic title "Branch" (Zechariah 3:8).1

F. B. Meyer wrote the following in his commentary on Isaiah. “But, it may be asked, how can words, so evidently addressed to Israel, be appropriated, with equal truth, to Jesus Christ? It is sufficient here to say that He was the epitome and personification of all that was noblest and divinest in Judaism. When, in spite of all that they had suffered in their exile, they for a second time failed to realize or fulfil their great mission to the world; when under the reign of Pharisee and Scribe they settled down into a nation of legalists, casuists, and hairsplitting ritualists—He assumed the responsibilities which they had evaded, and fulfilled them by the gospel He spoke and the Church He formed. In the mission of Jesus, the heart of Judaism unfolded itself. What He was and did, the whole nation ought to have been and done. As the white flower on the stalk, He revealed the essential nature of the root.” (Christ in Isaiah by Meyer)

It is possible that this very verse (verse 3) was on the mind of Jesus when Judas Iscariot left the table of the Last Supper to betray Him. Jesus said, *31b “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.”* John 13:31b

The last phrase of verse 3, “in whom I will be glorified” can be translated “in whom I will display my beauty.” Has the beauty or glory of the LORD ever been more clearly displayed than in Jesus of Nazareth? He was the friend of sinners, healer of all who looked to Him, allowed Himself to be sacrificed for our sins, and then rose to justify us (Romans 4:25) and assure us of our own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20). No individual or nation comes anywhere close to Jesus in revealing the beauty of the Lord.

*4 But I said, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.”* Isaiah 49:4 Jesus must have sensed profound discouragement at the hardness of the human heart. (John 6:66-67; Mark 14:50). Consider what Jesus did in humbling Himself to enter His own creation, speaking the very words of God, and still to have had such a poor initial response! Yet, Jesus knew faithfulness is rewarded. (Hebrews 11:6) He knew God would justly reward His obedient life (Psalm 22:22-31).

Many of the prophets faced the same hardness of hearts and were also murdered. We must follow Jesus with the same attitude and mindset, that God will do what is right and help us through whatever the world throws at us. Our ultimate reward is not in earthly acceptance, but in God’s acceptance. Our right is with our LORD and our recompense is with our God (Matthew 5:10-12).

*5 And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him— for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength*— Isaiah 49:5 This is an intro to the One speaking in verse 6. It introduces a change of speakers from the Servant to the LORD Himself. The LORD is the One who formed the Servant in the womb. While the expression is said of others, Jesus is the one and only Son of God. He was formed to bring Jacob back and gather Israel to God. That surely includes both physical and spiritual Israel.

The use of Jacob may specifically be referring to the Jewish people as we'll see in the next verse. While only the remnant came back from legalistic religion to a relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus, the full fruit of what Jesus did for the Jewish people is starting to become evident in our lifetime (Romans 11:5). We are seeing Messianic congregations on the rise even in the land of Israel.

Jesus is the honored of God, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9. Because of Jesus' willingness to obey to the point of dying on a cross, God honored Him with a name that is above every name. God was His strength in life, death, and resurrection (John 5:19). In doing so He demonstrated what we must do as well.

*6 he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”* Isaiah 49:6 This is the message from the LORD. It is from the One who called the Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring the world to Himself. The Servant's calling is not only to bring the Jewish people (Jacob) back to God, but He was to become the Light of the world (John 9:5). That is just what Jesus declared Himself to be.

Why did the LORD form Him and make Him the Light of the world? It was to bring God's salvation to the end of the earth. When John wrote that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son (John 3:16), he was following the theme of this verse. God is not willing that any should perish, Jew or Gentile (2 Peter 3:9). All lives matter.

The Apostle Paul would follow this pattern of going to the Jews first and try to raise up the tribes of Jacob through the proclamation of the Servant's message. When the Jews rejected the Word, he would move on to the Gentiles. In Acts 13 Paul was preaching in a synagogue of Pisidia. When those Jews rejected the preaching of the Good News, he quoted verse 6 of Isaiah 49 as the reason he should leave the Jews and go to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47).

This is the wonderful fact about God's message to the world. It is for everyone. We are all sinners in need of the gift of salvation freely offered to us because Jesus paid our sin debt. That is why the Gospel message is reaching the ends of the earth. That is God's will. Jesus predicted that when His message did go to the ends of the earth that the end would come (Matthew 24:14).

*7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: “Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”* Isaiah 49:7 The path to this global victory goes through being despised and abhorred by His own nation (John 1:11; Philippians 2:8-11). This is another indication of the Servant’s suffering and that the Servant is an individual and not the nation.

The LORD tells Him “kings will stand,” which is the way of receiving another dignitary. And “princes shall prostrate themselves,” which is an act of worship and submission (Isaiah 52:15). Why? It is all because this is God’s plan. This is not human idealism or effort, but the Almighty’s choice of Jesus to redeem us. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Isaiah 9:7)! And He has chosen His redeemed sons and daughters to be His own and to bring Him glory.

*8 Thus says the LORD: “In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages,* Isaiah 49:8 The Servant’s faith is rewarded. God heard Him and raised Him from the dead. He becomes the New Covenant for the people (Hebrews 9:15). The inheritances restored are the godliness and spiritual abundance of the patriarchs and prophets. In the Second Coming it may well include the land as well, though some of it is already inhabited by Messianic Jews.

The first part of this verse was cited in 2 Corinthians 6:2 by the Apostle Paul. Instead of applying it to Jesus, He applied it to our salvation. His point was that God reached out to us with His favor and helped us to be saved. But of course that is because God answered Jesus with favor first making it possible for us to receive God’s favor. Therefore, Paul tells us, now is the favorable time and the day of salvation for God heard Jesus’ cry.

*9 saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; 10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.* Isaiah 49:9-10 Because of the redemption the Servant has obtained for us, we prisoners of sin can hear Him call to us to come out of our prisons and go from darkness to light.

We are fed with the meat of the Word and drink from springs of living water. Our spiritual hunger and thirst is blessed with fullness (Revelation 7:16). We are sheltered from the scorching wind of prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). The LORD is our guide and leads us as the pillar of cloud led the Children of Israel. Our destination is the Promised Land that is even more glorious than Israel of old.

*11 And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up.* Isaiah 49:11 God is the One who prepares the way for His children who trust in Him. As the highway was to be prepared for the coming of the LORD, so He makes a highway for us (Isaiah 40:3-4). He works in our hearts and convicts us of our need for Him. He overcomes our doubts and fears and meets us in our weakness with His strength. Without His help and the work of His Spirit, none of us would ever make it into the kingdom. His sacrifice has made the way before us possible, and His Spirit has given us the strength for the journey.

*12 Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.”* Isaiah 49:12 From all over the earth Jews have returned to their homeland. But I believe this is ultimately speaking of the nations of the world spoken of in the first verses that will come to the Messiah. It is a wonderful thing to travel and meet believers in other lands and see their love for Jesus. It is one of the things I enjoy about trips to Israel, meeting the pilgrims from all over the planet who want to see the places they read about in Scripture.

*13 Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted*. Isaiah 49:13 The triumph of Jesus over death (the curse on sin) gives us reason to burst into song. It also gives creation hope that the restoration of creation (the lifting of the curse on the earth) will soon follow (Isaiah 44:23; Romans 8:19-21).

The Jews could relate to this upon their return to the Promised Land, but it is realized in the ends of the earth at the Second Coming of Jesus. That will be such an amazing event that the heavens will sing! The earth will exult. That means to be so excited that you spin around. That is pretty giddy. The fullness of it will be realized when we see our Savior face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). Ecstatic won’t begin to describe it. This is what the Servant has accomplished for all who receive His suffering on their behalf.

Questions

1 Who is to hear this message?

2 Why couldn’t Jesus be killed?

3 Who is the Servant?

4 Why shouldn’t we think the servant is someone other than the Jewish people?

5 Where do we see the glory or beauty of the LORD?

6 What kept Jesus from discouragement?

7 What was the LORD’S message?

8 Which verses did Paul quote from this chapter? How did He apply them?

9 What does He say to us? (verse 9,10)

10 What does verse 13 attempt to describe?