Studies in Isaiah

Study 3

The Blind Servant – Isaiah 42:18-48:22

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1. The Servant's Role

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- To strengthen bruised reeds and fan flickering fires into flame
- To give sight to the blind and freedom to the prisoners

2. What is God going to do with His failed servant? Sack him?

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- No, because I am going to restore him.

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The servant's **position** is that of one to whom the Lord is committed.

The servant's **calling** is to be committed to the Lord's purpose in the world.

Are the People of God fulfilling the servant's role in the world?

No – Isaiah has already hinted at this.

1. The Servant's Role

- To bring God's rule and God's judgements to the nations – i.e. seeing God's gracious and wise ordering of world affairs. Recently evangelicals have been rediscovering this role and have lumped it together under 'Holistic Ministry'.

  Was this a reality among the nations in the 6th century BC? No, not at all! Instead of ruling and bringing judgement the servant was in slavery under judgement!

  The servant was not to cry out in anguish or make his voice loud in the street. (This sounds like low profile teams such as in Iran.) Yet this is what the People of God were doing! They were lamenting loudly that God had abandoned them – see Is. 40:27.

- To strengthen bruised reeds and fan into flame flickering fires and at the same time neither be bruised nor splutter. But the People of God were a broken reed! They were spluttering!

- **To** give sight to the blind and freedom to prisoners, yet the People of God were themselves in bondage with pretty dodgy eyesight!

Now Isaiah is explicit – "you are a bunch of failures!"
"You deaf people, listen and you blind, look and see!" (Is. 42:18)

God says to them, "Y**ou have the status** of a servant, but you **don't have the spiritual sight and spiritual hearing** that are necessary for someone to carry out the role of being God's servant. You have sight, but no insight – no discernment! So God can't fulfil His purpose through you!"

"God wanted, for the sake of His righteous purpose, to exalt <u>the teaching</u> and glorify it." (Is. 42:21)

They were supposed to embody the splendour of God's revelation and prove it to the nations, but they failed!

God wanted to commend His revelation to the world, by showing how well it worked! In fact it didn't work at all because they wouldn't take their calling seriously!

Why was Jerusalem destroyed and why was Israel taken into exile? Sin, yes – idolatry, yes, but ultimately it was because they failed to be the servant of the Lord. (Is. 42:23-25)

Still they did not see it!

I tremble for the church in the UK! It is hard to think of anywhere where God has so blessed a people and yet we are a church that has abused God's grace more than them all! We haven't taken seriously God's call to be His servants and to be a light to the nations.

Revival will never happen until 'missions' becomes the major focus of the church!

Paul agrees that it is very dangerous if we, the new branches, start to think we are superior to the ones pruned out. (Rom. 11) We must take heed lest we risk the same fate ourselves and 'lose our candlestick'.

So often the evangelical church is blind and in bondage. In England we are like a pathetic minority in a world that totally ignores us. We have little influence on the life of our nation and little reputation.

Many people are attracted to Jesus, but repelled by the church. Sadly, the church seems to delight in hiding from the realities of the situation! (Oh things aren't so bad!) When we see that things are bad we blame the world's opposition and the culture of sin. This is wrong! We ourselves are the problem! It is the result of our sin, our sleepiness and our sloth!

So the servant who was supposed to bring sight to the blind and freedom to the prisoners in all nations and all people groups is (by his/her own neglect) sightless and in bondage!

2. What is God going to do with failed servants who are blind, deaf and useless?

Will He sack them, pension them off, put them on the shelf, put them out to grass, send them on a sabbatical?

No! No! No! There are three 'Nos' in these chapters.

i. No, because I still love him (43:1-7)

ii. No, because I still intend him to be My servant (43:8-13)

iii. No, because I am going to restore him (43:14-21 and the next chapters)

- **"No, because I still love him!"**

God really cares about all people who are blind, imprisoned, broken and wavering. He wants to bring them sight, freedom, strength and renewal – see Is. 42:1-9.

It is to people like this that 'servants' are supposed to minister. But what if servants need this ministry themselves? It doesn't matter! God cares for all who are weak. Today both pictures form the reality – we minister and we need ministering to.

Do you have any heroes or heroines:

- ✓ whose relationship with God never falters?
- ✓ whose commitment is never hesitant?
- ✓ whose love never runs out?
- ✓ whose patience never tires?
- ✓ whose ministry to the doubting never flags?

Most of us don't know anyone like that! These were characteristics of 19th century missionary biographies – missionaries on pedestals! Why is this so dangerous? It is because we **do** fail and because we **are** needy and weak. When we try to hide this fact from ourselves and others it leads to a life lived in unreality.

At the same time we mustn't swing the pendulum too far! We are servants and we are called to embody the model, but we have weaknesses that should not be hidden. The grace of God can be used both in application to others and to ourselves. So if we find no ability left as the Lord's servants to minister in the Lord's power, then we can receive that power for ourselves.

There is one major problem! When you become bruised and sputtering yourself you can't minister to others and you can't even apply the promises and grace of God to yourself!

This was the problem that the exiles were in! They knew that God was the Creator, the King and the Redeemer – nothing new here! They knew their history and their Psalms, but they couldn't apply that knowledge to the situation. They needed to be ministered to and this is exactly what God did for them. (43:1-7)

We might expect condemnation. The servants had no scope for self-defence. They were incontrovertibly guilty. We might expect a "therefore", but we get a "but". There are some wonderful "buts" in God's Word. All introduce God's power and God's grace.

"Godless men put Him to death. <u>But</u> God raised Him up again." (Acts 2:24)

"We were by nature children of wrath. <u>But</u> God being rich in mercy….." (Eph. 2:4)

"You meant evil against me. <u>But</u> God meant it for good." (Gen. 50:20)

God says:

- ✓ 'You are still the one I chose and called by name, the one I love. I am with you. You are Mine.' It is a wonderful thing to be chosen!
- ✓ 'I will restore you I will look after you and bring you back.'
- ✓ 'I will give everything for you. ***"You are precious in My sight!"*** Your worth is not that of a pebble but that of a pearl of great price!'
- ✓ In essence God says: 'I love you. I value you. I honour you!' We British love titles and honours. God dubs us as 'Right Honourable'. (verse 4)
- ✓ God doesn't hide the truth from His servants. He says, 'You are failures – blind, deaf, useless failures. But I still love you! I created you for My glory.'

We must sit down quietly and let these statements influence us as they quietly steal over us.

This is still true of the Old Testament People of God even though they rejected and killed the Messiah and did their best to stifle the Messianic Gospel. Paul uses a phrase that sums up Isaiah's message to the exiles. ***"The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."*** (Rom. 11:29)

No matter how unworthy we may seem, no matter how unworthy we may really become, God still says, ***"You are still the one I chose, the one I called by name, the one I love . Do not be afraid. I am with you."***

Often God and I look at my stupidity, my deafness, my blindness and my uselessness. I blow it so often! Then I feel His hug and hear His words!

- **"No, because I still intend him to be my servant."**

So blind, deaf or useless servants are not cut off. But it would be quite understandable for God to keep His commitment to His people – to restore them, redeem them, keep them still in His arms, but realistically come up with a Plan B.

Plan B: some other means of revealing Himself and fulfilling His purpose in the world – angels perhaps? In other words, failed servants would not be sacked, merely kicked upstairs! But no!
See Is. 43:8-13.

"You are My witnesses, Yahweh says. You are My servant whom I chose so that you may know and trust in Me; so that you might see that I am The One. Before Me there was no God formed. And there will be none after Me."

So we are still called to be His servants! We are called to be witnesses. We testify to the sole Lordship of God in history.

If we do this, it will build up our faith. If you witness it nearly always encourages you. But there is more. God really wants to encourage us. He is so gracious and loving! In effect He says to us, "I know you are blind, deaf, imprisoned and useless! I know you are finding it more and more difficult to believe in Me and to believe that I care for you. So listen to this. If I am to reveal Myself to the world, I need someone to be My servant and My witness. This is the most important role I could give to anyone. I'm giving it to you. Now do you believe that I am committed to you?"

Now we are the new People of God (the Jewish-Gentile Church). We inherit all God's Old Testament promises! To us also He never goes back on making His people His servant. Even if we:

- ✦ go back on our commitments
- ✦ slide away from Him
- ✦ commit acts totally unworthy of Him

- see ourselves as unforgivable and unrestorable – too far gone and too sullied

Still God says to us His disobedient, faithless, hopeless people, ***"You are My witnesses … You are My servants … So that you may know and trust Me."*** (43:10)

Our qualifications were never the reason for us being His witnesses. The reason always lay in **God's choice** and that choice always stands. So God still says, ***"You are My witnesses"***!

- **"No, because I am going to restore him."**

Isaiah adds this wonderful truth!

Failed servants are **imprisoned** and **blind**. Imprisoned implies outward and material. Blind implies inward and spiritual.

3. Imprisoned (outward/material restoration) (43:11-48:22)

Briefly: there are many specific prophecies:

- ✓ Cyrus is mentioned by name (45:1) – Cyrus ***"Yahweh's Anointed One"*** – i.e. Messiah!
- ✓ The exposure of the Babylonian gods as impotent (46:1-2)

  A lovely irony! *'I thought that your gods were supposed to support you, not that you had to support your gods!'*
- ✓ God carries His people (46:3-4)
- ✓ Babylon, once a woman so fine, stately, impressive and proud is now humiliated and in ruins. (47)
- ✓ God's people are called forth (48:20-22)

4. Rebelliousness at God's methods!

This is like going to Jewish settlers on the West Bank and telling them that the leader of Hamas is God's chosen vessel to help them!

Does a clay pot dare to argue with its maker? (45:9-13)

So although there is a return from exile – restoration of the outward and the material, what about the **inner** and spiritual blindness?

"You swear by the name of the Lord and claim to worship the God of Israel, but you don't mean a word you say!" (48:1)

Isaiah is saying, "Yes, you will be restored nationally and politically through Cyrus, but this won't deal with the inner problem. There will still be your:

- loss of faith
- inability to learn
- slowness to turn to God
- resistance to God's will
- unreality in the witness
- spiritual obstinacy – cynicism
- the inclination to put your trust in anything, anywhere but in God.

There is no "peace" (shalom) for rebels! (48:22)

God cares about the outward 'shalom' of His people. But sadly, it is possible to have a new Jerusalem and a new temple without a new heart! There can be no real 'shalom' without inner renewal.

Cyrus is the messiah for the outward restoration. Who is the messiah for the inner restoration? How can Israel be brought back to God? This is absolutely necessary if God's servants are to be fully restored to minister effectively.

Who is the servant who restores the servants?

5. A brief preview of the inner restoration (Is. 44:1-5)

"I will pour out My spirit."

"I will pour out water on the thirsty and streams on the dry ground."

When visiting the Niagara Falls, Smith Wigglesworth was standing a little way back and as he watched the roaring waters. He was heard to pray, *"Like that Lord in me. Like that in me!*"

The first requirement is to recognise our condition – thirstiness – a longing for inner restoration. I must acknowledge that I am desperately dry and plead for God to pour out His Spirit.

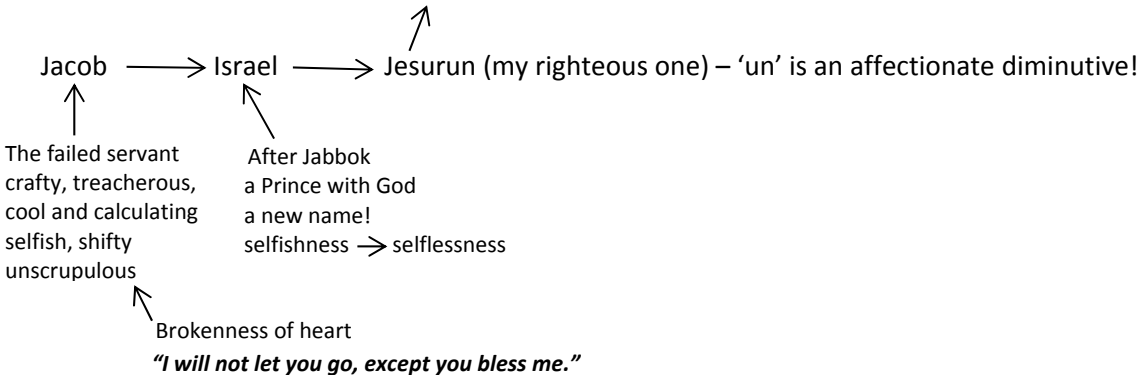
You are as blessed as you want to be and as anointed as you want to be!

The product of restoration is grass and poplars by streams of water – i.e. fruitfulness of life. This means fruitfulness:

- in prayer
- in service
- in holiness
- in witness
- in love for one another
- in unity

Wherever the Holy Spirit is there is life, there is fullness and there is overflowing!

6. The pathway of restoration (Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26)



We need to pray as John Wesley prayed, *"Lord cure me of my intermittent piety and make me consistent."*

7. Repentance is the key.

In Salt, Jordan around 1928 Roy Whitman and an Egyptian brother prayed together every morning at 3:30 am. For months they spent 3 hours in prayer each morning that revival would come and it came!