

The Third Servant's Song Isaiah 50:1 – 11

Before our reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, all flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Father, I pray that we would receive your word with willing hearts, that we would reverence your word for what it is—wisdom speaking to us, truth spoken to us, breathed out by God. Father, may we be conformed into the image and the likeness of our Savior Jesus Christ through the things that we hear. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 50, starting from verse 1, reading the whole chapter: “¹ Thus says the LORD: ‘Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce, with which I sent her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away. ² Why, when I came, was there no man; why, when I called, was there no one to answer? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst. ³ I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering.’

“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.

“¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. ¹¹ Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches! Walk by the light of your fire, and by the torches that you have kindled! This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.” Amen. May God bless His word.

Our study this morning takes in what is considered to be the Third Servant's Song. And once again, more is revealed to us about this servant. I guess to the people of Israel, the time that Isaiah was preaching, this servant was something of a mysterious figure. To us, or to the people of the church who have what we call the New Testament and who have the gospels, we know who the servant is. We know that He's the Son of God. We know that He took the name Jesus. We know that His full name is the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that He's the Saviour and the Redeemer of all who believe.

God starts speaking to His people concerning the punishment that's coming their way. Notice that it's spoken in the present tense, though Isaiah has predicted that the taking off to Babylon is in the future. Isaiah speaks and preaches by the Spirit of God as though this is an established fact, as though it has already happened, or indeed is happening. Let's read the first portion, verses 1 to 3:

“¹ Thus says the LORD: ‘Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce, with which I sent her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away. ² Why, when I came, was there no man; why, when I called, was there no one to answer? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst. ³ I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering.’”

So what's being said? What's, in a way, being anticipated? What's being anticipated is the complaint of the people of Judah, when dragged off into captivity. Their complaint is pictured as something like this: “We thought we had a covenant with God. We thought we were the people of God. And yet, Babylon breaks into Jerusalem, destroys the city, burns the temple, and takes us off into slavery! What kind of covenant arrangement do we have with God when things like this happen to us? Why is it that we should be sold off as slaves?”

Basically, they're accusing God of failing to keep His promises. Basically, like all of us when we're guilty, we tend to try and transfer the blame. You know, it started with Adam. “What have you done?” “Well, you gave me a woman, she gave me fruit, and I ate of it. It's her fault.” And He spoke to the woman: “What have you done?” And she said, “Well, the serpent that you made—you created it—it spoke to me and I believed it. It's his fault.” And we're all the same.

You know, nothing's changed. Nobody wants to take responsibility for the condition in which they find themselves. Everybody wants to blame someone else. Why are the kids violent? “Well, the government hasn't built a skate park.” Why are they stealing cars? “Well, the government hasn't educated them properly.” Why are they drunk and on drugs? “Well, they need better care. We're not looking after them.” “It's not their fault. It's not their own fault.”

No one blames themselves. You know when people get caught out, how often do you ever hear someone go public and say, “It's my fault. I've done the wrong thing. I shouldn't have done it. I knew all along I shouldn't have done it, but I was selfish, and I chased my own desires. Blame me.” No, they'll say something along the lines of, “I made a mistake. That wasn't my true character. I'm not normally like that. I'm not that kind of person, really. I just made a bad decision in the heat of the moment.”

And that's the game that Israel's trying to play. And God sort of cuts through this mess, and if we look at this mass of excuses, look at what God asks them. He says, “Well, okay, if you think I've abandoned you, where is the certificate of divorce?” A husband couldn't just tip a wife out. He actually had to write something out. He had to give her a certificate. He had to set her formally free. “If you think I've abandoned you, where's this certificate of divorce? Or if you think I've sold you, who do I owe money to that I have to sell? Who do I owe money to?”

Look at the question: “Which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?” Think about that. Who’s asking the question? It’s really about the most sarcastic question you could imagine. Who does God borrow from? Who does God put Himself in debt to? Nobody. So God’s saying, “Oh, what? Do you think I sold you because I needed the money? You think I let you go because I was in a bit of trouble? You think I couldn’t provide for you—times were tough, so I turned you out? No! No!” “Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.”

It’s the same old problem. Why is man separate to God? Why is mankind sinful, or why is mankind foolish? Why is mankind following after nonsense? Why does mankind not worship? Why is mankind not aware of the presence of God in the world? They’re chasing after their sins. “For your iniquities you were sold.” Or the New King James translates it slightly differently: “You sold yourself for your iniquities.” It gives the idea that they handed themselves over to their own sins. They handed themselves over. They surrendered themselves to their own lusts. “For your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.”

And then God says, “When I came, there was no man. And when I called, nobody answered.” You see what He’s saying—He’s saying it’s as though He paid a visit, He Himself paid a visit. He went for a walk through Jerusalem. He was just looking for one man—just one. Remember Abraham negotiating with God concerning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, knowing that Lot was down there. “What if you find some righteous man there?” And he went down through the numbers. If you remember the passage, he didn’t negotiate low enough. There weren’t enough.

Well now God says, “I’ve come walking through Jerusalem, and I was looking for *a* man—one! Just one, one who would answer my call—‘Let the servant of the living God come to me.’—and I found nothing. When I called, there was no one to answer.” He’s come to an idolatrous people. He’s come to a people who, though they claim to be the people of the living God, they’re no different to the pagan nations around about them. And so no one answered.

And God asked the question, “Is my hand shortened that it cannot redeem? Have I no power to deliver?” Then He gives that big reminder of the Exodus. “I dried up the seas, I made the rivers a desert, the fish died because there was no water. I clothe the heavens in darkness. I make sackcloth their covering.” Remember, one of the plagues was darkness that fell upon Egypt?

What’s God saying? “Why have you turned to idols? Why are you making offerings to gods who cannot save? Do you think that I, the living God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who spoke to Moses, the God who redeemed His people out of Egypt—do you think that I couldn’t save you if I wanted to? If I wanted to?”

The problem’s not that the people didn’t have religion. The problem is that they didn’t have the real God at the head of their religion. They didn’t have the true God. They’d forgotten the very nature of the God whom they claimed to worship. “Oh, yeah, we’re the people of the living God. Oh, yeah, we’re the inheritors of the promises given to Abraham. We’re the people rescued from Egypt. Let’s make an offering to Baal. Let’s just satisfy some of these local demon deities so

that we can make sure we get the rain when we want it, and the harvest when we want it, and fertility when we want it.”

And that’s the situation that the people are in. They’re separated from God by their sins. They’ve been handed over to their sins. The reason for the things that are happening to them is that they do not keep covenant. They are disobedient. It’s the eternal message, isn’t it? It’s the message from Genesis through to the end of this evil age. People sin. Sin separates people from God. People pursue their sins, people are handed over to their sins, people worship idols, people become more and more perverse. Nothing much changes.

In verse 4, someone starts to speak. Now we know God is speaking. We know that God is speaking through Isaiah. So someone’s speaking. Who’s speaking? Well, God was looking for somebody, remember back there, “Why when I came, was there no man, why when I called, was there no one to answer?” Well, it turns out there was somebody.

“⁴The 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. ⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. ⁶I 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. ⁷But 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.”

Who’s speaking? The servant. The same servant who was speaking in chapter 49, and the same servant who was speaking in chapter 42. The servant. What does He say? He says that He’s going to obey. Look at verse 5: “The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.” He says, “I’m going to obey.”

Look at what’s going to happen to the servant. We find out more about the servant in the Fourth Servant Song, which is from the end of Isaiah 52 and through Isaiah chapter 53. But here we get another glimpse of this suffering servant. Verse 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.” How was the Lord treated? How was Jesus treated by the Romans? How was He treated by the Jews? How was He treated? Well, just exactly like that. Just exactly like that.

“⁷But 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.” The servant speaks as a man, a man who surrenders Himself to the providence of God, a man who will not turn back from obeying the Lord God.

Adonai-Yahweh—there at the start of verse 5, at the start of verse 4, and at the start of verse 7. The Lord God—Adonai-Yahweh. The sovereign God, the God who rules, the God who reigns. It’s repeated three times for emphasis. “I will not turn back upon Him. I will accept whatever comes my way. I will obey. I will not fail to fulfill my mission. I have set my face like a flint.”

This is reminiscent of Luke chapter 9, verse 51, where it says Jesus set His face for Jerusalem. Knowing that His time was near, He set His face for Jerusalem. “I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”

We still don't honestly imagine Jesus in this way, do we? I mean, let's be honest. It's so easy to fall into the world's effeminate view of Jesus: He was nice, He was non-judgmental, He spoke wisdom, His face was filled with love, His eyes were soft and always ready to weep. Somehow or other, that's the picture that people have in their mind. And here we find that the servant sets His face like a flint, utterly determined—utterly determined to obey God. Nothing, absolutely nothing is going to be permitted to turn Him aside. Nothing is going to be permitted to distract Him.

Why did He respond so powerfully to the disciple Peter, when Peter tried to tell Him, “You're not going to the cross”? Why did He respond so vigorously, and turn to Peter and say, “Get behind me, Satan”? Why? Because His face was set like a flint. He was utterly determined to fulfill the mission which He had been given—to pay the price of the sins of all whom God would save. He set His face like a flint. Nothing could turn Him astray.

Satan was tempting Him and offering Him the easy way. “You don't have to be hungry. Make your own food and eat.” And, “You don't have to be rejected. Jump off the temple, and impress everybody as the angels catch you and lower you to the earth, and be popular, be loved. Be well-loved and popular. You don't have to suffer this stuff. You don't have to have your beard ripped out. You don't have to be spat upon. You don't have to be whipped. And you don't have to die. I'll give you the world. I'll give you the world. You don't have to die. You don't have to go to the cross. I can give it to you. You can have it easy. I'm the prince of the world. I can pass it over. Just bend the knee.”

He set His face like a flint and He was sustained by the word of God, remember? His answer was always Scripture—particularly from the book of Deuteronomy. His replies to those temptations were from God. Look at verse 4: “The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught.” The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught. He spoke the word of God in a time of temptation. His face was set like a flint.

My friends, I often think about the line that the centurion spoke to Jesus: “I, too, am a man under authority.” I, too, am a man under authority. I often think that what that's telling me is that a man who is truly a disciple of Jesus is a man who would be recognized by that centurion as a man under authority. You know, the centurion is the kind of guy, when he's given an order, he obeys that order to the letter. The centurion is the guy who, when a Roman column marches into battle, he's at the front right-hand corner.

Why is that important, that he's the one at the front right-hand corner? They were taught to fight as a unit. They were taught to fight with a sword in the right hand and shield in the left hand. The man on the front right-hand corner—what kind of man, therefore, does he have to be in that kind of fight? If you're the man at the front right-hand corner, and everybody beside you, behind you, directly behind you, has their sword in their right hand and their shield on their left arm, you can't take a step back into the left. You take a step back into the left, what do you do? You

mess up the fighting ability of those men who are immediately around you. The centurion was the guy on the front right-hand corner. He either went forward, or he died where he was. That was a centurion. He would not take a backward step. And the centurion said of Jesus, “I, too, am a man under authority.”

My Christian friends, especially my Christian friends who are men, would the centurion look at us and say, “I, too, am a man under authority. I understand what drives you. I understand what powers your life. I understand why you are so determined. You’re under orders from God Himself, and I, too, am a man under authority, and I understand why you’ve set your face like a flint. I understand why you won’t compromise.”

That’s not the Jesus most people think of. Always we want to talk about love. Well, I’m telling you, God is love, and I’m telling you that Christ loves His church, and I’m telling you that we’re elevated to be brothers in His sight. He loves us. We are His friends. He gave His life for us, and He said to us, “Follow after me. Follow in my way.” Remember from last week or the week before, in the gospel of John, He’s the grain of seed that fell to the ground to die, and He said that we, too, must be prepared to die. We, too, must be prepared to fall into the ground and die.

The world keeps telling you that the Christian man is loving and effeminate, he’s nice, and that he wouldn’t say “Boo” to a blowfly. And the Bible keeps telling me that Jesus was a man under military-type authority who could set His face like a flint and not be distracted from obeying God, no matter what, that He wouldn’t take a step back and to the left, because He was a man under authority.

That’s what the Bible tells me about Christian men. Oh yeah, we’re to love and we’re to laugh and we’re to fellowship. Of course. We’re to be complete men, just as Jesus was a complete man. You don’t just take one aspect of Jesus’ personality and blow that all of proportion at the cost of everything else. Everything that He was is everything that we as Christian men are meant to strive to be.

And Christian ladies, you’re actually supposed to encourage Christian men to be men. You’re not supposed to encourage them to be soft-handed little effeminate ones. You’re supposed to encourage Christian men to be men, being Christ-like.

Let’s keep reading. Verse 8: “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.” And there’s the servant’s challenge, this one who set His face like a flint.

What does He say? Well first of all, He says He knows that His God is near. “Who’s going to contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.” Once again, I’m reminded of our Lord. When He was taken in the Garden of Gethsemane, what did He say concerning the disciples? “You don’t need them. You’ve come for me. You’ve come for me, you don’t need them.” And He put Himself between the arresting soldiers and His own disciples. “You’ve come for me. Okay, come. Come for me.” “Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.”

Here's the challenge from the servant. Who's He challenging? I think you know who I'm thinking He's challenging. There's only one adversary that He would be challenging, that's the adversary that tempted Him in the wilderness. That's the adversary that tested Him in the garden. That's the adversary that spoke through the mocking crowds, "If you are the Son of God"—*If* you are the Son of God. There's only one adversary, and He says, "Let him come near to me." He set His face like a flint. "Do your worst, I'll win. Why? Verse 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."

And so the adversary comes, the adversary does his worst, Jesus dies upon the cross. Jesus dies upon the cross, and death cannot hold Him down. Why? Who can declare Him guilty? He's not guilty—apart from sin. He died for our sins, but not for His own. Therefore, death has no grip upon Him. And so the Lord God helps Him, and He stands. All the rest—they'll wear out like a garment. The moth will eat them up. They're nothing. The servant ministers by the help of Adonai-Yahweh. "Behold, the Lord GOD helps me."

Verse 10. Notice something now. It's as though the voice of the servant is the voice of God. Verse 10: "¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant?" Obeys the voice of His servant. How is one to fear the Lord? How is one to have a relationship with God, as his Father? Those who are God's people and who fear and reverence the Father, they fear and reverence the Father as a father. We love Him, and we also understand that we are in His hand, and that He can discipline as He wills. He can do with us as He pleases. He can set upon us any burden He chooses. He loves us.

But to have a relationship with the Lord, to have a relationship with Yahweh, we must obey the voice of His servant. We must obey the voice of the Son of God. Do you remember Jesus saying something along the lines of, "Whoever hears my words and does them, whoever hears these words and does them, whoever hears the things that He has to say"?

When the servant appears, and from the moment that the servant appears, everybody's relationship with God was, if you like, channeled through their relationship with the servant. Your relationship to God, from the moment the servant appeared upon the earth, from the moment the Lord Jesus appeared upon the earth, was entirely reliant upon your relationship to Jesus. People worshiped Him when He was an infant. Even when He was not speaking, people worshiped Him. Those to whom God revealed His identity, they bent the knee to the servant.

No one comes to God other than through the Lord Jesus Christ. No one comes to God other than through the servant. No one receives the word of the Lord other than through the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The servant is the mediator. He's the intermediary. He's our prophet, He's our priest, He's our king.

Average Joe in the nation of Israel, average Joe in the nation of Judah, had a relationship with God that was mediated through prophets, priests, and kings. He received the word of the Lord from prophets. He was interceded for by priests. He was ruled over by a king. That was his relationship with God. But now, when the servant is revealed, "the one among you who fears the

Lord and obeys the voice of His servant, let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”

This reminds me in a way, of the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” What was Jesus saying there as He said those things? Those who understand their need, those who know what they desperately need, they’re the blessed ones. Well here, we’re looking at people who know that they’re walking in darkness. “Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.”

You see, people aren’t even aware of their needs until they’re convicted by the Spirit of God. People don’t even know what it is they need. All they know is that they don’t have it. They’re searching for something they can’t put a name to. They’re given over to their sins. They’re blinded. They’re seeking satisfaction in their lusts.

But some people realize they’re in darkness, not of their own accord. It’s through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. They realize they’re in darkness, they realize they have no light, and what’s the answer? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Isn’t that interesting?

Look carefully there. “Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of His servant.” So it’s saying there’s no relationship with God, other than through the voice of the servant, other than through the servant Himself, whose mouth was sharpened and who’d be taught to speak the words of the Lord. “Trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on his God.” Whose God? The servant’s God? The Lord’s God? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. The servant himself, who is speaking as God, is telling us to trust in the name of the Lord and to rely on his God.

Think of the words of Jesus. Jesus continually spoke as God, “I am. I am the light of the world. Before Abraham was, I am. I am the good shepherd.” etc., etc. He spoke as God, and yet He told us when we pray, we speak to our Father who art in heaven. He told us that we are to worship our Father in heaven, mediated through Him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Him. And here we have this passage in Isaiah telling us that we’re to trust in the name of the Lord and to rely on his God—the God of the servant.

Verse 11 finishes with condemnation. It’s an irony. It’s sarcasm. Remember that they’ve been told to turn to the servant. If they know that they’re in darkness and they have no light, trust in the name of the Lord, rely on his God, listen to the voice of the servant. But then you have those who won’t listen, those who won’t accept the message of the servant. Now God speaks to them: “¹¹ Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches! Walk by the light of your fire, and by the torches that you have kindled! This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.”

You see what He’s saying. “You think you’re going to live on your own light? You think you’ve got the light you need? All right, walk according to your own light. Walk according to your own wisdom.” Where does it end? What’s the proverb say? “There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is folly. The way thereof is death.”

“You think you’re wise? You think you’ve got light? You think you can choose your own ways? You think you can solve your own problems? All right, walk by your own light. But I’m telling you something: You shall lie down in torment. Reject God’s grace? Reject God’s grace, you’re choosing death.” That’s why I read to us from Proverbs chapter 8. “Whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord. But he who fails to find me harms himself. The one who fails to find me loves death—seeks out death.” You shall lie down in torment.

Once again, we just come to this inevitable conclusion: Either you’re a servant of the living God or you’re not. Either you’re in Christ or you’re not. Either you have eternal life or you have eternal death before you. You have blessing or punishment before you. And nobody’s neutral, and nobody has nothing to worry about, and nobody has time to say, “I’m going to make up my mind next week, next month, next year, when my life is in order, when I’ve got it sorted out.” God is constantly demanding that we serve Him *now*, that we obey Him *now*, that we obey His word *now*.

My friend, you’re not neutral. It’s not as though you don’t have needs. It’s not as though you’ve got all the time in the world to choose to do right. You don’t. The threat from God is that if you walk by the light of your own wisdom, you will lie down in torment. Hell awaits. Hell awaits all who refuse to bend the knee to the servant, all who refuse to obey the voice of the servant.

And so, once again, Isaiah speaks to the people of God, and he tells them, Your problem is your sins, and you have not been cleansed of your sins, and you desperately need to be cleansed of your sins. The solution is the servant. Await the coming servant. Await the Messiah. Await the one born of the virgin. Put your faith in Him. Obey His voice.

God is always willing to forgive. God is always going to forgive all who put their trust in Him. God is always going to forgive all who seek forgiveness in the name of Jesus. Those who trust in the word of the Lord are those who will have light. They will have life. They will have a relationship with the servant. They will hear the voice of the servant. They will love this servant. Those who refuse to accept this word, they will lie down in torment. They are lovers of death. They are haters of themselves, and they consign themselves to destruction. Let’s close in prayer.

Father in heaven, once again we thank you and praise you that you reveal such glorious and wonderful things to us from Scripture. We thank you and praise you that you sent forth your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He is the servant, the one for whom you are searching, and that our lives are hidden in Him, and that our sins have been crucified in Him, and that we have been given life in Him by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Father, we pray that you would help us to live in obedience to the voice of the servant, and that you would use us to serve you and to bring you great glory. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.