

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Isaiah 50 & 51
January 13, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

There is one area in which we can be perfect and that is in having a heart that is humble and submissive to the word of God. That is Isaiah's message to his people, just as it is Christ's message for us today. The people Isaiah was dealing with were God's people - the Jews. The Jews were struggling with sin and it wasn't because they didn't *have* the law of God and His commandments. It's because they weren't *listening* to the law of God.

I gave you this statistic before, when we first started our study of Isaiah... The verb translated in the NASV as "Listen" is used in the imperative 31 times (see 1:10). Isaiah calls on Israel to "hear," a cognate word for "ear" (just as in English). This imperative is found 6 times throughout the book (again, see 1:10). The reason God wants the heavens and the earth to listen to His charges is because *Judah is not listening!* Take a look at 6:9-10, passages made famous by Jesus in Matthew 13:14-15 and Paul in Acts 28:26-27. Thus the expression, "The Lord speaks," found three times in Isaiah but the equivalent expression, "the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (vs 20) is found ten times.

With these thoughts in the background, let's study Isaiah 50 & 51 as Isaiah leads us to Christ. The key for Israel as for us is to have an *obedient* heart!

THE SERVANT OF GOD:

In Isaiah 42:1-4, the prophet pictures the coming of a "Servant" of God who would lead all those with an humble and submissive heart. This "Servant" is in contrast with God's people, the nation of Israel. Israel would not listen to the law of God so God would punish them by destroying the northern nations with Assyria and He would send the southern nation into exile in Babylon for 70 years.

That "Servant" pictured in 42:1-4 and 49:1-8 is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, as Matthew will tell us in Matthew 12:18-21.

GOD'S REBUKE OF ISRAEL - 50:1-3:

That same Servant is pictured in Isaiah 50. But we begin in the first three verses where God asks Israel if she has been divorced. The expected answer is "no." Israel was unfaithful to God in giving herself to idol worship (pictured by the prophets as spiritual adultery), but God has not divorced her. He also pictures Himself selling Israel - but their suffering is a result of sin - iniquities and transgressions (verse 1).

Both the exile and its punishment did not happen because God was *not powerful* to save (vss 2-3). He can do marvelous things. The problem was *their sin*. These two questions at the beginning of verse 2 imply that *Israel was not listening!* And God cannot save someone who won't listen! His hand is not so short that He can't reach out and save Israel. The problem is not with God. Even the powers visible in nature show that God is not lacking in power. The problem is Israel's sin, specifically their *unwillingness to hear and obey!*

The "hand" is a reference to financial resources (Motyer, 357) so that the picture of a "ransom" here "involves 'paying the price' (1:27; 35:10) required to obtain freedom. The question therefore indignantly asks whether the Lord is short of the cash to buy back his wife

(Hos. 3:2), to redeem his slaves or to find the due payment for their sins - in short: can the Lord satisfy the law?"

So, what was the solution to their sin? If the sin is pictured as deafness, then they needed to *listen*. "God lacks neither the desire nor the power to deliver his people. The only issue is whether they will step forward in repentance and faith to meet him when he comes and answer him when he calls" (Oswalt, 320).

THE SERVANTS' STRENGTH - 50:4-5:

Observe here that "Lord God" is not "Jehovah;" the letters in Lord are not all capital letters. This word "Lord" is "Master" or "Sovereign" and that is the focus of this passage: verses 4, 5, 7, 9. God is Master; He has all power to save, which He does through His Servant.

His strength was that He had the "tongue" of a disciple and He *taught* what the Lord wanted Him to teach. Not only that, but He *did* what the Lord wanted Him to do. He was obedient. Speaking of the Servant's strength, observe the number of first person pronouns (either "Me," "My" or "I") from verse 4 to 11. I have counted 27!

Here is the strength to hearing God: **humble obedience**. A disciple is a learner (the Greek word for "disciple" gives us the word *mathematician*.) Here, we have pictured the Servant who *learns* and then *teaches* and *obeys*. If you hear, you obey. If you're not obeying, it's because you don't hear. The Servant knows what it means to obey God in everything and He calls on Israel, those who were weary of worshiping idols, to obey God the same way.

God authorized Israel through:

1. Direct commands - Deuteronomy 6:13
2. Warnings not to add to His commands - Deuteronomy 4:2
3. Statements showing that silence was prohibitive. That is, God did not have to list *all* the different gods of the pagans nor all the different *practices* which they did. What He authorized, He authorized. Nothing else entered His mind to permit - Jeremiah 19:5. If there is no word of it, there is no authority for it.

"This Servant did not 'turn his back' on God's plans for him but faithfully taught the weary what God said" (Smith, 381).

THE SERVANT'S SUFFERING - 50:6-7:

Because of what the Lord wanted, the Servant accepted humiliation. But, He remained true and loyal to the Lord. Isaiah pictures for us that the "Servant" of the Lord was going to be despised by His people. We will also get a clear picture of that suffering in chapter 53.

This Servant was to endure flogging, torture, and humiliation. But, His determination to obey God is pictured through this reference to *flint* being extremely hard. For the fulfillment of this picture in Jesus, see: Matthew 26:67; 27:30; Mark 15:5-20; Luke 9:51, 53; John 19:1.

Eventually, the Servant knows the Lord will vindicate Him. The Lord will vindicate Him *because* He was adamantly determined to *obey* the Lord. "This is a picture of absolute stubborn resistance to giving up his responsibilities (Jer. 5:3; Ezek. 3:8), a resolute determination to carry out the will of God" (Smith, 383).

THE SERVANT'S CHALLENGE - 50:8-9:

Since He had done what the Lord had *taught* Him, He knew He would be vindicated. If God is on His side, who can condemn Him?

A courtroom is the image in verse 8 - Who will stand up to the Servant and accuse Him, when He has been faithfully obedient to the Master's will?

“Why does this Servant have such confidence? *He knows* God intimately. *He knows* that God is near his side. *He knows* that God is the one who will vindicate him” (Smith, 383; emph. added).

THE SERVANT'S TESTIMONY - 50:10-11:

Please observe the message for Isaiah's audience and his message for us today:

#1 - Fear the Lord.

#2 - Obey the voice of His Servant.

#3 - Walk in the Light.

#4 - Trust in the name of the Lord & rely on God.

The thoughts in verse 11 probably suggest that one is trying to walk by his own light which he, himself, has created and if one refuses to submit to the Word of God, he will receive the consequences of that decision.

Passing into chapter 51, Isaiah calls on Israel, the faithful in Israel, to respond:

LOOK TO THE PAST - 51:1-3:

“Listen,” once again Isaiah cries out. His thoughts here are directed to those who “seek righteousness.” This would be the remnant; those who do not believe they are righteous in themselves but they need to be made righteous in the eyes of God by God Himself.

“Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug” - vs 2. Look at the past. Consider your past - Abraham, your Father, Sarah, your mother. Sarah gave birth to their forefather Isaac in pain. When Abraham was alone, God called him, blessed him, and multiplied him. Incidentally, this is the *only* place outside of Genesis where “Sarah” is mentioned.

Yes, verse 3, God can and will do it again. He will comfort Zion, all her waste places. He will refresh her and make her just like the Garden of Eden, the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will again be found in her. I mentioned before that Isaiah talks about sin a lot. He uses the word “joy” 37 times; “gladness” 19 times and “rejoicing” 22 times! She will sing with thanksgiving, the sound of a melody. Thankfulness leads to worship, which motivates to evangelism.

“If he [God] could make a great people out of barren Sarah, surely he could restore a great people to barren Zion, turning her from a wilderness into a garden of the Lord (see also 4:2; 32:15; 35:1-2; 61:3-4; 65:21-22)” (Oswalt, 334).

LOOK TO THE FUTURE - 51:4-6:

Here is another call from Isaiah/God to “pay attention to Me” - a different word from “Listen” in verse 1, but a synonym. There is a new law coming out from God, through which He will set His justice as a light to the peoples. We see here another reference to 2:1-4.

“This is what the prophet said earlier the Servant would do (42:1-4; 49:6) and before that what the Messiah would do (9:6 [Eng. 7]; 11:4; 16:4b-5; see also 55:3-5). Now it is God who does it. This should say something about the identity of the Servant/Messiah” (Oswalt, 336).

Elaborating further on that law, His righteousness is “near” and His salvation has gone forth - it is available. He will judge the peoples - the Gentiles - and the “coastlands” will wait for Him, for His arm of power to save them and bring them righteousness. This shows that Isaiah

has in mind a salvation beyond the return from Babylonian exile. This is a spiritual return, a spiritual deliverance, salvation from sins.

Thus, God calls on the remnant, the peoples, and the coastlands all to “lift up your eyes to the sky” and look “to the earth beneath.” In apocalyptic terms, God says the world is going to come to an end but His salvation will continue and endure forever. His righteousness will not “wane.” It will be made available.

LOOK TO THE PRESENT - 51:7-8:

Verse 7 once again begins with the imperative verb “Listen!” Now he refers to those who “know” righteousness, as opposed to those in verse 1 who “pursue” righteousness. Those who “know” righteousness are those who - please observe - are “a people in whose heart is My law.” Finally! There is someone who takes God’s law seriously! To those, God says, “Do not fear the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings.

Repeating his thoughts from 50:9, the moth will eat them like a garment, the grub like wool. But His righteousness will be forever. His salvation will last to all generations. “Righteousness” is used by Isaiah 68 times, that averages to slightly more than once per chapter. “Salvation” is used 27 times with “save” used 17 times and “Savior” used 8 times for a total of 52 times. The message in Isaiah is salvation from sins and the righteousness that results from that act!

ISAIAH’S PRAYER - 51:9-10:

In these two verses, Isaiah directs his attention to God, thus we consider it a short prayer. “The fact is that the way to react to the Lord’s promises is to pray urgently for their fulfillment” (Motyer, 364). He speaks to the “arm of the Lord” and calls on God to awaken His arm. Just as God did “in the days of old, the generations of long ago.” It was God who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced the dragon. Most commentators agree that this is a reference to Egypt (30:7), to God destroying Egypt’s armies at the Red Sea.

Verse 10 is clearly such a reference.

GOD GIVES A RESPONSE - 51:11-16:

God responds to this prayer from Isaiah. Beginning especially in verse 12, God speaks in the first person. Here in verse 11, God points out that the ransomed will return to the Lord with joyful shouting in Zion, wearing, clothed in everlasting joy, at least on their heads. When they return, they will obtain gladness and joy. Sorrow and sighing will flee.

Why? Because God will comfort His people. They do not need to be afraid of mortal man, man who is as transient as grass. “Son of man,” incidentally here, is simply a Hebrew idiom that means human.

God directs His thoughts to those who have forgotten that He is the one who made heaven and earth. Why do His people fear man, the fury of the oppressor? In contrast to the eternal, powerful God of heaven, where is the fury of the oppressor? “If we know that it is God who holds our ultimate destiny, then the oppressor no longer holds power over us. Yes, oppressors may hurt us, even kill us, but they do not have the power to make us fear them or hate them. God is the ruler over all” (Oswalt, 346).

We have in verse 14 a reference to the exile. The one in exile will be set free; he will not die in the dungeon nor will his bread be lacking. How do you know? Because (vs 15), God is the Lord who controls the sea and its waves.

Plus, verse 16, God has put His word into Isaiah's mouth and covered Him with His hand, for protection and defense. He created the heavens and the earth and calls to Zion that they are *His* people.

JERUSALEM, WAS DRUNK - 51:17-23:

Finally, in this last paragraph, Isaiah directs his attention to the Jews in Jerusalem (vs 17). They have drunk from the cup of God's anger, the chalice of reeling from God's wrath. This cup of wrath imagery is common among the prophets: Ezekiel 23:31-33; Jeremiah 25:15, 17, 28. Isaiah will use it again in verse 22. "To drink the cup of God's wrath is to take in the full measure of God's judgment" (Beyer, 199). Jesus will drink from the cup of God's wrath (Matt. 26:39, 42) and John will say Babylon will drink from the cup of God's wrath - Revelation 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6.

There is no one in Jerusalem who can be her leader (vs 18). In fact, there is no one who can bring her comfort (vs 19). Jerusalem and her sons and daughters are all recipients of God's wrath (vs 20).

So, Israel needs to hear (vs 22): God has taken the cup of wrath away from her. She will not drink it again. Instead, God will serve the cup of His wrath to her tormentors, those who have walked all over Jerusalem.

Because Jerusalem lies prostrate on the ground, humbled by her sins, she has come to an understanding that - yes - she needs a Savior. But He will be a Savior different than what they would expect...

Next week:
The Suffering Servant
Isaiah 52 & 53