

Title: Relief or Redemption? Pt.1
Text: Isaiah 49.1-26
Theme: The Servant who brings restoration
Series: Isaiah #41
Prop Stmt: The only true and lasting hope is in the Servant of the LORD.
Aim: I aim to help my people trust Christ for his atonement, instead of trying to use him to manage unpleasant consequences.

Read Text:

Let me introduce you to Dave. Dave has 3 children with three different gals. Two of them have taken him to court for child support and if the third one could find him, she would do the same. Years ago, Dave used to go to the bars with his buddies and had a good time drinking. Then, drinking became the way he handled pressure, and pretty soon, he was calling into work sick, leaving work early and spending all weekend long either drunk or hung-over. He lost his job and is not good at keeping promises, and if he does get a job – legally, he is so far behind in child payments, that his wages are immediately taken by the court. So, he does odd jobs here and there, getting paid under the table. He survives. About a month ago, he moved in with a girl and her 2 kids. It isn't ideal, but Dave gets some sex, some food and she gets some companionship. But that isn't going too well, because her child support payments stopped coming and Dave isn't working like he promised. She received a shut-off notice from DTE 3 weeks ago (electric company) and ignored it. She owes \$786.00, but figured that the big, rich utility company wouldn't do anything. After all, they had threatened her before and nothing happened but today, her power was shut off and she freaked out. In her hysteria, she kicks Dave out and tells him that he can't come back unless he figures out a way to pay her bill. So, here is Dave, going down 12 mile road. He sees this big building that is called a church and says to himself, "That much be a rich church and churches are supposed to help people who need money." So, he comes in and meets you. Why is Dave here? He is feeling the pressure of consequences from living a self-absorbed life of sin, arrogance, rebellion and laziness. But, is he here to repent? No, he doesn't want to repent. He wants temporary relief from the pressure. And, in his mind, this church exists to enable him to sin and not face the music. Dave is not much different than many of us. We typically want relief from the consequences of sin, but not rescue from the sin itself. Can I manage the consequences to avoid embarrassment yet not have to fully admit my sin? Response to relief reveals the true motivation. God's is infinitely more concerned about you than simply protecting you from embarrassment and discomfort. But, for some of you, that is all that you want.

Isaiah has two parts (1-39 and 40-66):

1-39 – Judgment for sin = exile from the land

40-66 – Mercy for the sinner = restoration to the land and redemption from sin

40-66 has three parts (40-48, 49-55 and 56-66)

40-48 – just as Assyria was the instrument of God to bring about judgment on unbelieving Israel, Babylon is the instrument of God to bring about purification on rebellious Judah. The prediction of the rise and fall of the Babylonian empire and the rise to power of ruler named Cyrus in the Medo-Persian Empire and its affect on Judah is astounding because of how everything happened exactly as God described. Cyrus is the servant of God who is used by God to get Judah back home. But, getting back into the land is the surface issue. What about the heart issue? Even if Judah is restored to the land, how can her sin be atoned for? This is the greatest need. Cyrus may have the authority to send her home, but he cannot save her from her sin. How can Judah ever become the nation that God called them to be?

The point of history is that history is not the point. God is. All of history is the work of God to display the glory of his power in rescuing people in order make them part of a kingdom for his Son, Jesus Christ. We see this in Isaiah. All of these prophecies about Judah, Israel, Syria, Assyria, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Elam, Media Cush and Egypt are all in preparation for the unveiling of the plan of God through the Servant. The political intrigue, military alliances, royal betrayals, national treaties, battles, wars, campaigns and empires; the rise and fall of leaders, the movement of armies, and diplomacy of emissaries all together serve the ultimate plan of God to build a theater out of the world, where a stage is set and a curtain is lifted in order to reveal the Servant!

49-55 – In Isaiah 49-55 Isaiah tells us about him. These chapters point us to the very point of history itself. These chapters point to the hero. But, hold on, because Isaiah concludes (55.8) that God's ways are not our ways. He does not do things as we would expect him to do. The world theater has been constructed on the foundation of impressive empires and mighty Kings. Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman boast power and wealth that is staggering. So, what, can you imagine, the stage will look like? We are in disbelief to see that it is nothing more than a town, if you can call it that, perhaps more like a village, called Bethlehem. And when the curtain is raised, we see in the center of the stage is a manger, and in it, a baby, surrounded by two peasants. Honestly, we were looking for someone a little more impressive, someone who could turn around and strike fear in his oppressors, not this one who is so soft, so merciful, and so kind that he is like a tender shoot that grows out of the dry ground. In fact, he has no form, no features that would get him on the cover of GQ, he is so plain, so common. And yet, this servant is the one who reveals the mighty arm of God? How does that happen? What kind of a leader is this? A Servant? Why does God promise a servant? Don't we need a king? Don't we need a leader who will destroy our enemies? Yes, but we need to understand that our greatest enemy is not in the country next to us; our greatest enemy is in our own hearts. Who will deliver us from us? The Servant.

1. **God called His Servant to bring salvation.** (1-7)

The Servant is speaking in these 7 verses. We do not yet know who this servant is, but we will find out that it is Christ. He tells the world (1) to listen up. This is for you.

But, do not forget that this message of the servant, for the world, was recorded by Isaiah who wrote to the Jews. The Jews needed to know that the Servant who would rescue them was also going to provide salvation for the world. Everything that was going on, was part of a plan that was so much bigger than them. But the people of Judah were just like us. They viewed the political, economic, environmental, and military events all through the grid of self. How is this going to affect me? One of the themes of Isaiah's preaching and writing is that God us up to something so much bigger than Judah. God is using them as a vehicle to carry out his plan to reach people from all over the world. They exist for his glory. So, do you. You do not exist for what you think is your comfort and your pleasure. Now, you may think that, and you may try to do everything you can in order to pursue that, but the man who gains the whole world not only loses his soul, he loses the whole world too. But the one who surrenders to God and embraces the priority of the advancement of God's kingdom, submitting to God's plan gives up on his rights to gain the world; gives up on his rights to rule his own life; gives up on his rights to have everything his way, and chooses to drill his well for pleasure in the advancement of the gospel of Christ. That person may lose his life as far as the world is concerned, but he will save his soul. But, if you look closely there is a footnote beside his name. And in the footnote we read "Matthew 5.5" which says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Those who gain the world, lose their soul and the world. Those who lose their life for Christ gain their soul and end up gaining the world.

Here is the truth that God is attempting to teach Judah. What I am doing involves you, but is so much bigger than you. I am going to send you a Savior, who will not only bring true salvation to you, but he will bring true salvation to the world. Here, that Servant is speaking. He is calling the coastlands (the farthest regions of the world and all of her islands and most remote regions) to listen. The LORD (Yahweh) has prepared me. He has been making me ready for this. He called me from the womb, prepared me to speak, prepared me as an instrument to carry out his work and even called me his servant and names me Israel. It is so clear that this Servant is not the nation, but is an individual person. But, why does God give him the name Israel? It is because the Servant will personify, what Israel was supposed to be and do (3). He will bring salvation to the world. He will show the world what life was intended to be. He will be the Israel that Israel never was. Israel was supposed to show the world what life was like with God. That is part of what the Tabernacle was intended to show. But, Israel, as a nation not only failed in that, but Israel as a nation will not listen to the Servant. Therefore, the Servant feels like he is a failure because his own people (4) do not believe him.

The fact that Christ was God, who became man, does not make Christ the man, who was also God immune to deep disappointment and to trials of the soul. Do you see what the Servant is saying here? The Servant (whom we will find out, is the Christ) looks at his life and all that he has given up and all that he has done and concludes (at least for now) that the whole thing has been a waste. It is like some of you who look at your family and think that nothing is going right. I can't get my own kids to listen, my husband to care, or even my health to cooperate. I have attempted to

serve God and be faithful and it seems as if my entire life has been a waste. What good has all of my work produced? Oh, listen to the Spirit of God this morning. Here is the very Son of God who says the same thing. He is honestly acknowledging what life appeared to be at that time.

Now, before we move on, there are two things that I must draw your attention to:
1) You and I can never say that God does not understand me. He knows! Our great High Priest is touched, is moved, and is engaged with the feelings of our infirmities.
2) This is not the end of the story. There is more. The Servant, even in the midst of great disappointment, still responds with faith, doesn't he? Look at the end of verse 4? "Yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God." Now, please, hone in like a laser on this, because this is so critical for you to grasp. The fact that Christ, the Servant felt rejection, felt failure, felt frustration greater than us, is amazing. The fact that in spite of the depth of this experience he responded with faith is also amazing and serves as a great example for us and illustrates the truth that God is doing so much more than we realize even when we think we have failed. But, there is more.

The Servant responded perfectly in faith. We do not. We should, but we do not. We get there, eventually, but not usually right away. In those times, and they are many, remember that Christ did, in our place. We often say that Christ died for sins – and we should, because he did. But he also lived in our place too. He lived the life that we could not live in order to die the death that we could not die. He was faithful, when I am not. His faithfulness is credited to you when you become a follower of Christ. You are counted as being righteous in the eyes of God because you are credited with all of the righteousness of Christ. He responded in faith – for us, that we might be counted as righteous, and empowered to respond in faith as well.

But notice how the LORD responds to him in verses 6-7. The LORD is reaffirming His call upon the Servant. Even the Servant (Christ) finds deep encouragement from a reminder of the promises and calling of God. This is the Old Testament version of Philippians two. Here God is promising exaltation to the Servant who has humbled himself and becomes obedient even though he is despised and abhorred (7a), he will be vindicated. The worthless slave, despised by the powerful, will be revealed one day as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His path to the throne however goes by way of the cross. And as John says in Revelation five, there before the throne of God, surrounded by myriads of angelic beings, receiving the deafening praise of millions is the Lamb, standing as though it had been slain.

2. **The Servant will bring an amazing salvation.** (8-13)

In these verses, the attention shifts from the Servant to those whom the Servant rescues and what a response this generates. The return of Judah from exile is the historical example that illustrates a greater salvation. The Servant, who comes to save, is going to save so well, that people who were in darkness, like prisoners are going to be set free. They will be so cared for, protected, nourished and cherished,

that even when they go through bare land they will not suffer loss. Like the Servant who was despised and is now exalted, the ones, who were in bondage and were left without hope of escape, are set free. All of this speaks of the salvation that this Servant brings. Right now, it sounds to Judah as if God is simply going to bring them back one day to the land that they lost. But the salvation accomplished by the Servant is more than that. The Servant brings about the rescue from sin. As we will see the death of the Servant in our place (on the cross) is the infinite and final sacrifice that completely absorbs the wrath of God for every single person who will ever trust in him and therefore so perfectly satisfies the righteous wrath of God, that there is therefore now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. That is how amazing and complete this salvation is that the Servant secures! No one else can save like Him. No one else is called, prepared, and sufficient for this. The worst of sinners, like the most hopeless of prisoners can be forgiven and set free. The vilest of sins, like the most despised sinners, can be forgiven and adopted into the family of the King. But this is all accomplished because God, the very God, became the most lowly and despised Servant in order that he might die the most humiliating of all deaths, so that he might secure an infinite pardon that can never be revoked.

3. **This Salvation reveals the deep, deep love of God.** (14-26)

These verses are really overwhelming. But, I need to remind you of the context. In chapters 40-48 the people of God were being told not to lose hope because the God who is able to orchestrate history, who predicts it and then fulfills it is able to take care of you. Your God has promised that he will do this. And those chapters, as saw, demonstrated that there is no God like our God. There is no God who can save like our God. There is no God who can control history and rule nations like our God. But here the challenge becomes more personal. Ok, God can save, but why would he want to? After all, I have been so unfaithful, so fickle, and so sinful, I am sure that God has given up on me. I am a lost cause. I will never get this right. That is what the people of Judah are saying (14). Then, God asks a very penetrating question?

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?” (15a). A child is conceived in the womb of the mother. There it develops into a baby. There is an attachment literally, physically, emotionally, personally that cannot be understood by mere science. A mother feels what the child feels. Even after birth, many children are nursed. The physical connection of the child drawing life from the mother and the mother giving her very body for the child to live is a personal and powerful experience that the mother, it seems cannot ever forget. Who designed the birth process like that? Who planned for conception to happen that way, for the development of the child to progress like that, for the attachment of a mother to her baby to form such a bond that even before birth, she knows that child and is moved in her soul, not just her womb? It is God who did this. God made mothers in his image. There are times, when even a mother becomes so deceived by sin and so hardened by her desires, that she forgets her children. But God cannot. He cannot forget his own. He says (16) “I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” You are on both of his hands beloved! It does not matter which

way he looks, you are before him. But, please do not miss this. It was customary for a master to write his name on the hands of his servant. Here, we are the servants, whose names are written on the hands of our master. And of course, this is all secured for us through the Servant.

God assures his children that he loves them with a love that will never let them go and beloved that is true for you. If you have trusted in Christ, you are his and he cannot and will not let you go. Even though you may face injustice, rejection, defeat and even death, those who attack you, will face your God. And one day, God will turn the whole system upside down and inside out. You will be amazed at the fruit that God has brought forth. The nations that tormented you will serve you. Those who showed their spite against God by attempting to destroy his people will now face this same God, but without the Servant in their place. (24-26)

Conclusion:

Chapter 50 continues to speak of the amazing love of God. But do not lose sight of this. The Servant that God calls, and uses to accomplish all of this is the Suffering Servant. He suffers first and conquers later. It is a pattern that is seen throughout the Bible. When the mighty Egyptian Empire had to be dealt with, it wasn't another empire's army from without that was called upon. It was a stammering, insecure man from within who reluctantly, yet faithfully obeyed the voice of God and became such an awesome weapon in the hand of God, that Pharaoh's entire palace held this leader of the slaves in awe. When the Midianites had to be faced, they were not defeated with a superior force and better weapons; it was merely 300 men armed with pitchers, torches and a belief in God. When Goliath had to be confronted, it wasn't the warrior-King Saul who did it, it was the boy-shepherd David who fearlessly and faithfully (full of faith) secured the victory. All of this and more were the stage-building acts of God preparing the world for the greatest servant, suffering the greatest humiliation, experiencing the greatest weakness, enduring the greatest loss, being counted as the greatest sinner, suffering the greatest shame and dying the worst death in order to accomplish the greatest salvation. God has always accomplished the greatest acts of power through the weakest vessels of man. Are you willing to be made weak that God would be seen as strong? Are you willing to give up your right to power, control, influence, security, possessions, that as a bond-slave to King Jesus, he might use you for eternity? Or do you just want relief, now? Are you willing to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you? Are you willing, right now, to cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you? The Servant did, for you and enables you to walk this way.