

THE SERVANT AS SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD
Isa. 49:1-6

Isaiah has been called the Romans of the OT. – None of the other 65 OT books comes close to the grandeur and gospel vision of Isaiah 40ff. – Compared to Isaiah, nowhere else in the OT will you get a clearer picture or more gorgeous panorama of God's great salvation plan.

We come tonight to Isa. 49 (put on screen), Isaiah's 2nd 'Servant Song' about this coming Servant of the LORD who would bring salvation to the nations through His suffering & victory.

But the previous 4 chps. have been all about another servant that God would raise up: Cyrus, the ruler of Persia that God would use to free the Jews from captivity. – God would do an amazing thing, to put it in the heart of a pagan leader to let God's people return to their homeland and rebuild!

YET, despite such great rescue and restoration to their land through God's servant, Cyrus, God's people are unchanged. – They are ungrateful, disobedient, and still as stiff-necked as ever.

So chp. 48 ends with this grim diagnosis: v. 22...

Cyrus could bring them back to the land, but could not change their hearts. – They relocated, but they had not repented. – They were freed externally, but internally still slaves to sin & guilt. – Their outward circumstances improved, but their inward condition was still dark & restless.

It is against that backdrop, then, that Isaiah introduces a Servant much greater than Cyrus, one who would accomplish what Cyrus never could.

Read vv. 1-6 & Pray:

NB, last time, chp. 42, the Servant's task described biographically, with God telling us *about* His Servant.

Now, it is *autobiographical*, as the Servant, Christ, speaks about Himself. – This is Messiah's personal testimony about the great mission that His Father sent Him on, and its global significance.

***SIX IMAGES of Christ, God's Servant & the world's only Saviour:**

But first: *HOW do we know this is speaking about Jesus? – Many reasons could be given, but here's just a few (proving it is Christ):*

(a) v. 1, the authority with which he speaks, like no other prophet ever speaks in Scripture. – Only a God-man would speak this way.

(b) Last time (Sun. PM) we saw this same individual, God's "Servant", in Isa. 42, and Jesus in the NT directly said that HE was that Servant and fulfilled that prophecy. – Here again in chp. 49, we'll see we have this same Messianic individual, sent by God to save Israel and the nations, so who else would it be if not Jesus?

(c) v. 6 will show that God sent Him to bring salvation to Israel and to the world. – Hmmm, who else could that be if not Jesus?

(d) YET v. 7 says that this Servant will first be “despised... abhorred”, rejected by the Jewish people? – Hmmm, sound familiar? –

By the time we reach Isa. 53 on Sun. AM, it will be clear as the noonday sun – only One person qualifies as this Servant of the LORD, and His name is Jesus.

1. v. 1a, A PROPHET

v. 1a – God’s Servant is also a Prophet. – “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given” to Him (Matt. 28:18). – His megaphone thunders across the oceans; it echoes out to most distant islands. – His voice shakes the cedar trees and makes mountains tremble. –

→As we’re about to see, ignoring Christ’s voice is not a smart thing to do. – Plugging your ears could cost you your life. – ‘He that has ears to hear, let him hear.’ –

‘May I have your attention. Attention please. God’s Servant, Christ, is speaking. He has a message for us of enormous importance.’

But, really, WHY? – Why should we listen to Christ, God’s Servant?

For starters: Because He is no ordinary man, and had no ordinary origin:

2. v. 1b, A BABY

v. 1b – From the womb, God was preparing His great Prophet & Messenger. – And God’s Servant, His Messiah, would be human, fully man, “born of a woman, the Seed of the woman”, as Scripture says (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:5).

Here was this baby embryo growing inside of a humble Jewish maiden. – God had called this Child to a task of earth-shattering proportions, a world-saving mission. – Yet the outside world, Mary’s neighbours in Nazareth & all others, had no idea what God was about to do.

Yet those who read OT prophecy should’ve known what God had planned for Christ, His Servant: He would be born of a virgin. – His name would be called, “Immanuel...Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, Mighty God, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 7:14; 9:6).

As the angel told Joseph, Matt. 1:21, “[Mary] will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Repeat: v. 1...

From the womb we move to the image of warfare here:

3. v. 2, A WEAPON

v. 2 – What good is a dull sword in battle? – What use is an unpolished or unprepared arrow that will not pierce? –

NOT SO the Servant of the Lord, not so our Saviour.

When God called Him & named Him, God was not just preparing for the world a friend, a healer, a wonder-worker. – God was furnishing a lethal weapon, He was fashioning a deadly instrument of warfare.

NB, Like a sword, Christ would defeat enemies *nearby*. – Like an arrow, He would also bring down enemies *far away*.

More specifically, NB, v. 2b, a “concealed” weapon. – Like a sword in its scabbard, like a dagger in its sheath, Christ would be concealed and prepared personally by God, UNTIL it was time.

v. 2d, Like an arrow stored in a quiver until time for battle, Christ would be protected & preserved by God Himself, until it was time.

As Gal. 4:4 tells us, “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

→God could not have chosen a more accurate weapon, a more potent device for destroying sin & Satan. – When God pulled His Sword from the scabbard and swung at the neck of sin and Satan, it was spot on, a lethal blow. –

When God pulled Christ from His quiver and aimed Him at sin & Satan, that arrow shot forth from Heaven, whizzed through space & time and entered earth with pinpoint precision & accuracy.

Only Christ (the Mediator, God-man, eternal Son!) could save us! – ALL other swords would be shattered. – All other arrows would miss the mark. – Only Christ could save us.

But HOW? – How is it that God makes Christ such a lethal weapon? – How is it that God strikes the death blow against His enemies & wins His battles in this world?

Is it through forced conversions? – Or through State support & legalised religion? – Or through the wealth & power of a Pope or some world leader? – Or through majority vote or big crowds? – No.

v. 2a, “My mouth”. – Christ’s Word is the weapon that wins the battles. – The truth from His mouth slays the dragon.

+ Martin Luther, the great reformer, saw Scripture overturn empires and shake a continent. – His hymn says it all:

*The Prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him,
His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them abideth,
The Spirit & the gifts are ours, through Him who with us sideth,*

*Let goods & kindred go, this mortal life also,
The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*

Haven't we heard this before? – Isa. 11:4, Messiah “will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.”

3x in the Book of Revelation: “...out of [Christ's] mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword” (1:16; 2:16; 19:15)

WHAT does the Bible call itself? – Eph. 6:17, “the sword of the Spirit” (the gospel). –

Heb. 4:12, “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Reread: v. 2a...

+ No wonder they said of John Knox's sermons, “The voice of [that preacher] is able in one hour to put more life in us than 500 trumpets continually blustering in our ears.”

No wonder the Bible remains the world's best-selling book. – Nothing is more potent, more life-changing!

→Tell me a weapon that is more powerful than spiritual truth? – When Christ speaks, eternal destinies are altered. – When Christ calls, the dead live. –

When God's Servant opens His mouth, old natures are made new and lives are transformed. –

When the Lion of Judah roars, marriages are rescued, homes become radiant, churches wake up, nations are reformed!

Reread vv. 1-2a...

→Has this Book ever wounded you as it ought? – Is this message of Christ piercing your heart, even as I speak? – Has this Sword done its work, has the arrow found its target?

Or are you still ducking & diving, trying to hide from the heat-seeking missile of God's Word? – Jonah, stop running. – Judas, stop pretending. – Rich man, stop trusting your riches.

Sinner, repent. – Let the Word of God cut you open & expose your guilt before God, the Holy Judge & Lawgiver...

But don't stay there, all cut up & bleeding. – Let this same Book heal & restore you. – Hear the promises & remedies of this Book:

Isa. 55:6-7...!

Now listen to how God will comfort His Servant, His sword & arrow, in His difficult mission on this rebellious earth:

4. v. 3, A JEW

v. 3 – But wait, I thought this was Jesus. – Why does God call Him, “Israel”? – Yet we know from v. 1b that it is an individual? – What’s going on here?...

Answer: Why does a wife take on her husband’s surname? – Because he is her head, he represents their new family & household that has been formed. – There is solidarity here. – The one represents the many.

WHO was the name “Israel” first given to?...not a nation, but an individual (Jacob). – He would then have 12 sons, and through them, a nation was born that would bear the name of their patriarch Jacob, Mr. “Israel”.

+ Africans know this well – with how a patriarch or head represents the whole family or clan. – E.g., at lebola meetings. – When that leader speaks for the family, the whole family has spoken, even though the rest of them didn’t say a word.

So then Christ represents & embodies the whole nation of Israel here. – We saw this with the Church in 1 Cor. 12: ‘Just as there are many members but one body, so also is...(not “the Church”) Christ.’

Reread: v. 3a...

WHAT does it mean to earn such a great title from God as “My Servant”? – At the end of the day, it boils down to this:

v. 3b – I.e., “will display My splendour, will show My beauty”, will show off & exhibit My radiant character & person.

→ Christ is first & foremost GOD’S Servant, not yours or mine. – He doesn’t exist for MY prosperity, MY comfort, MY agenda, MY church, or yours. – He exists for GOD’S agenda, God’s pleasure, God’s purposes. – He is “the Servant of the LORD”.

Repeat: v. 3...

+ What is the ideal servant for any master? – A loyal & devoted one, one who loves to honour his master. – For this he lives, for this he would die, to make a name for his master. - So it was for Christ, only & always for his 33 years on this earth – to boast in God.

5. v. 4, A WRESTLER

What does the name “Israel” mean? – “He who wrestles/strives with God”, given to Jacob in Gen. 32 after wrestling with God’s angel at Peniel.

v. 4a – Ever felt that way? – All that effort, for what?! – I break my back & work like a dog, and this is all I get? – That’s what the whole Book of Eccl. is about, as we’ve been seeing on Sunday nights.

BUT this is not just ordinary frustration in a fallen world. – This is Christ Himself speaking. – In His humanity, Christ would wonder if it was worth it, all that He laboured & all that He suffered for:

+ The crowds were just a fickle fan-club seeking another miracle. – The 12 disciples were so dense, and never seemed to get it. – All deserted Him in the end. – “He came unto His own, but His own received Him not.” (Jn. 1)

Jesus died alone, outside the city, as a common criminal. – He amassed no riches, started no business, built no empire, founded no society, left no buildings or dynasty behind. – By human standards, He had nothing to show for how He’d spent his life.

Heb. 4:15 says Christ was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”. – He never gave in to discouragement or defeat, but He was tempted, He wondered, He still asked the questions. – The most agonising of which were His final questions of His Passion Week:

In Gethsemane, in an agonising bloody sweat, he prayed: ‘Father, is there any other way? Do I have to drink this cup of Your wrath & anger against sin?’

On the cross, he cried, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Repeat: v. 4a...

BUT Christ would not linger there. – He knew God’s answer to those anguished questions:

v. 4b – He is still holding on to his God. – He will not let go. – His hope is sure, his faith is fixed. – ‘My God has not forsaken me forever. My labor is not in vain in the Lord. The One Who called Me from the womb and appointed Me long ago – He will decide on the harvest, He will determine the outcomes, not in My time, but in His time.’

→How do you overcome discouragement? – Stop listening to yourself and start talking to yourself....

That’s exactly what the Servant continues doing here:

6. vv. 5-6, A LIGHT

v. 5a – I.e., says Christ, ‘I was born for this. From Mary’s womb, God has been sharpening Me as His sword and polishing Me as His arrow. I may feel discouraged or disappointed, but how does my God view me?’ – v. 5cd...

I.e., Isa. 42:1abc – God will vindicate His Servant, guaranteed.

For what mission, what purpose?

v. 5b – “To the Jew first” the gospel would go forth (Rom. 1:16). – Jesus said, go first to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10) –

+ What was the Apostle Paul’s missionary strategy every time, when he first arrived at each new city? – Start at the?...synagogue.

And some Jews would get saved each time, though most rejected the gospel.

Reread: v. 5b – This was why Christ came.

But there's more to Christ's mission:

v. 6 – This passage ends where it began, back full-circle – with a world map in front of us, our eyes on the unreached frontiers, the “fields white unto harvest”.

+ How I praise God for this verse! – Do you see your name in there? “nations...end of the earth”. – I do!:

That's me, 'Tim, in far off Texas, age 15, churchgoing but lost! Worshipping sport and friends and self, unreached, stumbling in darkness, until this “light”, this “salvation” came!...

John 8:12 comes to mind...

Acts 1:8 also (probably using this very terminology, v. 6de)...

Think about it:

After Adam & Eve rebelled, God had every right to wipe humanity off the face of the planet and save no one. – Or, God could've gladly just chosen to save the Jewish people, and that would've been 100% grace & mercy. –

In light of our wretched sin & guilt, God owed us Gentiles nothing but punishment. – We deserved nothing but His holy wrath. We could've been nothing but spectators, watching Him love the Jews & save the Jews, with us pressing our noses to the window, on the outside looking in. – Nothing wrong with that if God had wanted to do it that way. – But He didn't.

Reread: v. 6a – How precious those two words, “too small”! – Where would we be if it were not for the big-heartedness of God, the length & breadth & height & depth of His great love for us in Christ!

+ Crumbs are falling from the Jewish table for us Gentile dogs. – Let's gobble them up gladly! – Jesus, the Bread of Life, offered not just to the Jews, but to the world!...

John 3:16...!

+ This was what was so hard for the first Christians, the Jewish Church in Jerusalem, to grasp – was why it took: persecution from Saul & the authorities to force the Christians out of Jerusalem; a rooftop vision for Peter & and a incredible encounter with Cornelius; and then an Antioch church in Acts 11ff to finally burst the boundaries and climb over that high Jewish 'wall' and start reaching the Gentiles!...

But from the beginning, our God has always been a global God. – His heart is a missionary heart. – He wants to be worshipped by people “from every tribe, tongue, people & nation”. –

He wants Heaven to be the most multi-ethnic, cross-cultural, international, rainbow-concert of praise you could ever imagine!

+ Even in the OT, we get hints & foreshadowing of God's missionary heart: Melchizedek; Rahab; Ruth; Naaman the Syrian captain, Jonah's mission to Nineveh. – The Psalms and God's heart for the peoples to praise Him...

But here is one of the most explicit of all places, Isa. 49:6. – It's been called the "Great Commission of the OT". –

That's why it was Paul's text of choice in Acts 13:47, on his 1st missionary journey. – He wanted to explain why he & Barnabas were turning away from the angry synagogues and "turning" to evangelise the Gentiles. –

Why such a huge shift in their strategy? – Paul answered:

"For so the Lord has commanded us," then quotes Isa. 49:6cd...

→NB, Paul didn't say only Jesus was the "light" & "salvation" to the nations. – Paul said "us", WE too, who go in His name, WE too are called bring Christ's light & salvation to the lost. –

We are sent by God's Servant to serve in His name & preach His Word and speak with His authority – calling all to repent & believe....

This Easter weekend: WHO is God seeking & saving through YOU? – WHO is in darkness needing Christ's light, and YOU are the only one who can bring it to them – Who is unsaved and you are the only to reach them with this glorious news of God's salvation?...

PRAY