**Jesus in the Servant Songs of Isaiah**

**Song # 3 – Is. 50:4-11**

There are four sections in Isaiah called “the Servant Songs” because they are written as poetry. Today we’re looking at the third one. We’re looking to see if Jesus fits as the fulfillment of these prophecies. If He does, it serves to connect the First and Second Covenants or Testaments, it connects Judaism with Christianity, and it helps us understand who the Jewish Messiah was to be and what He was to do, making it more certain that we find Him and align ourselves with Him and His mission.

Most Jews don’t believe Jesus is this Suffering Servant, and that’s understandable because prophecy is often obscure. Isaiah is especially obscure and difficult, because he speaks of things near in time but also far away within a few verses, things which will have a literal fulfillment and others which will have only a spiritual one, and this makes it harder to interpret these passages correctly.

But as Christians, we believe Jesus is the only person of history who truly fits this picture, especially when we look at the four songs together and add up all the attributes ascribed to the Servant. In hindsight, we understand Him fulfilling much of what Isaiah wrote in a spiritual way, not a physical or literal one. No other Jewish person of history has all the attributes of this Servant or the world-wide impact that Jesus has had. I’ll try to demonstrate this as we go along.

The third Servant Song begins abruptly at 50:4 with an autobiographical description. But what’s the context? The latter part of chapter forty-nine contains God’s promise of what was to be a future restoration of His people to the lands of Israel, and their purposes as God’s people. It seemed completely impossible to them, but God promised to bring them home. He would not forget or abandon them (49:15, 16), but would deliver them from their captors, who were much stronger than they. (49:25-26) He would give them great favor with the nations all around them. (49:22, 23) Basically, God was saying all He’d purposed for Israel, He Himself would eventually accomplish.

Then chapter fifty begins with God reminding His people that He never divorced them or sold them to creditors. Rather, their own sinful ways had brought calamities upon them as a people. God had called them again and again to return to Him (50:2), but no one would listen or respond. With that background, we come to this third song.

**Is. 50:4, 5 –** 4 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. 5 The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.

Whereas Israel hadn’t listened, the Servant, by virtue of being disciplined and trained by God Himself, will be able to hear from God for His people. Thus, He will have the right words to say to the weary in order to comfort and uplift them. This shows why we don’t believe the Servant is just Israel. They didn’t listen; He did. He will live a life of discipline, attending upon God day after day, allowing God to speak to Him and train Him. Unlike Israel, He will not rebel against the will of God in any point, even though that obedience will cost Him.

**Is. 50:6 –** 6 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.

In the previous songs this cost was only vaguely hinted at. In the third song, the form it will take starts to become a little clearer. The Servant will offer His back to those who will beat Him, allow His beard to be painfully plucked from His cheeks, and will be mocked and spat upon. For some reason, He will be exposed to shame and disgrace, which is very puzzling, because He’s so obedient to God, so righteous in His character. Why would He face opposition?!

**Is. 50:7-9 -** 7 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. 8 He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! 9 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.

Though mocked and scorned, the Servant yet trusts that God will help Him and ultimately vindicate Him. Because He knows this, He will set His face like flint, indicating an unflinching resolve to carry out the will of God. He will be so assured of the fact that the Sovereign Lord will help and vindicate Him that He asks who might possibly condemn Him, and calls for any who would accuse Him to come forth and face Him. He boldly declares that all who oppose Him will vanish away like a moth-eaten garment. He knows He will prevail.

And yet, there will be some sort of terrible opposition to the accomplishment of His mission. Somehow it will seem as if shame and humiliation could overwhelm the Servant. He will have to trust God’s ultimate validation of Him, but that won’t be easy. The Servant will be beaten, His beard plucked out, and He will be mocked and spat upon. The Servant will suffer!? How strange! He’s supposed to be so powerful, so extraordinary, more than a mere human being. He’s supposed to bring deliverance and justice to the whole world! What’s this then, about suffering? How can this relate to the fulfillment of God’s plans?

The whole scenario is mysterious and disturbing. That’s why the Jews have such problems with these songs. To whom could this refer? The Servant was called Israel in 49:3, yet a nation’s back is not beaten nor its beard plucked out! The nation brought its suffering on itself by sinning. The Servant will suffer *unjustly*. This Servant can’t be the nation. He’s got to be a person. But what Jewish leader went through shameful disgrace and suffering in order to bring Israel and the world into its rightful place with God? Why would He have to endure such things? How could *suffering* bring salvation and victory?!

Well, Jesus certainly set His face like flint to go to Jerusalem, even though He knew of the hostility and opposition arrayed against Him there. His disciples questioned Him about this. (Jn. 11:8) His opponents sent wave after wave of their minions to attack Him with words. (Matt. 21) Since they couldn’t defeat Him in the open, He was eventually shamefully arrested at night and subjected to an illegal trial, at which He was slapped and beaten, and probably had His beard plucked. He was spat upon and mocked at that trial (and afterwards) by both the Jews and the Roman soldiers into whose hands He was eventually surrendered. He was scourged, His back severely beaten. Then He was stripped practically naked and crucified publicly. He was repeatedly mocked and treated shamefully. His accusers said, “He trusted in the Lord. Let the Lord deliver Him now.” (Matt. 27:43)

During all His suffering, He certainly seemed to have been abandoned by God and humiliated. However, for those who believe the New Testament, Jesus was eventually vindicated in grand fashion. He was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God on high. He was brought before the Ancient of Days with clouds of glory (Dan. 7:13, 14). And Phil. 2:9-11 says God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, so that at that name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God.

At this point, the question must again be asked, when did the nation of Israel in general or any specific Jewish person experience anything like what is described in this third Servant Song? Jesus of Nazareth fits this description, but no one else does. If He’s not the Person indicated here, I’d sure like to know who else might be!

As we close today, what’s the application of this Servant Song to life? I see three main applications.

First, let’s be sure we get the main message of *all* the Servant Songs. We need a Savior! We cannot save ourselves!

What Adam and Eve failed to do and what Israel failed to do, God’s Suffering Servant, and only He was able to bring about. He did it in a totally unexpected way, through suffering, shame, and death. His ways are certainly not our ways. They’re higher, but they go against our natural ways of thinking, which tests our faith.

A suffering Servant isn’t what we would expect, Christ crucified can seem foolish (to Greeks), a stumbling block (to Jews). But He is the power and the wisdom of God, God’s way of making us righteous (1 Cor. 1). Only those who humble themselves and accept such a Suffering Servant as Messiah can be saved. There is no other way!

Second, Jesus had this instructed tongue, this attentive and discerning ear, because He is the perfect Son of God and He listened attentively to His Father, so He had the right words to say (Matt. 11:28). Israel didn’t listen; that’s why they got into trouble. But friends, we are also called to be attentive listeners, diligent seekers of God, so that we understand what to say to those with whom we come in contact, and how to say it. Jesus modeled discipleship for us. We are called to fear the Lord and obey the words of His Servant (vs. 10). You can’t obey them or live by them if you don’t know them! We’re called to abide in Christ and let His Words abide in us! (Jn. 15)

Third, Jesus is not only our Savior but a model of faith for us. He trusted that His Father would vindicate Him. He knew He would ultimately not be put to shame. Think of how that faith was tested! He faced tremendous hostility and opposition throughout His ministry, and especially His last week, when He was attacked from every conceivable angle and finally had to go through Gethsemane and then the cross. The assaults against His soul must’ve been horrendous! More than anything, His faith in His Father was what was mocked and tested.

In the 2nd Servant Song, Is. 49:3, we saw that the Servant would feel discouraged, as if He’d labored in vain, and we understood this referred to the way in which the majority of Israelites would not accept Him as Messiah. Yet He knew His reward would ultimately come from God, and God was truly His Source.

He modeled that for us so we would see how it’s done and learn to do it ourselves. He endured so much because He knew where He stood with God, and trusted God would not ultimately abandon Him. Abraham was great in faith and was willing to even sacrifice his son, but he didn’t have to. Jesus, on the other hand, had to trust God more than anybody ever has. He had to trust Him even beyond death!

Now you and I go through lots of things in life that can make us doubt God is with us, doubt His love and forgiveness and His promise of future vindication through Christ. But nothing we go through is as great as what the Servant went through, yet He trusted, and so can we!

The apostle Paul quoted this prophecy of Isaiah in Ro. 8:33, 34, asking, “if God be for us, who could be against us? If He gave us His own Son, will He not also give us all the rest? Who can condemn us? Who can lay anything to our charge?” The Suffering Servant would go through terrible mocking and testing of His faith in God, but He would overcome. We’re to follow His example of faith. Verse 10, though it’s not part of the Song itself, emphasizes this same trust we’re to exercise:

**Is. 50:10 –** 10 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.

Often, we who fear the Lord and obey the word of His Servant may still feel like we’re walking in darkness. What?! How can that be?! Well, let’s face it, we live in a darkened world, and we can’t see God with our physical eyes. We don’t always understand what He is doing in our lives. We don’t always see His provision for us, so our faith is often tested. Let’s face it, life itself is one big test! As Ps. 34:19 says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” We can surely all attest to that!

What Isaiah is saying to us, however, as is the psalmist, and as is Paul, is that, when we *feel* we’re walking in the dark, our answer is to consciously set ourselves to trust. To trust God’s promises and trust that He is with us. We’re called to live and walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We’re to trust who God is and what He has said, and not focus on the circumstances which surround us. Steer through the darkness by the compass of God’s Word.