

THE SERVANT OBEDIENT, ABUSED & UPHELD
Isaiah 50:4-11

Guess who is the favourite OT prophet in the NT, quoted by NT writers far more than any other prophet? – Isaiah!

Turn back there, now to Isa. 50. – We are continuing our special 4-part Easter study in Isaiah's famous Servant Songs. – These are 4 prophetic portraits of our Messiah, Jesus, written 7 centuries before Jesus' was born! –

I've had such a great time studying these prophecies for the first time. – I've been blown away at these unique windows into the mind & heart of our Lord, glimpses of Christ found nowhere else – not in the Four Gospels, nor in any other part of Scripture.

Few people can get me into the right Easter mood better than a dead German friend of mine from the 18th century: George Freideric Handel, composer of the breathtaking oratorio entitled, "Messiah".

It might interest you to know that Handel composed his "Messiah" when he was at his lowest point in life. – His opera company had just gone bankrupt, he had suffered a mild stroke, and his music was causing conflict and outrage in England where he was living at the time.

At this dark time in his life, Handel was visited by his friend Charles Jennens. – Jennens had written a work about Christ's life and His work of redemption, for the purpose of challenging the deists of the day. – The entire text of Jennen's work was taken straight from Scripture, mostly from Isaiah. –

Would the discouraged, depressed Handel take on such a task?

He wasted no time. – In less than one month, Handel had completed 260 pages of music. – When he finished writing what would become known as the Hallelujah Chorus, he said, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God himself." –

That's what happens when you immerse yourself in Isaiah!

NB, the Book of Isaiah can be divided into 2 parts (almost like 2 halves):

- I. Chps. 1-39, CONDEMNATION
- II. Chps. 40-66, COMFORT & Salvation!

39 dark chapters of gloom & doom – of God's judgment of His people b/c of their sin, warning that they will be hauled off to captivity in Babylon.

THEN, at last!: 40:1a...

WHY would Israel have to spend 70 bitter years in exile? – Because they had failed God in two ways: they were a *disobedient son* & and unfaithful *servant* of their Lord. – HOW then would God comfort & save them?...

Through another Son and another Servant, in the line of David. This coming Son & Servant would succeed where Israel failed. – He would be the Son & the Servant that Israel was supposed to be, everything that they were NOT. –

In this final Jewish Seed & Servant of the LORD, God's original purpose for Abraham's offspring would be fulfilled: "all the families of the earth" would finally be blessed.

In Isa. 42, we saw Christ, the Servant of the LORD, as "Gentle Judge". – Last night, in Isa. 49, we saw God's Servant as "Saviour of the World".

Stand & Read text & Pray:

Give title: "The Servant Obedient, Abused & Upheld"

***FIVE KEYS to understanding & obeying God's obedient Servant, Christ:**

PROVE again that this is Christ? – esp. when this figure is not called God's "Servant" until v. 10?! – And it does sound at first like it's just Isaiah speaking, *until* you get to v. 6 and the abuse mentioned there... –

That never happened to Isaiah that we know of. – But it sure did happen to a greater Prophet, a greater Servant. – In fact, a Servant we've already met in chps. 42 & 49 of Isa. – a Servant known for His ministry to others by teaching, by the word from His mouth. –

A Servant marked by obedience and submission to God His Father. – A Servant upheld by God, and One in whom God greatly delights.

v. 4, NB, same as in chp. 49, the Servant of the LORD just starts speaking, unannounced: v. 4a...

1. vv. 4-5, EDUCATION

NB, the Servant's favt title here for His God, used 4x, almost in every verse: vv. 4a, 5a, 7a, 9a...

"Lord GOD, lit., Adonai Yahweh, Sovereign LORD", i.e., 'Master & Commander of all things, all-powerful & reigning.' –

→ God's absolute sovereignty will prove here to be a great comfort to Christ as His suffering increases in this passage. – And so God's sovereignty is also a great comfort to US in times of trial & testing....

Cf. 42:1, "upheld" by God.

WHAT has God done for His Servant?:

v. 4a – i.e., "an instructed tongue, the tongue of those who are taught", as opposed to a servant who is ignorant, untaught, and undisciplined.

+ What did people say in Jesus' day, after hearing Him teach in the synagogues or on the hillside? –

“No one ever spoke like this man. He teaches as One with authority, not as the scribes.” – Jesus’ teaching would often leave people ‘astonished, awestruck, marvelling’.

Was Jesus just born a brilliant teacher? – Or did He get some instant teaching ability at His baptism? – HOW did He become such a brilliant teacher, the supreme educator?...

v. 4cd – This is a huge theme for Jesus in John’s Gospel:

“My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. ...I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.”

“...For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. ..the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” (Jn. 7:16; :8:28; 12:49-50, etc.)

What a glimpse into Jesus’ first 30 silent years, growing up in Nazareth, assisting Joseph in the carpentry shop, learning the trade. – But all the while, being taught of God and prepared for his public ministry.

What a rare window into the private devotional life of our Lord! Reread: v. 4cd...

NB, daily, Christ was being mentored by GOD Himself. – While most others were still sleeping, Jesus & His Father had a regular morning appointment. – These private habits were what made Him the Teacher he was in public. –

See, Jesus was the God-man, but He never flew on auto-pilot. His up-front ministry was always the overflow of his behind-the-scenes communion with His Father. –

When He surfaced each morning, He had the dew of Heaven still fresh on Him from His quiet times with the Lord.

NB, Jesus was the Last Adam: Where the first Adam failed in the Garden, b/c he stopped listening to God “in the cool of the day” when they used to walk together & fellowship. –

Where Adam failed in that way, Jesus, the Last Adam, succeeded. – Jesus always listened to His Father and sought His face and never ignored Him.

→What gracious condescension – that Christ would stoop to become a learner & disciple. – He who from all eternity was the Son of God, all-knowing, needing nothing. – Yet He stooped this low, to have to become like us and learn. –

KIDS: Jesus also had to learn to sit up & crawl, learn to walk & to talk, learn to read & write. – Luke 2:52...

FOR what *purpose* did God educate & disciple His Servant Jesus (and any of us)? (Why all of the mentoring in v. 4a,c,d)...

v. 4b – To be able to ‘speak a word in season’, to encourage & console, to comfort & build up. – To have a wise tongue like in Prov.: a fountain of life, a tree of healing, like apples of gold in settings of silver, pleasant like a honeycomb....

Reminiscent of the Servant’s tender role in 42:3...

→How true this is! – No one can comfort us like Jesus, no balm can soothe us like His Word! – ‘They are my songs in the night, my therapy, my best counsellors!’ – How often have the words of Jesus sustained your weary soul? –

Think of some of Christ’s sweetest & best comforts that never grow old but only grow sweeter with each passing year. – Just three quick examples:

Jn. 14:1, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me.”

Mk. 6:50, to the disciples in the boat, “straining at the oars”, when Christ walked out on the water to save them, but they panicked: Jesus said, “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.”

Matt. 11:28, “Come to Me, all you who are weary & heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

→What an example Christ is for all of us in our counselling of one another & mutual ministry in the body. – *HOW can our tongue be ready to minister to others if our ear is not first listening to God’s Word?*

Reread: v. 4...

→Are you having regular DEVOTIONS, or have you let it slip? (I’m often concerned) – Recommend a simple plan; start in Psalms & Gospels, 15 min. a day, ½ reading, ½ prayer...

v. 5 – A stark contrast to Israel’s blocked ears: 48:8a...

And contrast to 50:2... From “no man...none to answer”, v. 4 says there is *someone* will answer the call!, who is listening to God!...

John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, NOT to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

→Think: Jesus faced temptation from Satan that you & I cannot imagine & will never face....

YET if Jesus had ever disobeyed God, even once, we’d be doomed, we’d have no salvation b/c we’d not have the perfect Saviour we need as our Substitute:

Php. 2:8, “...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Heb. 5:8, “Although [Christ] was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation....”

+ What a model Servant was our Lord. – Never had there been such ears as Christ’s. – Every whisper from His Father was met with immediate obedience. – He needed no persuading, no reminding, no convincing.

What a contrast to US! – We are often so slow to obey, so sluggish in our submission to God’s will....

Think of Jesus' perfect obedience: From the day His parents found 12 yr. old Jesus left behind in the Temple, and He said, 'Don't you know that I must be about My Father's business'. –

From that day, up until His final hour on the cross when He cried out, "It is finished" – never once had Christ disobeyed God. – Not once.

2. v. 6, HUMILIATION

v. 6 – From the mountain top (v. 4) to the battle field. – From precious quiet times alone with God to public attack and hostility.

NB, the Servant suffers not for His own wrongdoing, as with Israel, 50:1de (cf. 42:24)...

NB, there is a majestic composure here, a command of the situation despite terrible abuse. – Doesn't say, 'I was victimised, they snuck up on Me, they hit Me, etc.' – Reread: v. 6a ("I gave", deliberately, voluntarily)...

Cf. Jn. 10, "I lay My life down for the sheep. No man takes My life from Me. I lay it down", willingly.

+ Even when Jesus on the cross was offered the wine as a pain-killer for relief, He refused it: v. 6a...

+ *We turn to the Gospels and we see this verse (this prophesied abuse) fulfilled with tragic precision (painful accuracy).* – Turn to Mark 14:

It's Thurs. night of Christ's Passion Week. – He's shared His Last Supper with His beloved disciples. – After singing a hymn, they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where the disciples slept while Jesus agonised in prayer.

Then Judas & the soldiers arrived and carried away Jesus, while all the disciples forsook Him and fled, except for Peter. - They then dragged Jesus into the 1st phase of His Jewish trial, at the court of Annas (Jn. 18).

There, an officer strikes Jesus for the way He sternly answered Annas' scoffing questions. – Annas then sends Jesus bound to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, for a final verdict from the Sanhedrin.

Here, the pre-dawn hours of Good Friday, Jesus faces His 2nd phase of the Jewish trial, this time before the full Sanhedrin of 70 leaders:

Mark 14:65a – Oh, the sadistic cruelty and savagery of man.

First the Sanhedrin members themselves line up to get their shot at Jesus. – Religious dignitaries resorting to childish bullying of an innocent man, playing some game of 'guess-who-hit-you'. –

They then hand Jesus over to the guards and other officers:

14:65b – Here was history's longest night.

NB, in the Gospels, it is not the physical pain that is emphasized as much as the humiliation and shame our Lord endure. – Just as Isaiah prophesied.

Next, even greater pain is inflicted emotionally, as in the background, 14:66ff, we hear Peter deny Christ three times.

Then, Mk. 15, Jesus begins his Roman trial by standing before Pilate. – Instead of releasing Jesus, an innocent & holy man, the crowds call for Barabbas' release:

15:15 – This was the terrible Roman flagellation, a pre-crucifixion cruelty to entertain the soldiers and prepare the victim for the final torture of the cross. – Women were not even allowed to witness such scourging. –

The victim was stripped naked, then tied to a post. – The Roman soldiers took a long whip, with leather at the end, and often chips of metal or bone in the leather.

The first soldier would brutally whip the victim until that soldier got bored or tired. – Then the next soldier would take a turn, then the next. – Until they gave up, or their commanding officer pulled them off, while the victim collapsed to the ground, a bloody pulp.

As if that wasn't enough for Christ, their cruel games continued:

vv. 16-20 – With His own blood & their spit both running down His face, Christ marched to the cross. – The worst pain, still come. – The worst humiliation, still awaiting Him on Golgotha's hill. – The worst agony on its way, to be forsaken by God Himself while becoming our sin-bearer. –

All in obedience to His Father, and out of love, love for sinners like me and you.

*O sacred head now wounded,
With grief & shame weighed down,
How scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown!
How pale art Thou with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish
Which once was bright as morn!*

Turn back to Isaiah 50...

You wonder if Christ, amidst His anguish, was recalling/reciting these very words: vv. 5-7...

~ Spurgeon on Christ's determination: *No man could have scarred that blessed back of His unless Christ had been willing, out of mighty love, to suffer thus on His people's behalf! None could have plucked His hair unless He had put Himself into the position to have it plucked, in order that He might redeem us from all our iniquities!*

Many a martyr has suffered much, but he could not avoid it, for he was bound and he was not able to strike his foes or to escape. But here sat One to be spit upon, who could, if He had willed it, have withered into nothingness all who stood about Him!

With one glance of those eyes of His, had He but grown angry, as He well might have done, He could have burned up their very souls....

Blessed be the majesty of that Omnipotence which controlled omnipotence—that mighty love which bound the Godhead so that it came not to the rescue of the Manhood of the suffering Savior.

*Guilty, vile & helpless we
Spotless Lamb of God was He
Full atonement can it be
Hallelujah, What a Saviour!*

But HOW? – HOW did Christ find the courage to endure such agony? – What kept Him from cracking or bailing out, like any of us would've done under far less pain?...

3. v. 7, **DETERMINATION** (as seen already in v. 6)

v. 7 – I.e., 'Because I am strong in the Lord & in His mighty power, I am certain of the outcome (v. 7b), My gaze is set (v. 7c), and my hope is certain (v. 7d). My God is true, it *will* be worth it in the end, no matter the cost.'

Because of this confidence in God, Christ could (v. 7c) set His face "like flint", i.e., hard-nosed. –

Let's admit it: When it comes to obeying God when it's hard, most of us have faces more like butter or playdoh than like a rock. – Our wax faces change shape to suit the circumstances, to conform to the pressure, to please people and be popular and liked. –

It's the universal human instinct. – Very few enjoy being hard-nosed and flint-faced, esp. in obedience to God amidst a hostile world that hates the righteous.

This verse from Isa. 50:7 explains & depicts us for us our Lord in His final journey to Jerusalem. – Remember those vivid accounts in the Gospels? –

Turn to Mark 10 – It was Passover time for the Jews. – Many would've been journeying to Jerusalem at this time. – But this group was unlike any others:

Read Mk. 10:32a...

This was no ordinary group of pilgrims. – They were led by a Man on the final leg of a fateful journey. – So Jesus wasn't chatting with His companions along the way, or doing His usual teaching. – No, says Mark, this time Jesus walked a few steps ahead of them, keeping His distance. – WHY?...

Jesus' heart was heavy b/c His hour was at hand, His mission was about to reach its climax. – The mood was ominous; you could cut the air with a knife. – None of His companions could relate; they just didn't get it.

NB, v. 32b, and the disciples were amazed/astonished – WHAT baffled them was Jesus' solemn & unflinching determination to do His Father's will, His unshakable resolve to complete His mission, knowing He was on a death march to Jerusalem. –

'How could Jesus walk straight into a tsunami, go willingly back to such a cruel city, with a price on His head?'

Lk. 9:51 tells us, "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus 'steadfastly set His face, He fixed His gaze' to go to Jerusalem."

The Gospels don't depict Jesus lagging behind like a prisoner going to the gallows. – No, our Saviour is "leading the way". – Because He knew that He was Isaiah's prophesied Servant of the Lord, 'setting [his] face like flint' (Isa. 50:7), putting His nose straight against the harsh north wind and marching on.

Surely this is why Luke recorded the further words of Jesus (18:31) to His disciples at this point: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished." –

Like the Servant Songs of Isaiah. – Turn back there: Reread 50:7...

→As we approach "Rezolution", here is our supreme model & example of the resolved, resolute life – Christ, the Servant of the Lord. – O for grace to follow in His resolve!...

HOW could Christ be so bold, so determined?...

4. vv. 8-9, VINDICATION

v. 8 – Listen to His triumph here, as Christ taunts His enemies! – He knew He was not suffering for His own guilt, but for the guilt of others. – It was my crimes & yours that put Him there, not His.

Prov. 28:1, "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion." – None were more righteous than the Lion of Judah, Christ. – His conscience was absolutely clear, His motives were spotless, His cause was pure & holy; and His God was near and faithful, HE would defend Him. – So He could (as it were) say:

'Bring it on. I'm ready for my day in court. I fear no verdict. It is God who justifies. Let all of Hell rise up and accuse me; still I will be innocent!' – Reread: v. 8...

The courtroom scene continues:

v. 9a – Great news if you are in Christ today: You too have this same confidence, not inherently, but by faith alone! –

→Cf. Rom. 8:33-34...!

v. 9b – The Servant is not only confident of His own vindication, but also of His enemies' defeat & demise. – Like an old moth-eaten t-shirt that you turn into a dust rag or toss in the rubbish bin, all of Christ's enemies will come to ruin. – Before a holy God, they'll be put to shame as easily as a moth devours worn-out clothes.

NB, the contrast again between God's failed servant, Israel, and His faithful & final Servant, Christ: Zion doubts God's love (49:14); the Servant is confident of God's help & nearness (50:7a,8a,9a)...

5. vv. 10-11, APPLICATION

HOW THEN shall we respond to such a Servant, to such a Saviour? – There are typically TWO opposite responses, two contrasting ways of life:

a. v. 10, the godly response

v. 10ab – NB, should be capital, “Servant” (as in NKJV & HCSB).

I.e., true believers = those who fear God more than man, and who obey Christ’s voice. – “My sheep hear My voice,” said Jesus (Jn. 10).

NB the essential connection here: You can’t say you fear the LORD, but don’t obey His Servant. – It’s a package deal. – “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father,” said Jesus. – “He who honors Me, honors My Father”. –

God says, “This is My Beloved Son. Listen to Him!” – Because the Servant’s words are God’s words.

v. 10cd – I.e., ‘Walking in the footsteps of the Servant means we too will face dark times, esp. hostility & persecution from a cruel world. But thankfully, Christ has shown us the pattern of how to suffer righteously:’

‘Follow Him. If God proved faithful to His Servant Christ amidst all the agony He faced, then what are our trials? Nothing, compared to what Jesus suffered, enduring the very wrath of God in our place!’

‘If God could sustain Jesus through that, He can carry us through anything, through the darkest nights and the deepest valleys and the coldest winters of the soul...’

→ John 16:33, Jesus’ final words in His Upper Room discourse & final counsel to His disciples b/f the cross: “In this world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

b. v. 11, the ungodly response

v. 11abc – NB, another “walk”, but a totally different lifestyle. –

NB, here is how they deal with life’s darkness, with the dark nights of the soul. – Here’s how the world handles their trials:

Instead of turning to God for light, instead of receiving God’s Servant (Christ) as their “light”, the Light of the world –

instead of this, they want their own light; they keep trying to light their own fires, even though the matches keep burning out & the lighter fluid is all gone....

I.e., ‘You are so busy saving yourself, trying to earn eternal life by your own doing, your own good works, your own self-righteousness.’

NB, v. 11cd, “YOUR fire...YOU have set ablaze”. – Like Nebuchadnezzar, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I MYSELF have built...by the might of MY power and for the glory of MY majesty” (Dan. 4).

→This is how we're all born thinking. – This is the way of the world. – Sadly, this is the way of many in the Church: The D-I-Y approach to life. – The false gospel of try-harder-ism. –

It's the inevitable outcome of those who do not truly know & believe Eph. 2:8-9 (recite)...

v. 11ef – What a horrible irony, the strict justice of God: 'Is it fire you want? Then fire you will get, for all eternity. You hate My light, the light of My Servant & My Son, Jesus? Is it darkness you love? Then darkness you can have, for all eternity.'

Cf. very last verse in all of Isaiah: 66:24....

What a stark contrast with the believer, v. 10: Instead of leaning on God (v. 10d), the unbeliever lies down in torment. – What a horrible contrast! – The stupidity & blindness of sin, to choose eternal torment over rest, punishment instead of peace from God.

Now for Isaiah's 4th & final song on Sunday, chp. 53. – Bring a friend, and be praying for me as I prepare....

PRAY:

*What language can I borrow, to thank Thee, dearest Friend?
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord let me never, never, outlive my love to Thee.*