

Isaiah Looks to Easter (Week 3)

Looking at the Servant Songs of Isaiah

The Servant Songs are:

- Isaiah 42:1-9 (March 4)
- Isaiah 49:1-6 (March 11)
- Isaiah 50:4-9 (March 25)
- Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (April 1)

Normally, we walk through a variety of scriptural texts and point out parallels between the Servant Song we are looking at and how it matches up with the New Testament reference. This week I want to do something a little different. This week I want to look at a thematic parallel for the servant song passage. The thematic parallels will show us that Jesus really does give life to the Servant Song found in Isaiah 50:4-9.

The thematic parallel we want to look at is Philippians 2:5-11. You will see that posted on the next page, but before we navigate through that let's think about what Paul is doing in Philippians 2:5-11. Paul is writing to the church at Philippi (from jail) and he is encouraging them to put one another's good before their own and he is using Jesus' obedience and self-sacrifice as an example to illustrate how the Philippian church can do that. So, in a sense Isaiah looks forward not only to Easter, but to the church that would spring forth from the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, because the church would seek to pattern itself after the life and character of Jesus.

On the following page is the passage from Isaiah 50 and the passage from Philippians 2. Take a moment and look through each of those passages and see if you can find any themes that are the same in each passage. As you are looking for things that are the same remember that we are looking at passages that are talking about the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Some of the parallels are not immediately obvious so take some time, to process through the passages to see if you can find what we are looking for.

Isaiah 50:4-9

4 The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
5 The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward.
6 I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting.
7 But the Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
8 He who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who is my adversary?
Let him come near to me.
9 Behold, the Lord God helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Have this mind among yourselves,
which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6
who, though he was in the form of
God, did not count equality with God
a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied
himself, by taking the form of a
servant, being born in the likeness
of men. 8 And being found in human
form, he humbled himself by
becoming obedient to the point of
death, even death on a cross. 9
Therefore God has highly exalted
him and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name, 10 so that
at the name of Jesus every knee
should bow, in heaven and on earth
and under the earth, 11 and every
tongue confess that Jesus Christ is
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

On the following page you will find three highlighted sections that I want to focus on, let's see how your observations lined up.

Now I know that you all are extremely observant and probably found loads of ways that these two passages connect to one another, but I want to focus on three main thematic parallels as they are highlighted below.

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I want to encourage you by saying really quickly that if you found different connections than the ones that I highlighted don't be discouraged. There are more connections than the three that I highlighted, these are just the three that I thought helped us move towards Easter and understanding how what Isaiah is telling us looks forward to Easter and to the lifestyle of the church.

Each of the three parallels that were highlighted tell us something about the Servant.

Humility: Isaiah 50:4 & Philippians 2:6-7

In Isaiah 50 the humility of the Servant is displayed in the language of receiving from God. The Servant is Jesus who is God, but Isaiah tells us that the Servant will always point to God the Father as the source of all things. Accordingly, the Servant recognizes that God is the source of his words, which we can meaningfully think of as wisdom, knowledge, insight, or discernment. In the same way the humility is displayed in Philippians 2, but in a more direct fashion. Philippians recognizes directly that Jesus is God in the flesh, but his attitude, his deliberate choice of self-understanding that of a Servant.

Obedience and Humiliation: Isaiah 50:5-6 & Philippians 2:8

In Isaiah 50:5-6 the Servant hears the word of the Lord and does not turn back from what God has called him to do, even when his obedience leads to shame, torture, disgrace, and ultimately death. In the same way Philippians 2:8 gives us the picture of Jesus who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. It is important to remember a couple of things about Jesus' death on the cross. First, it connected him with another Old Testament teaching that anyone who dies on a tree is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). This connected Jesus with the curse of our sin, which is death. Second, the humiliation of dying on a cross was immense.

Vindication and Exaltation: Isaiah 50:7-9 & Philippians 2

Despite the circumstances of the Servant's mistreatment God ultimately vindicates and exalts the Servant. In Isaiah 50:7-9 the Servant stands with confidence in the face of his opposition because God is the one who is justifying the Servant. Likewise, in Philippians 2:9-11 God raises up Jesus because of his obedience and sacrifice to the place of honor above all peoples. The humiliation that was suffered by the Servant at the hands of wicked men is not a permanent stain on the Servant, rather it is because of the suffering Jesus underwent he is vindicated by the only judge who matters, God, and he is exalted above every evil doer and all of creation.

As we have discussed before these kinds of connections are important for us because it allows us to see the continuity of the Word of God, meaning that it all holds together. The Bible is not 66 books of individual writings; it is one story told in 66 chapters. Equally, what we see in Isaiah was lived out by Jesus in the gospels and then becomes a clarion call for the way we are supposed to live as followers of Jesus. Isaiah 50 is telling us the story of the Servant of God who would redeem his people, Jesus put flesh and bones to that story, and now we live in light of the truth of God's fulfilled prophecy by living the way that Jesus modeled; loving God and loving our neighbor.