

The Way of the Servant – Isaiah 50

Introduction – In this sinful world, obedience is never easy. If we are to be followers of Christ, we must not forget His words, “take up your cross and follow Me.” What does that mean? If we are going to be agents of the Lord’s righteousness and messengers of His salvation, we will clash with the unrighteous world, the temptations of the flesh, and the devious works of the defeated but remaining principalities. Where will we find the faith and courage to stand firm, to believe in the dark what we knew in the light, to obey with glad-hearted hope?

Our Iniquities and Another Exodus (vv1-3) – Earlier, Zion complained that God had abandoned her (49:14). Following up on His reply that He has not forgotten Zion, God is quick to point out that the real problem is that Israel has forgotten and abandoned Him (v1). The reason there is an experience of forsakenness is because of Israel’s iniquities (v1b). God reminds them that He has come and called them (again and again) but no one responded (v2a). They have turned to idols, or other nations, or themselves, but God has said, “*Is My hand shortened that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?*” (v2b). Zion needs to remember the Exodus (vv2c-3). How many times are we told to remember the stories of God’s deliverance in our times of doubt?

The Servant’s Obedience (vv4-5) – The Lord’s Servant now speaks out. He has been instructed by the Lord, especially “*a word in season to him who is weary*” (v4). His obedience was daily and constant – perfect (“*morning by morning*”). The Lord opened His ears and obeyed whatever He heard; the Servant was not rebellious (v5).

The Servant’s Suffering (v6) – Here is the center of this chapter. Here is where obedience leads – directly into conflict and suffering. This is the result of stalwart obedience to the Lord. The Servant suffered the pain of persecution and the shame of malice and scorn.

The Servant’s Vindication (vv7-9) – Here the Servant teaches Zion by His life. He appears to be abandoned, but His confidence is in the Lord God who will help Him (v7). And so He sets His face like flint knowing that it will not end in shame. He then defiantly calls on His enemies to bring a charge against Him (v8) for He knows they and their way will “*grow old like a garment*” – their time is coming; their demise is sure (v9).

The Way of the Servant; the Way of the Cross – Jesus is the Suffering Servant. Jesus says, “*Why, when I came, was there no man...none to answer*” (v2, John 1:11, 3:19, Matt 23:37-38). Jesus was taught directly by the Father (v4, John 7:15-17) and the people knew it was different (Matt 7:28-29, Luke 4:22, John 7:46) Jesus was perfectly obedient to His Father (v5, John 8:29, 14:31, 15:10, Phil 2:8) even to the point of suffering and the cross (v6, Phil 2:8, Matt 26:39, Mark 14:65, 15:19). Jesus set Himself determinedly to do what God had required (Luke 9:51), knowing that the old man, the old Israel, the old age was going to be judged (v9, Heb 1:11-12).

Our Choice: Follow Christ or Ourselves (vv10-11) – The Servant has come and we are to follow the way of the Servant. But not all Christians are Christians, just as it was that not all Israel was Israel. Not all who were circumcised were circumcised just as now, not all who are baptized have been baptized. How do you know which you are? “*Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant?*” (v10). In describing the Servant’s own obedience we see what God requires of all His people; not empty profession, but wholehearted, costly obedience with a courageous faith in God even when we find ourselves walking in darkness (v10). God will not always tell you “why” you are walking in the valley of the shadow of death, but He always tells you that He is leading you through it. Some rely on the Servant, the LORD. Others choose their own way, kindling their own fires (of self-revelation, self-justification, self-satisfaction – v11). This is a terrible way that leads to torment and hell (John 8:24, 2 Thess 1:8-9). “*Some, by their persistence in indifference or rebellion, will show themselves, in the long run, not to be his people at all. But God’s ultimate purposes will not be frustrated by their mixed response. There will always be those who genuinely do rely upon their God, and they will move on in faith to inherit all the glorious things he has promised*” (Webb).

What the Servant Said (Luke 9:23-25) – “*Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”* This is not only what the Servant said, it is what the Servant did. And so, if we are in Christ, then our crosses are within His cross and we are never alone in our obedience or our sufferings. We find courageous faith, not in ourselves, but in the courageous faith of the One Who died and rose again for us. He was faithful. And He gives us the gift of His faith and His faithfulness to walk in the way of the Servant.

“*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*” Jim Elliot