

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Four Songs of the Servant: The Support of the Servant

Introduction

Good morning. Today we will consider the third "Song of the Servant" which is found in Isaiah 50. Our consideration will be "The Support of the Servant" found specifically in Isaiah 50:4-9. We will look at the whole of Isaiah 50.

- Isaiah 50:1-3 sets the scene as the LORD seeks to show that Israel, as a nation, was entirely to blame for the sad state into which they had fallen. The LORD is not the one at fault.
- In Isaiah 50:4-9 we consider the servant in alien conditions and then the servant's support from God. These verses may well speak of Isaiah in some way, but prophetically they are about another servant - the man Christ Jesus, God's Perfect Servant.
- Finally we will close by considering the warning in Isaiah 50:10-11. This warning is addressed to those who ignore God and consequently who are outside the sphere of blessing and living in spiritual darkness.

Background

Let us read Isaiah 50:1-3, *"Thus says the LORD: 'Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away. Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.'*"

In these opening verses the LORD challenges the people's perception of events. In Isaiah 50:1, *"Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce?"* and *"to whom I have sold you?"* They have no answer because the LORD states that it was entirely their own fault, *"For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away."* One of the most difficult things to do is to recognise our own failings. It is so easy to see the faults of others or to blame someone else for the problems that we are enduring. It is just possible that Israel were in this kind of situation.

Isaiah 50:2 shows clearly that they were unresponsive to all the pleadings of the LORD. Two questions are put to the nation, *"Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer?"* The LORD through Isaiah was challenging the nation, both rulers and the ordinary people, but sadly there was no response to God's call.

Next, the challenge of God's ability, *"Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?"* If they were unable to answer or unwilling then the end of Isaiah 50:2 is a reminder of past events. *"Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst."* Inseparable to the nation is their past and here God goes back to the captivity days in Egypt and we have two specific acts of power.

The first is the drying up of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1-31) and the second is the turning of the water of the river Nile into blood (Exodus 7:14-25) with the consequence that the fish died. Here again God is saying that He had power then and because He is God, His power remains as powerful today as it was then. Similarly Isaiah 50:3 refers back to Egypt days when darkness covered the land for three days, but in the dwellings of the Israelites there was light. God in that miracle of judgement upon Pharaoh and his people showed the distinction and Israel had light. The reminder of past dealings should have awakened the people and brought them back to God. However, as we will see in the following verses, the people remained unmoved.

The Support of the Servant

We are now going to consider Jehovah's perfect servant outlined in Isaiah 50. It is clearly descriptive of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospels and especially in the Gospel of Mark we see the Lord Jesus living as God's perfect Servant.

Let us read Isaiah 50:4, "*The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.*"

We see in Isaiah 50:4 the servant rightly addressing God as He deserves and in this dual way of Lord GOD. The names Lord and God mean "Master" and "Jehovah" respectively. It is not haphazard that God is addressed in various ways through the Bible. God's names indicate specific considerations of His greatness and His relationship with people; the nations in general, Israel in particular and with Christians today. So Isaiah's opening words as he speaks to his God gives a clear indication of his reverence. "*Lord*" would refer to the one who is to be obeyed and "*GOD*" indicates that He is the eternal self-existing God, who is the same, past, present and future, and the God of relationship especially with the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus when He spoke of Himself as the "I AM" was clearly referring to Himself as the eternal self-existing God.

See John's Gospel for a number of occasions that this name is used:

- John 6:35 I am the Bread of Life;
- John 8:12 I am the Light of the World;
- John 10:9 I am the Door;
- John 10:11 I am the Good Shepherd;
- John 11:25 I am the Resurrection and the Life;
- John 14:6 I am the Way the Truth and the Life;
- John 15:1 I am the True Vine;
- John 18:6 I am (The eternal self-existing God).

I am sure Isaiah had a sense of God's greatness as he spoke in this way. It is also true of our Lord Jesus and an example of this is in John 17:1, "*Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.'*" Also Matthew 27:46, "*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'*" The first is as equal with God and second as the man who was the sacrifice for sin.

Next we see the servant acknowledging that his ability, in terms of preaching, comes from God. "*The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned*" (Isaiah 50:4). It is good to remember from whom we have received gifts to enable us to serve our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not my ability. The intention of Christian service is to draw attention to God not to the servant. At the same time our service for God may well be directed to someone in need. This we find in Isaiah 50:4, "*that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary.*" The weary person who is burdened and feeling the pressure of life needs someone to speak comforting and encouraging words and if necessary back up those words with practical help.

How did the servant have a wise tongue? The end of Isaiah 50:4 provides the answer: "He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned." To be instructed is a daily process; it is not just now and then when we feel in the mood. Daily reading of the scriptures is an essential part of the Christian's life. Reading must be backed up by prayer, meditation upon and the study of scripture. It is no good thinking that scripture will come to mind without having put it there in the first place. The Lord prayed to the Father in John 17 and said, "*For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me*" (John 17:8)

The Lord is the prime example of a perfect servant listening to the Father and passing on to His disciples the words of the Father. The Lord is not physically here today but we do have the inspired scriptures.

The next two verses in our chapter appear to go together. Isaiah 50:5-6 state, "*The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.*"

The servant states that he was not rebellious when his ear was opened to receive instruction. It is so very important that when, through the reading of scripture, we hear a clear message giving direction that we do not ignore it and turn away. God is always looking for obedient servants. Jonah is a good example of a servant who was instructed to go

and he turned around and ran away, see Jonah 1:1-3. We might not like what God is telling us to do and readily come up with all kinds of excuses. In Luke 22:42 we read, *“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”* Now, the perfect Servant did not run away, as did Jonah. The legitimate question raised by Christ, who knew what was before Him, and desired of the Father an alternative course of action if, and only if, it was the divine will. Prophetically in Psalm 40:7-8 we have the Lord Jesus saying, *“Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.’”* This is also quoted in Hebrews 10:7.

Isaiah 50:6 states, *“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.”* Now, whether any of this actually happened to Isaiah we are not informed but we do know that this was true of our Lord Jesus Christ when before both the high priest and Pilate. The references to Christ being abused in the Gospels are as follows: Matthew 26:67, 27:30; Mark 14:65, 15:10; Luke 22:63; John 18:22, 19:1-3.

In Isaiah 50:7-9, we see the servant’s confidence because the servant is supported through the troubles associated with living a godly life of service. Isaiah 50:7-9 state, *“For the Lord GOD will help Me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. He is near who justifies Me; who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me. Surely the Lord GOD will help Me; who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.”*

As we read these verses we see how Isaiah confidently refers to the Lord GOD in various ways as the source of his help. *“Will help Me”*, the certainty of help and because of that assurance he states *“I will not be disgraced”*. There is the knowledge that all will be well. I think of the words of the Lord Jesus when He said in John 10:17, *“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.”* The Lord was in no doubt as to the accomplishment of the work of salvation on the cross, the laying down of His life and then the certainty of rising from the dead. Because of this confidence, the result in the servant’s life is a firm commitment to continue in the life of service, *“therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed”* (Isaiah 50:7) Again this would be true in the life of Isaiah; he was unmoveable in service regardless of the dangers. We have a similar expression regarding our Lord Jesus in Luke 9:51, *“Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.”*

Again in Isaiah 50:8 we have this wonderful statement from Isaiah, *“He is near who justifies Me; who will contend with Me? Let us stand together.”* Isaiah had the confidence that his God would never leave him. With regard to the Lord Jesus we have another wonderful statement in John 16:32, *“Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”* Outwardly, it might seem that the Lord Jesus was alone but from this scripture I believe there was never a moment when the Father was not with His Son as He journeyed in this world. Yes, there was that cry from the cross *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*, Mark 15:34. But, notice it is God addressed in the question by Jesus the incarnate man, the sin bearer. Taking the words of Isaiah, the Son could say in regard to the Father, *“Let us stand together”* (Isaiah 50:8)

Finally in Isaiah 50:8 we have another question, *“Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me.”* Isaiah may well have had many adversaries and, like ourselves, might well say, *“Well, I am not perfect”*. But, when we consider the Lord Jesus He was indeed perfect. Pilate in his consideration three times declared Jesus innocent (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). The Lord faced His opponents one day and said, *“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?”* John 8:46. This was the big dilemma when the Jews tried to find fault with the Lord Jesus. They could find nothing wrong. He always told the truth. It needed false witnesses to have their accusations stand before Pilate. This word *“adversary”* in the Hebrew means a person who has a legal challenge. So the Jews sought a religious legal challenge but Pilate needed a political legal challenge. Therefore we have the Jews saying in John 19:7, *“The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.’”* And so they accused Pilate of injustice in John 19:12, *“If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.”*

Therefore, in Isaiah 50:9 we have confidence expressed again which would be true of Isaiah and in a fuller way of our Lord Jesus Christ, *“Surely the Lord GOD will help Me; who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.”* There was no one who could justly condemn our Lord Jesus Christ. But this verse ends with a sad condemning statement concerning the accusers, *“Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.”* They will become like an old moth eaten garment. The cross was not the end for our Lord Jesus Christ; He was raised by the glory of the Father (Romans 6:4).

A Word of Encouragement and a Word of Warning

In Isaiah 50:10-11 we have encouragement to those who feared the Lord and words of warning to those who live independently of God. Isaiah 50:10 states, *“Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God.”* Fear (or reverence) and obedience are two essential requirements of a believer. Reverence is due to the Lord because He is God. Obedience is mandatory for a believer because God has given us clear instructions for all aspects of life. God’s values do not change. The world’s values do change but it is ultimately for the worse. The world does not improve; it is incapable of improvement and an honest assessment of all progress (so called) must be that we failed and keep failing. The question might be raised “What is wrong?” and the only answer is “God has been left outside!” That is why Israel was walking in darkness. Light is connected with God and Christ, John 1:4, *“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”* Therefore, as Isaiah 50:10 states, *“Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God”*, a good message for Israel then and good for us today.

Isaiah 50:11 however is a word of warning to all who leave God outside of their lives, *“Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks: walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled.”* They kindle their own fire for light and warmth to illuminate their pathway in an attempt to move forward. But God’s assessment of their effort is *“This you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment.”* There is only one way to God as Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6).

In our pathway of service and through the struggles of life, let us seek to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Servant. Isaiah and others in the scriptures give us marvellous examples of devoted servants of God, but all had their imperfections. Only in Christ do we see true perfection and it is He whom we must seek to imitate and follow. There is ample support for the Christian life as our Lord said in John 16:33, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

Thank you for listening and the Lord bless you today.

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