
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXXII : THE THIRD SERVANT SONG (50:4-11)

General outline (from Oswalt's *Isaiah*):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-5)
- II. A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD (6)
- III. BASIS FOR SERVANTHOOD: WHOM SHALL WE TRUST? (7-39)
- IV. THE VOCATION OF SERVANTHOOD (40-55)
 - A. MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD: GRACE (40-48)
 - B. THE MEANS OF SERVANTHOOD: ATONEMENT (49-55)
 - 1. Anticipation of Salvation (49:1-52:12)
 - a. Comfort through the Servant (49:1-13)
 - b. Zion not forgotten (49:14-50:3)
 - c. The Servant's confidence (50:4-9)
 - d. Obey the voice of his Servant (50:10-51:8)
 - (1) Light or darkness (50:10,11)

c. The Servant's confidence (50:4-9)

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him

The Lord Jehovah hath given to me The tongue of taught ones, To know to aid the weary [by] a word, He waketh morning by morning, He waketh for me an ear to hear as taught ones. The Lord Jehovah opened for me the ear, And I rebelled not — backward I moved not. My back I have given to those smiting, And my cheeks to those plucking out, My face I hid not from shame and spitting. And the Lord Jehovah giveth help to me, Therefore I have not been ashamed, Therefore I have set my face as a flint, And I know that I am not ashamed. Near [is] He who is justifying me, Who doth contend with me? We stand together, who [is]

<i>face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.</i> (NIV)	<i>come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.</i> (KJV)	<i>mine opponent? Let him come nigh unto me. Lo, the Lord Jehovah giveth help to me, Who [is] he that declareth me wicked? Lo, all of them as a garment wear out, A moth doth eat them.</i> (YLT)
--	---	--

“Without introduction, and immediately following God’s claim of the will and the power to deliver his people from their iniquities and rebellions, the Servant speaks again. In this case he is identified as the Servant only in the following segment (50:10,11), but the similarities with the other Servant passages are clear enough that even if that identification had not been given, this passage would have been identified as such. *As in 42:1-9 and 49:1-7, this person is obedient and faithful, and though deeply troubled, is supremely confident in his divine calling and ultimate vindication. His mission is centered on the proclamation of the Word.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

PROGRESSION WITHIN THE SERVANT PASSAGES — Note the progression within these Servant passages. There is no mention of suffering in the first Servant Song and in the second there is only a hint of frustration over the apparent fruitlessness of his labor. But here the Servant suffers both emotionally and physically (v 5,6). *“When one considers the sequence of all four Servant passages, a progression is apparent, leading to a climax in the fourth passage, 52:13-53:12, where the nature and meaning of the Servant’s suffering is explained and related to his ministry.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE IDENTITY OF THE SERVANT — The question again arises of the identity of this servant. It would be difficult here to identify the servant as Israel or even the righteous remnant within Israel. Note in 50:1-3 God told Israel she was punished due to her rebellion and she deserved all that she got. Here immediately following those verses this servant is one who *‘has not been rebellious nor drawn back’* from submitting to the Lord. *Could that be the same Israel!?*

THE SERVANT’S RELATIONSHIP TO THE ‘SOVEREIGN LORD’ — Isaiah’s use of *Adonai Yahweh* (Hebrew; *Sovereign Lord*, NIV; *Lord God*, KJV; *Lord Jehovah*, YLT) is found elsewhere in this part of the Isaiah several times but it is the only time used in the Servant Songs and it is used here four times in a brief section. The natural assumption we can make from this is its use is intentional. *“Perhaps its function is not only to impress on the reader the intimate association of the Servant with the Ruler of the universe, but also to emphasize both the seriousness of the calling and the certainty of the vindication. The Almighty Lord is the one who has called, not just anyone; therefore, the mission cannot fail.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE SERVANT’S COMMISSION — *‘Has given me the tongue of the learned, has given me an instructed tongue’* gives the function of the Servant as being a prophetic function. *The Servant’s main commission was to serve as a Prophet, to declare the Word of God to the people.* This agrees with previous portions speaking of the Servant; in 49:2 it was recorded that God had made the Servant’s *‘mouth like a sharp sword’*, which as discussed previously, gives the weapon of the Servant to be the Word of God. This tongue is *‘instructed’* which is only used two other places in Isaiah, 8:16 and 54:13. Each time this is used it speaks in the context of disciples, *‘persons who by intimate association with a master have learned what they know.’* *“‘The tongue of the learned’ conveys the idea of one who speaks out of intimate association with the Lord (cf. Paul’s claim in*

Gal 1:11-23).” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *When we hear Jesus, we are hearing the word of the Creator of the Universe. When we listen to Jesus, we are listening to One who has intimate knowledge with truth. When one rejects the words of Jesus, they are rejecting God!* Jesus said, “*He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.*” (Matt 10:40).

GOD ONLY REVEALS TO US TO THE DEGREE WE ARE WILLING TO OBEY — the Servant is One who every morning listens and hears the Father, takes what He hears and obeys (vv. 4b,5). “This becomes especially clear when it is remembered that ‘to hear’ in the OT is virtually synonymous with ‘to obey.’ To say ‘I have heard’ is to say ‘I have obeyed,’ and to say ‘You did not hear me’ is to say ‘You disobeyed me.’ Thus the point of God ‘awakening’ the Servant’s ear may well be that the Servant is able to speak God’s word to the broken and outcast of the world because he has learned through a life of obedience.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The servant of Jehovah affords us a deep insight here into His hidden life. The prophets received special revelations from God, for the most part in the night, either in dreams or else in visions, which were shown them in a waking condition, but yet in the more susceptible state of nocturnal quiet and rest. Here, however, the servant of Jehovah receives the divine revelations neither in dreams nor visions of the night; but every morning, i.e., when his sleep is over, Jehovah comes to him, awakens his ear, by making a sign to him to listen, and then takes him as it were into the school after the manner of a pupil, and teaches him what and how he is to preach.” [K&D, *Isaiah*] *This says a lot concerning those who ‘continually seek’ the will of God for their lives yet never seem to be able to find it. As one pastor stated many years back, there is typically something in that person’s life that we may not see but the Lord sees. God does not guide and lead those who are not willing to follow.*

THE HUMILIATION OF THE SERVANT — v. 6 speaks not only of public humiliation (public scourging, plucking out of the beard, and spitting in the face) but also of acts meant to inflict pain, at least the first two. “*As Calvin said, whoever faithfully administers the Word will be exposed to a contest with the world. But it is part of this Servant’s obedience that he gave his back to those who struck him, and his cheeks to those who plucked out his beard; he did not hide his face from shame and spit. These things are not merely a secondary result of obediently declaring God’s Word; it is part of the Servant’s obedience to give himself to these things (cf. John 10:17-18).*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “Among the Medes it was highly offensive to spit in any one’s presence, and so likewise among the Persians. ‘*They abhor me; they flee far from me; They forbear not to spit in my face.*’ (Job 30:10). ‘*And JEHOVAH said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?.*’ (Num 22:14). On which place Sir John Chardin remarks, that ‘spitting before any one, or spitting upon the ground in speaking of any one’s actions, is through the east an expression of extreme detestation.’” [Clarke, *Isaiah*] “He put him into a position inwardly to discern His will, that he might become the mediator of divine revelation; and he did not set himself against this calling, and did not draw back from obeying the call, which, as he well knew, would not bring him earthly honor and gain, but rather shame and ill-treatment. Ever since he had taken the path of his calling, he had not drawn timidly back from the sufferings with which it was connected, but had rather cheerfully taken them upon him.... But no shame makes him faint-hearted; he trusts in Him who hath called him, and looks to the end.... The consciousness of his high calling remained undisturbed; he was never ashamed of that, nor did he turn away from it.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

THE CONFIDENCE OF OBEYING GOD — to be subjected to such humiliation would typically be a result of deserving such treatment; yet the Servant subjected Himself to such treatment and as it were turned around and says He has done nothing wrong! “*At any rate, the*

Servant makes plain that since the difficulties that befell him are the result not of disobedience but of obedience, he can be confident of God's help. Being confident of that help, he knows that he will not be disgraced in the end." [Oswalt, Isaiah] *This is extremely difficult for us to accept in our own lives. No one likes to be humiliated, we all enjoy being accepted by our peers. But if we are to be like Jesus, we must stand for the truth regardless of the treatment of those around us. Our confidence is in knowing we please the One who ultimately has the final authority in our lives. "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."* (1 Pet 2:20-24)

RIGHTEOUSNESS HATED BY THE WORLD — the image given within these verses is one of a court scene where the Servant declares his righteousness and dares anyone to condemn him. He can say this because the Servant knows the Sovereign Lord is near him and will justify him. The 'one who justifies him' (v. 8) and the 'one who condemns' (v. 9) are opposite parties, much like the prosecuting attorney and the defense attorney. "The Servant is confident that, with the help of his defense attorney, no prosecuting attorney would even have a case. It would never be presented, let alone come to trial. Anyone who did dare to stand up to him would be as insubstantial as a worn-out garment, full of moth holes. Their end would not be some cataclysmic destruction, but simply a slow and inevitable wasting away, with the cloth of their lives getting thinner and thinner, punctuated by holes where there is nothing at all." [Oswalt, Isaiah] One of course cannot read this without the Lord Jesus coming to mind, Him standing before His accusers and challenging them, "which of you accuse me of sin?" (John 8:46) *The Lord Jesus in all His perfections was hated by sinful men, not because of anything in Him but rather because of man's own sinful nature being revealed by the presence of holiness. This explains the present goal in our culture to remove any remembrance of God from public places. Sinful man hates holiness; and rather than be brought to a place of repentance and confessing one's own wrongs, man would rather get rid of that which reminds him he is sinful. That's true of the marketplace, it is also true of individuals. The lesson for us is not to be surprised by these actions but rather to expect it and stand with the Lord nevertheless.*

THE SERVANT'S UNDESERVED SUFFERING — "The point here is to make clear in the most unmistakable terms that although the Servant's adversaries might think he had deserved the humiliation and abuse he received (see 53:4), God would be the Servant's witness that no such charges could be justified (cf. John 18:38). Why this heavy emphasis on the undeserved nature of his suffering? Again, 52:13-53:12 provides the clue. If the Servant's suffering was deserved, it certainly could not be on behalf of someone else (cf. 1 Pet 2:21-24). But if it was undeserved, as is strenuously maintained here, then the kind of substitution that that passage attributes to him is possible." [Oswalt, Isaiah] *The Lord through Isaiah is building His case that the sufferings which the Messiah was to suffer was not because of His own failings and sin but rather for another reason. In chapter 53 we see the reason for His suffering was His love for us, to redeem us unto Himself.*

JUDGEMENT UPON THE UNBELIEVERS — “In the midst of his continued sufferings he was still certain of victory, feeling himself exalted above every human accusation, and knowing that Jehovah would acknowledge him; whereas his opponents were on the way to that destruction, the germ of which they already carried with them.... ‘All of them’: this refers to all who are hostile to him. They fall to pieces like a worn-out garment, and fall a prey to the moth which they already carry within them:-a figure which we meet with again in Isa 51:8 (cf., Job 13:28; Hos 5:12), and one which, although apparently insignificant, is yet really a terrible one, inasmuch as it points to a power of destruction working imperceptibly and slowly, but yet effecting the destruction of the object selected with all the greater certainty.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

d. Obey the voice of his Servant (50:10-51:8)

(1) Light or darkness (50:10,11)

Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment. (NIV)

Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow. (KJV)

Who [is] among you, fearing Jehovah, Harkening to the voice of His servant, That hath walked in dark places, And there is no brightness for him? Let him trust in the name of Jehovah, And lean upon his God. Lo, all ye kindling a fire, girding on sparks, Walk ye in the light of your fire, And in the sparks ye have caused to burn, From my hand hath this been to you, In grief ye lie down! (YLT)

These two verses are debated as to their exact purpose in this chapter. According to Oswalt, many commentators include these verses with the previous segment of 50:4-9, although most admit the change in the speaker (from the Servant of the Lord) does signal a structural change. As transition verses, part of what is said looks back to the previous verses but part of what is said also looks forward to the verses following. Since it is uncertain as to which these verses belong, I am keeping them with this lesson to preserve the unity of the chapter.

WE DEMONSTRATE WE FEAR GOD WHEN WE OBEY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST —

of the Servant in the previous verses it was asked ‘who are my creditors?’ and ‘who will condemn me?’ Here another question is asked but this time to God’s people. They are identified by four characteristics: they *fear the Lord*, they *listen to the voice of his Servant*, they *walk in darkness* and they *have no light*. It is important to note these characteristics are stated in two parallel forms. Obviously ‘darkness’ and ‘no light’ are parallels, but what is more interesting is the first pair: ‘fear the Lord’ and ‘obeys the word of the Servant.’ “***How does a person demonstrate that he or she ‘fears the Lord,’ lives in that reverent awe of God that shapes one’s behavior? By ‘listening to,’ that is, obeying, that which the Servant has been appointed to reveal to the world.... To obey this Servant is to fear God, and to fear God is to obey this Servant.***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “If the prophet’s message of hope was met with a solid wall of scorn and rejection, as the chapter seems to suggest, it is not surprising that an actual division should have begun to be apparent between those who fear the Lord and obey the voice of his Servant and those who heap upon the Servant only

ridicule and humiliation. The people who obey are, in fact, identifying themselves with the Servant's own attitude (cf. v. 5) and so expressing their reverential fear of God (cf. Deut 18:15-18; Luke 9:34-35). This fear is not one that makes men hide (cf. 2:10-11, 19-21) but draws them to God in faith." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

GOD DOES NOT PROMISE FREEDOM FROM PROBLEMS IN THIS LIFE — The second parallel statements are surprising. One would think those who *'fear the Lord'* would be described as those who *'walk in the light,'* a description of believers used repeatedly throughout the scriptures. One possible explanation is the darkness here is used to describe the difficulties experienced by our Savior while on earth. ***"Those who follow this Servant may indeed walk with him into the darkness of frustration, injustice, humiliation, and abuse. But this does not mean they should forgo their reliance on God. Through all the ages the children of God have equated God's blessing with comfort and a sense of well-being. But that was not the way of the Servant. So the challenge is again and again: do not cast away your confidence. Wait on the Lord. Put your hope in him. Trust in the reputation and the character (the name) of the Lord, and rely on your God. This is the example that we have in the Servant, as has just been powerfully expressed in vv. 5-7."*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Another possible manner in which v10 might be interpreted: "Verse 10b perhaps calls for repentance, for it speaks of walking in darkness and offers, by implication, light from God through the word of the Servant (cf. John 12:44-45)." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

TO THOSE WHO REJECT THE LORD — Isaiah now addresses those who refuse the Word of God in their lives. Following on the admonition to 'walk in the light' of v. 10, Isaiah describes those who reject that light and set about to create their own light. ***"There is only one light in the darkness of human sin: the one kindled by God in and through his Servant. To refuse that light and to embrace some other is to open oneself to a devouring flame.... Such persons will be devoured by the light that they have tried to create."*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] "The modern reader needs to remember that before the advent of modern science, a source of light was also a source of heat; so the analogy of v. 11 develops that which brings v. 10 to its close. It may be compared with 10:17 and furnishes a striking link in imagery between parts of the book so often attributed to two distinct authors. ***It also reminds us of 1:29-31, teaching as it does that the wicked man will be caught in his own trap.***" [Grogan, *Isaiah*] "But the destruction which they prepare for the servant of Jehovah becomes their own. They themselves have to go into the midst of the burning fire and the burning darts, that they have set on fire. The hand of Jehovah suddenly inverts the position; the fire of wrath becomes the fire of divine judgment, and this fire becomes their bed of torment." [K&D, *Isaiah*]

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."

— Isaiah 50:6 NIV