My Messenger – Isaiah 42-53

God's Invitation

"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out. In faithfulness He will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth. In His law the islands will put their hope." 42:1-4

"Hear, you deaf; look, you blind and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send?" 42:18-20

Let us look at these "Servant Passages" for the servant is also seen in the light of being a messenger with a message to convey. We are to convey this message to other people and in our case, especially to Muslims.

The four servant passages in Isaiah present to us 'the Messenger'. In chapter 49 we have the call of the Messenger and the heartbreak of the Messenger. Then in chapter 50 we have his commission and the way he receives the message to pass on to others. Then we have the final conquest and triumph in chapters 52 and 53. These are chapters we know so well.

So first of all we need to ask ourselves, "Who is the servant?" At the beginning it appears to be God's People Israel. But Israel failed miserably. Gradually, as you read on, it seems to get increasingly puzzling! But when you come to the New Testament Mt. 12:18-21 makes it very clear that the "Servant" is the Lord Jesus, ***"Here is My Servant whom I have chosen, the One I love, in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory. In His name the nations will put their hope."***

So today we want to 'turn our eyes upon Jesus'. We want to look at Him as He exemplifies to us true service that didn't exhaust Him, but which He has handed on to each one of us; so each one of us is His messenger and His servant.

Thank God that we can take that first verse to ourselves, ***"Behold, My servant whom I uphold, My chosen in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon him."*** So as messengers, servants of God, we can count on Him to uphold us. The Holy Spirit is the One who empowers us and helps us in the delivery of our message.

The Character of the Messenger

"He will not cry out or lift up his voice in the streets." (42:2) God's work will be accomplished, but in such a way that the worker will be hidden! This was true in the life of the Lord Jesus. There was no outward show or ostentation. He faithfully gave God's message, but time and again He said, ***"See that you tell no one"***. He was the Messenger, faithfully delivering the message but hiding Himself.

This must also be true of our work for God. Millions in Europe today have been fed the lie that there is no God. Millions of people have been fed by God's hand, but the great majority deny that He exists at all.

So this is the usual way that God works, hiding Himself among people. There is no boisterous happiness here, but the simple giving of the message with a quiet joy (the hiding of self). This is the first lesson we need to learn. ***"Come to me and learn of me, for I am meek and humble in heart."*** (Mt. 11:29)

We tend to downplay humility, but when we look at its opposite – selfishness and pride – we can see its importance. Self has to take a very definite second place. It is this character – this humility – that so often touches people's hearts.

I can think of a particular Algerian Christian leader in the worshipping group in Algiers. He told me how he was converted. Since being a young teenager he had gone to "Sunday" School (held on a Friday). He was the son of a sheik teaching in the mosque. At the age of 18 he took over his father's job and started teaching as a Quranic teacher.

One day he went to a lady missionary and asked for a Gospel of John in Arabic. The lady was thrilled to give him one. He looked at it and tore it into lots of tiny pieces flinging the pieces on the ground and then stood there waiting by her reply. He expected to be met with anger, shouted rebukes, but no words came. Instead tears filled the lady's eyes. He went away.

But that look from her broke his heart! Within an hour he was back again as a repentant sinner. Four or five years had left him hard and absolutely opposed to the Gospel, but the tears of this lady who was in fellowship with the Lord Jesus broke this young Algerian's heart and he came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Remember that Jesus lamented over Jerusalem. (Mt. 23:37)

This young man was shut in a stable for a month and beaten every day. He lost the sight in one eye but he has now walked with the Lord Jesus for about 45 years!

So he was not won by words but by the humility of the one who did not even rebuke him, but showed that she loved him through her tears.

So one lesson we need to learn is humility – the hiding of ourselves. How necessary this is for both men and women in Muslim countries. There must be a quietness in our attitudes – no outward showing of self. For those who inevitably get involved in controversy it is important that while we do have an answer to questions and challenges, we shouldn't raise our voice or show any sign of anger or in any way assert ourselves. It is important to hide yourself especially when someone is aggressively against you. Our aim in everything is to demonstrate the character of the Lord Jesus.

Secondly, ***"A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not put out."*** (42:3)

Perhaps we could take a bruised reed as an unconverted person bruised with sin. The Lord Jesus would never break such a person. Perhaps we could take a dimly burning wick as a backsliding believer but someone who had known the Lord.

Think of the occasion when a woman was brought to the Lord Jesus who had been taken in adultery. She had been badly bruised by sin. The Pharisees clearly wanted to "break" her. Moses had commanded that such a one should be stoned! But the Lord Jesus didn't even condemn her. He showed love, ***"Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more!"*** (Jn. 8:11) A bruised reed he would not break!

I think not only was the reed not broken, but it was made anew. In the past in Jordan where copious reeds grow by the river, people cut down the reeds then took away the bruised parts and use them as a pen to write with. Sometimes boys made little boats out of the reeds and floated them on the river.

So the whole "bruised reed" concept is a parable. We are all bruised reeds. The Lord Jesus wants to take us His "bruised reeds" to write His love letters and to take living waters to other people. He wants to remake us and use us. As He does so He will form in us a gentle spirit.

What about "a dimly burning wick"? In the Middle East some years ago power cuts were frequent. Every wise household had an oil lamp. Every half an hour they needed to pour in more olive oil otherwise the stench was intolerable!

Peter denied the Lord, but on the Day of Pentecost he too was filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter who had so bitterly and utterly failed was used so greatly by the Lord after he was filled with the Holy Spirit. About 3000 people were converted on his first sermon!

So often we look for strong believers from a Muslim background – both men and women, but often the new believers are those who have failed! They are people who have been broken by sin – people who, instead of going on, turn into backsliders and drift away from the Lord Jesus. How can we help them? We need a gentleness of spirit. We need to be like our Lord Jesus. He didn't condemn a fallen

woman. We need to avoid condemning people. We need to help them get right with God and then God will use them in the salvation of others! So let us be gentle, not condemning! We need to stand for the truth but to be humble and gentle.

"He will faithfully bring forth justice." "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on His shoulders and He will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom with righteousness and justice from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." (Is. 9:6-7)

So we must be humble and faithful to the One who has called us and faithful to the Word of God that He has given to us. As 'People of the Book' we need to show that we respect it not only in the way we hold it. As you know, our Muslim friends never hold the Quran below the waist it must always be held chest high. That is the way they look at things so we too must show reverence for the Bible. Never put it on the floor. We must faithfully bring them the message that God has given to both them and us.

"He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In His law the islands will put their hope." (42:4) So the Lord Jesus, the Light of the World, never lets His light burn dimly. He was never bruised with sin. Contrast this with a 'bruised reed' or a 'dimly burning wick'. ***"He will not falter or be discouraged until he has established justice in the earth".***

So patient, persistent plodding must be part of our character. What we need more than anything else as we seek to win many to the Lord Jesus is the Spirit of our Lord Jesus. We must faithfully share the Word of God – never faltering or being discouraged.

One of the greatest weapons the Evil One uses against us is discouragement. It is so easy to be discouraged. In one place where the workers were very discouraged one of them wrote a little song with just two words, "Go on". This was sung to a well-known tune. We often need something like this –"Go on, go on, go on, go on etc." That is what the Lord Jesus did. He set His face as a flint to 'go on' to Jerusalem. Our biggest enemy of all can be that we lose our confidence because we have taken our eyes off Him. He will never fail or be discouraged!

"Hear you deaf; look you blind and see! Who is blind, but my servant and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to Me, blind like the servant of the Lord?" (42:18-19)

Do we recruit a company of blind and deaf people? I hope so!! There are some things we have to see in the world today. But we must not fix our eyes on them! We hear many voices – a few praising us and many criticising. We have to be deaf! This characterised the Lord Jesus. Right at the beginning of His ministry the devil took Him up to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth saying, ***"All these I will give you if you will bow down and worship me."*** (Mt. 4:8-10) But the Lord Jesus refused!

So many things will turn us aside and nullify our service. Satan can do this so many ways. ***"He who looks on a woman and lusts after her has committed adultery in his heart."*** (Mt. 5:28) It is surprisingly how often this happens among God's servants. Looking leads to longing which leads to desiring. We can be provoked by the TV. As we go about we see things – advertisements etc. We must learn to shut our eyes to them.

Remember, the Lord Jesus warned us, ***"If your eye offends you, if it gives you an occasion to stumble, pluck it out! If your hand offends you, cut it off!"*** (Mt. 5:29-30) These are two body parts used in lovemaking. So they are to be dealt with. They should be "crucified" if we are truly to be servants of God. This is something we can't do ourselves but by the Spirit of God we are to put them to death – to refuse to look at some things.

One hymn writer wrote, *"I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear."* We need to be blind and deaf to those things.

Sometimes we are praised because we are 'full-time' in the service of the Lord in difficult parts of the world. We should not listen to such praise. Others may criticise us even though they have no

right to do so! Our eyes need to be set on the Lord Jesus our gaze must be fixed on Him. Our ears must be open to His voice day by day.

So here we have the character of the perfect servant of the Lord Jesus – hearing the things in the world but not heeding them at all. The questions that Muslims ask often have the intention of provoking controversy. For example, you are telling the story of Abraham and Isaac and they are insisting that you are wrong it was not Isaac but Ishmael. You hear the objection but the wise thing is to let it go! So there are some things concerning which it is wise to be blind and deaf for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

So that is the character of the servant. Now we will look at Isaiah 49:1, ***"Listen to Me you islands; hear this you distant nations: before I was born the Lord called Me; from My birth He made mention of My name. He made My mouth like a sharpened sword. In the shadow of His hand He held me. He made Me into a polished arrow and concealed Me in His quiver. He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I will display My splendour.' But I said, 'I have laboured to no purpose I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due to me is in the Lord's hands and my reward is with my God'."***

This passage is addressed to the Jewish people. 'Jewish' means one who is ruled by God – one who is controlled by God. But in this passage it clearly refers to the Lord Jesus.

"The Lord called me from the womb". In our work it is important to be able to get back to the fact "He called me". We need to explain that we too have been called by God to serve Him in a particular place. At any time we could turn back from that call – perhaps for a short time like a year. But unless you are sure that God has called you back, don't go!

You can know if God has called you. You can wait upon Him and time and again what has kept me going is back to the fact that God chose me. He called me and gave me work to do for Him in the Muslim World. I would be letting Him down if I didn't do it.

You may have already experienced 49:4, ***"But I said, 'I have laboured to no purpose: I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due to me is in the Lord's hands and my reward is with my God'."***

So often, even after several years in a place we say to the Lord, 'I have nothing to show. There are no Muslim background believers. I have spent my strength for nothing. It has all been in vain.' This is heart-breaking! If you have experienced very little fruit and you don't care, then you have a hard heart and God will not be able to use you.

I am sure that heartbreak will come and then you will get back to the fact "He called me". "He chose me". The voice that called me is still sounding loud and clear! He chose me! I will obey him! I must go forward!"

So often the temptation to go back home is very great, but no turning back! Hang on to the fact that the Lord Jesus called you. He chose you and you can't get away from that. You must go on in spite of all the problems and heartbreaks.

The second important thing is the call of God on your life – first the character then the call.

Isaiah 50 is specifically to do with the message. We have looked at the character of the messenger because this is really important. The messenger is as important as the message. So in Isaiah 50:4-8 notice the servant's communion with God, ***"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 who is 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 I have set my face like a flint and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near."***

So we turn our thoughts to the Lord Jesus who rose up a great while before day and went away to the hill to hold communion with His Father. He is the One whose ear is open to us morning by

morning to receive, having been given the ear of a disciple who listens to him. He is given the tongue of the one who is taught as a disciple in order to speak the word in season to those who will hear. This is really important – not just to speak the right word, but to know how to say it.

You can say the truth in a number of different ways. You can say it in such a way that it provokes your listener and he is offended or you can say it in a way that he will accept it! The Lord Jesus, morning by morning, entered into communion with His Father and listened to His Father's voice speaking to Him.

In that lovely prayer in John 17 Jesus communed with His Father, ***"The word that you gave Me I have given them. They knew with certainty that I came from You and they believed that You sent Me."*** We need to speak a message that will really strike home in the hearts of those to whom God has sent us. We need to know how to deliver the message with which we are entrusted.

We will learn this when we are in communion with our Lord Jesus. To listen and then begin is a principle that runs right through the whole New Testament***. "I delivered to you that which first of all I received, how Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."*** (1 Cor. 15:3)

So right through the Bible there is this principle: I listen and I am just the messenger that passes on the message – the Living Word – not the logos, but the Living Word this Word will strike home because it is something someone needs in that particular group or it is what is fitting for the whole group.

In Isaiah 50:6 we read, ***"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."***

The suffering of the Lord Jesus would lead to the salvation of millions of souls and finally to triumph. It is important to notice the order:

1. The Character of the Lord Jesus
2. The Call of the Lord Jesus which led to pain and heartbreak leading Him back to the Call
3. The Communion which enables us to get just the right message for just the right person at just the right time

Isaiah chapter 53

In chapter 52 there is an introduction. We are to turn our eyes to the Lord Jesus (v. 13), ***"See My Servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted".***

So we are strongly encouraged to turn our eyes upon the Lord Jesus (My Servant, My Messenger, the One I have sent). That is what we must do. We must continually look at Him. ***"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and prolong His days and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand. After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied. By His knowledge My Righteous Servant will justify many and He will bear their iniquities therefore I will give Him a portion among the great and He will divide the spoils with the strong because He poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. For He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors."*** Isaiah 53:11 is very encouraging, ***"After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied. By His knowledge My Righteous Servant will justify and He will bear their iniquities."***

Now to what extent can we have fellowship with our Suffering Servant in the work of redemption? The answer is 'none'. We can have no share at all in this. Yet the Lord Jesus suffered for us and so left us an example that we should follow in His steps. So this has some application to each one of us.

We look forward to the day of His triumphant return to earth and we will share in that, but this will only be because we have fellowship with Him in the conflict with all the powers of darkness. We can

have fellowship with the Lord Jesus now in the midst of pain, frustration and setbacks and we can look forward to seeing the Lord Jesus exalted at God's right hand.

But still He will be despised and rejected in the world. Still people will gang up on Him. They see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. But this is our task – to demonstrate His love for people. The principal is triumph through suffering.

2 Cor. 2:14-15 says, ***"But thanks be to God who <u>always</u> leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For <u>we are</u> to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the fragrance of life; to the other the smell of death. Who is equal to such a task?"***

v. 17 ***"Unlike so many we do not peddle the Word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity like men sent from God."***

Verse 14 is especially encouraging, ***"But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him."***

The picture is of a Roman general returning victorious from war and conflict and chained to his chariot wheels are the leading captives who are the proof of his victory. What the Lord is trying to teach us here is that our defeats are very often His victories. This is the way it started with Saul of Tarsus.

Notice that it is not **we** who triumph. God leads us in triumph. We are just chained to the wheels of His chariot and He leads us on into victory after victory. Often He leads His army through defeat. Often I am defeated because He is triumphant.

We say, "Lord have your way with me – at any price, at any cost, anywhere – Lord what do You want me to do?"

So a total continuous surrender to the Lord Jesus is putting everything before Him. "Lord what do you want? Who should I marry? Where do you want me to go? Which country? I would like to go to X, but if you want me somewhere else that is fine to Lord Jesus. I am ready for your plan I am ready to be defeated. I am ready to be put in the background if only You Lord Jesus can triumph through me."

If we can say this then very humbly we can apply Isaiah 52 and 53 to our lives. Fellowship with the One who is rejected, but through weakness and apparent defeat wins the victor's crown. He trod down all His foes beneath His feet by being trodden down

May the Lord make this study a blessing to you. Remember what we are. Our character is what counts. It is character that gives value to the message.

If you are having a hard time and getting no positive results, then go back to the time when the Lord Jesus called you. He chose you. Remember that communion morning by morning when we have a new revelation of His purpose for our lives. It may be a purpose of suffering with Him. When you are open to hear His voice – perhaps through ears that have been deaf for a while – let Him speak to you morning by morning. As you get a glimpse of His purposes for you, you will be changed and transformed. This is the lesson of victory through defeat! He is coming again! He will come in triumph! But the path runs through Calvary and the path of a servant is the same as that of his Master.