

The Servant of Isaiah: The Servant Is Focused on His Work

Isaiah 50:4-11

March 9, 2016

5th Wednesday in Lent

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. 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. 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. He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Behold, all you 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! This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.

The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah was appointed to one specific task. He might do many things, and in fact he did, but he had one primary task to accomplish. So, it's not strange that the Servant was supremely single-minded. He had a mission, and it was a mission only he could accomplish. So, he was focused on His work.

As a result, he succeeded. Once again, the prophecy is remarkable in how Isaiah describes Jesus and his work from a point in time eight centuries before Jesus was born. While we examine the prophecy, we want to keep in mind that single-minded focus of our Savior. Our theme for this evening is, "The Servant Is Focused on His Work."

The prophecy has no apparent sense of the order of time. Isaiah speaks of things as though they are past when they are actually in the future. He speaks of other things as though they are in the present, when they actually happen prior to the things He spoke of as past. It helps a little to remember that the prophet is seeing these things from a distance in time that might make a neat chronological record difficult to distinguish. Besides, this is the way God inspired it to be written down.

For example, Isaiah begins with the disciples: *The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary* (Is 50:4 ESV). Jesus wasn't just fortunate to find his disciples. It wasn't just that he wanted to establish a school of thought in Judaism. The prophet already described Jesus as having disciples, and, fundamentally, their task – the task of sustaining the weary with a word.

The purpose of the Gospel is to bring comfort to believers and sustain us while we walk through this world. God does that by teaching us about his love and grace, about the forgiveness of sins – and he accomplishes that through his Word which he proclaims

through his disciples, especially those who live as his disciples.

The Servant speaks about his devotion to the Lord: *Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward* (Is 50:4-5 ESV). He begins his days with the Lord and listens to God's Word, and willingly and cheerfully obeys. He is devoted, and will not depart from his devotion to the Lord even in the deepest difficulties.

But notice that the prophet says that the Lord has opened his [the Servant's] ear. Even for Jesus in his human state, faithfulness is the work of God. It's not our work. It's not by our strength and determination.

God then describes, through the prophet, the torments of the Servant. He speaks of them in the first person. Long before Jesus came and accomplished them, they were clearly known. When Jesus walked the long road to the cross, he knew what was awaiting him. It was already laid out in painful detail in Isaiah: *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* (Is 50:6 ESV).

This is the task of the Servant, and yet it is so clearly the suffering of our Lord in his passion. When Jesus said that he had come for this (Jn 18:37), he knew exactly what "this" would entail. The Servant was truly focused on his work.

When you read this text, you are struck by how completely the Old Testament envelopes the New Testament. Not only do the prophets speak with clarity and precision about the work of Christ, but many things written by the apostles are clearly spoken also in the Old Testament by the prophets.

Consider, for example, these words from tonight's text which so closely foreshadow Romans 8 where Paul presents the Gospel as a legal, courtroom situation: *Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty?* (Is 50:8-9 ESV).

Now compare those words to Paul's: *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?* (Ro 8:33-34 ESV). Paul goes on in Romans to answer that Christ is the one who died, who rose from the dead, and who intercedes for us. It's striking how the words of the prophet and the words of the apostle, written eight hundred years apart, sound so very much alike.

Then the Servant announces the judgment of God. These words are both the judgment and the instructions for God's people: *Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God* (Is 50:10 ESV).

"Fearing the Lord" means faith. The believer obeys the voice of the Servant of the Lord just as Jesus said: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me* (Jn 10:27 ESV). This is the obedience of faith, Paul spoke about in Romans 1:5. [You can see the idea of](#)

faith here by the further description: *Let him who walks in darkness and has no light* (Is 50:10 ESV). That describes the one who lives by the guidance of the Word.

You may not be able to see what difference it will make, or where your life is leading, but you follow God and trust His Word and promises just the same. You are then the ones spoken of when Isaiah says: *[Let him] trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God* (Is 50:10 ESV).

The other condition in the judgment is spoken of next: *Behold, all you 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! This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment* (Is 50:11 ESV).

The term “kindle a fire” refers particularly to those enemy invaders who light arrows and torches to shoot into the towns they attack to start fires and destroy the ability of the townspeople to resist them. This marks them, in this context, as the enemies of God and enemies of His Servant.

The prophecy tells them to go ahead and be enemies and feel all wise and powerful and influential, while the opportunity lasts. They will get caught up in their own evil. They will walk in the light of the fire they have started and in the flames they have set ablaze, which means they will burn.

The judgement of God is: *This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment* (Is 50:11 ESV). You will lie down in torment, speaks of damnation – the eternal judgment of God for all those who set themselves against him as enemies. Jesus described their destiny as: *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched* (Mk 9:48 ESV); and *In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 13:42 ESV).

Once again, Isaiah has painted a picture of our Lord, and spoke the Gospel in that peculiar prophetic language. He shows us the devotion and obedience of the Servant, and the horror of the task before him, which he faces head-on.

He also speaks the blessings of the Gospel for us – but this time he includes the dread judgment on those who will not believe. Those who set themselves as enemies of God and of the Gospel.

Jesus said: *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters* (Lk 11:23 ESV). It was clear even in Old Testament times, that there is only two possible positions to take, God’s friend, a believer, and a servant, or God’s enemy. There is no middle ground.

And when you consider the price paid, the torment and death of the Servant of God, paid willingly for you by Jesus, it all makes sense. The Servant is focused on his work, and we should be similarly focused, on his work and on his word.