



THE SERVANT OF THE LORD (2)

The Servant of the Lord is the whole nation and yet at the same time the individual within that nation who most clearly demonstrates what it means to be a “Servant of the Lord.” Supremely such a “Servant” is Jesus. Through His own self-understanding and the understanding of the New Testament writers, a connection is clearly made between the “Servant of the Lord” in the O.T. and Jesus the Son / Servant of the Lord in the N.T. (The Greek word *pais* can mean both son and a servant of the French word *garçon*).

ISAIAH 42v1-4

Theme: God’s rule of universal justice (v.1,4 – “the nations”, “earth”, “the islands”).

v.1: Commands to “listen”, or to “look” are recurring motifs in the Servant Songs (42v18; 49v1; 50v4; 52v13; 53v3; 60v4).

Who is the Servant?

Israel / Jacob (41v8)

A specific (unique) individual. “His law” (42v.4; 51v4) and the words of v.1 are similar to those used of Saul and of David (1 Sam.9v15-17; 16v12). The Servant is formally presented to the world as he is anointed and empowered to be effective in God’s service. (NB “will” v.1,3,4). He will have both a prophetic role (49v1f; 50v4f) and a kingly role ((42v1,3-4,7; 49v2,7-9).

“Uphold” (v.1), means to grip tight. “Delight” (v.1) tells us that this about relationship and not simply service and references forward to Jesus’ Baptism and the Transfiguration.

Although his mission is to the world and will be pursued with determination and courage until it is accomplished (v.4), unlike the splendour and majesty of worldly powers, this Servant will come in humility, gentleness and grace (v.2-3; 53v2; Mt.21v5).

God adds His confirming word (42v5-9) – “*this is what the Lord says..*”

ISAIAH 49v1-6

Theme: Re-stated in two stages: Restoration of Israel (v.5-6) whom the Servant will “bring back” (v.5-6), “gather” (v.5), “restore” (v.6) and the Restoration of the world (v.6) - “salvation to the ends of the earth”.

The command comes to “listen” (v.1) and to listen attentively (after all he will not raise his voice (42v2), and to listen obediently. (cf Ex.21v5-6. And see 42v18-20; 48v1-2; 49v1; 50v4-5; 52v15; 53v3; 61v1).

The Servant starts to step out of the shadows, as the pronoun moves from “he” to “I”.

Something about the Servant

A prophetic call from his mother’s womb (v.1,5 cf Jer.1v4-5; Gal.4v4).

Hidden away by God and prepared in secret until the right time (v.2).

At some point he becomes despondent (v.4 cp 42v3-4).

Something about the Servant’s Mission

It will involve struggle but will be effective and widespread (v.2 cf Jer. 1v17-19; 23v29; Eph.6v17; Heb.4v12; Rev.1v16; 19v11-16).

Just when the Servant thinks he has accomplished nothing, the call is enlarged to embrace the world (v.6)!

The Servant and his mission is to display God’s splendour (v.3; 53v2-3; Jn.12v27-28).

God adds His confirming word (49v7-13).

ISAIAH 50:4-9

Theme: (cf 49v4) The suffering and the vindication of the Servant (v.5-9).

This is what the struggle of 49v2 means, as it is set against the backdrop of arrest, mistreatment and trial (v.6-9), mirrored in Jesus’ own arrest, mistreatment and trial. This clearly concerns an individual and not a nation.

At this stage the reason for the opposition to the Servant and the reason for his suffering is seen to lie with the predictable response of rebellious, sinful men and God Himself acts in his defence (v.8-9; cf Rom.8v31ff). We still await 53v10 and the full revelation of what truly lies behind the Servant’s suffering.

To be a Servant of God is to be a Disciple of God:-

Daily listening (v.4); spiritual discernment (v.4; 1 Cor.2v9-16); learning God’s will (v.4); doing God’s will, whatever the personal cost (v.5-6).

The outcome is that he is able to teach God’s will (v.4); sustain the weary (v.4); is strengthened to resist ungodly opposition and thus to accomplish God’s will (v.7; Jer.1v18; Ezek.3v8-9; Mk.10v32-34).

God adds His confirmatory word (50v10-11).

ISAIAH 52:13-15 - Isaiah 53v1-12

Theme: The suffering and vindication of the Servant: the reason for his suffering: the effect of his suffering. Once again, this suffering Servant can be neither Israel nor Isaiah.

Recurring motif: *We thought this...but in reality, that...*

52v13-53v3: The Servant's suffering is observed but not understood.

53v4-6 : The Servant's suffering is understood.

53v7-9 : The Servant's death is observed but not understood.

Isa.53v10-12: The Servant's death is understood.

52v13: The Servant is "raised", "lifted up" and "highly exalted" even as Jesus was crucified, raised to life and ascended into glory (cf Jn.12v32-33; Lk.24v50-51; Heb.1v3),

52v15: "sprinkle" – part of the priestly, purifying role (53v6,10). *or the Hebrew can be understood to mean "startle" – matching 52v15 and 53v1.*

53 v2: the Servant comes into no promising environment, with no physical beauty or wealth or status to draw us to him. In fact people had the opposite reaction, turning their faces away and despising him (v.3).

53v3: the Hebrew of "familiar with suffering" means to be intimately acquainted with it.

His Suffering:-

- Disfigured and marred until he was hardly recognisable as a human being (52v14 cf 1v5-6).
- Despised and rejected (53v3).
- Pierced (Hebrew suggests "pierced fatally" cf 51v9) and crushed (53v5).
- Wounded (53v5).
- Stricken and smitten (53v4,8).
- All our sins laid on him (53v6,8,12).
- Oppressed and afflicted and unjustly judged (53v7-8).
- Cut off from the land of the living (53v8).
- His life poured out (53v12).
- Numbered amongst sinners (53v9,12).

Our Blessing:-

- Took all our sins on Himself and so took them all away (53v4,6,12).
- Carried our sorrows (53v4).
- Brought us peace (53v5).
- Healed us (53v5).
- Took the blow that we deserved (53v8).
- Made his life our guilt offering (53v10).
- Justified us (53v11).
- Interceded for us (53v12).

53v6: the Hebrew of "laid on him" is "cause to arrive at" and is a phrase which refers to the worshipper laying his hand upon the animal being sacrificed. He did this to identify himself with the offering and symbolically to transfer his sin upon the animal, thereby receiving forgiveness in return (cf 2 Cor.5v21).

53v12: the "great" and the "strong" can also mean "the many" cf "he bore the sin of many" e.g.Mt.26v27-28. Jesus makes intercession for sinners both in his atoning death (Heb.2v9) and in His words on the Cross (Lk.23v34).

ISAIAH 61v1-11

This is not usually included in the Servant Songs but it has clear similarities with the other Servant Songs in the anointing, the message and the ministry and it is a passage that Jesus specifically said referred to Him (Lk.4v17-21). However in Nazareth, Jesus stops the reading before coming to "vengeance." His mission at this stage is about salvation (Jn.3v16). Only later is judgement to come (Jn.5v22-30).

61v1: the "good news" is the Gospel (40v9; 41v27)!

The Servant is called to preach / proclaim (v.1-2); bind up (v.1); comfort (v.2); bestow a crown, oil, garments (v.3).

61v2: “the year of the Lord’s favour” is the Year of Jubilee (Lev.25v8f; Jer.34v8f), when all debts were cancelled, land returned to its original owners and all slaves were set free. To “proclaim a release,” seems to have been the formal means of announcing that the Jubilee had begun.

61v6: “priests” was what the nation had been called to be (Ex.19v6; 1 Ptr.2v4-5,9).

61v10: the Songs come full circle. As the Lord had delighted in the Servant (42v1), so the Servant delights in the Lord. This is the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev.19v6-9; 21v1-2)!

God adds His confirmatory words in v.7-8.

IN SUMMARY

The Servant of the Lord is the nation of Israel and the nation of Israel as it was called to be. In the end only one person, the Lord Jesus Christ, has ever lived as the people of God were called to live. He became and is *the* Servant of God and as such He remains the inspiration and the role model for every believer, every servant of God.

Jesus the Servant of the Lord revealed in His life what the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth as in Heaven actually looks like and in His suffering and death, restored sinners to God. “The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become sons of God” (John Calvin). As servants of God we are called to continue His work of bringing sight to the blind, release to the captives and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s Jubilee!