



THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Georgina W. Everingham

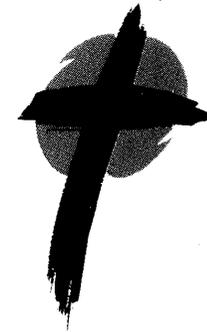
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Meditations on Isaiah 49 : 1-12

by Georgina W. Everingham

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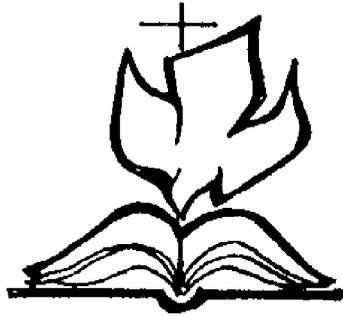
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Your
word
is
truth



THE SERVANT OF THE LORD
Meditations in Isaiah 49:1-12

FOREWORD

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THese meditations in Isaiah 49 were written for monthly mailing, from April to December 1996, to a small number of people who had been members of different congregations where I had been minister during my active ministry before retirement.

These writings are the fruit of my on going study of, meditation in, and prayerful reflection upon, the Bible. I make no claim for any excellence or special insight. They were written with the hope and desire that the people who received them each month might find in them some blessing and spiritual nourishment.

I have the same desire as I offer these meditations to others in this book form.

In my ministry I have always had one supreme aim, which is to glorify God and exalt and set forth our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and also faithfully declare God's revelation in the Bible.

Georgina W. Everingham

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

1 - THE SAVIOUR ETERNALLY APPOINTED FOR ALL

“Listen to me, you islands; hear this you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name”.

Isaiah 49:1

LIKE other passages in Isaiah, for instance Isaiah 53, Isaiah 49 so precious reveals our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and I would like in this small book to share with you what the Spirit is saying to me about Jesus from this passage.

There is no doubt that this section of this chapter is a revelation of Jesus, for although the one speaking is called “The servant of the Lord”, he is an individual so cannot be the nation of Israel, even though he is given that name in verse 3. The servant also is spoken of in terms which in no way can be interpreted of anyone other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament Christ is spoken of very specifically as to his person and work. This is because the New Testament speaks of Jesus after his incarnation and great atonement, and after the coming of the Holy Spirit to lead the Church into all truth concerning Jesus. The revelation concerning Jesus in the Old Testament, as illustrated here, is before the event of Christ’s incarnation and death, but is no less Spirit given. Because the revelation

is before the Saviour’s coming, it is necessarily less direct and given more in pictures. The pictorial indirectness has its own beauty and light as it reveals to us the wonder and excellence of Jesus. We are led to the Saviour here in just as real a way as in the New Testament.

The title I have given this first meditation expresses for me at least the two great truths which this first verse contains concerning Jesus, and the salvation that he won for us. This opening I find particularly intimate, for though Jesus speaks to all, there is that quality of personal entreaty as if the Saviour is speaking directly to me, and indeed to each individual believer. In these opening words “Listen to me”, I don’t hear a fearsome God demanding attention, but a loving God yearning over me and calling me in love to hear that which brings salvation to my soul.

THE SAVIOUR FOR ALL

The first comforting revelation comes in the first half of the verse and it is this, that Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, is sent as the Saviour of the world, that is to Gentile as well as Jew. This must have been particularly startling to

the Jews who read Isaiah and understood the message, because the previous chapters are addressed to the Jews. Now suddenly the message is for all, and it is the message that the Messiah is for all.

This truth is expressed in the way Jesus speaks and to whom he addresses his words. He says, "Listen to me, you islands". The islands cannot be the nation of Israel, therefore must be referring to those who are not Jews. That Jesus is speaking to Jews as well cannot be doubted, because the Spirit has been speaking to the Jews already, but to emphasise that what follows is for all, the Servant speaks to other than Jews. This understanding is confirmed in the next clause. The NIV translation, if not literal, is undoubtedly accurate. Jesus speaks literally to "people afar off" and so must refer to other nations who were not of the Jews. "People afar off" particularly would suggest to the Jew that the Gentiles were being referred to, because to the Jew the Gentile was afar off, and not part of God's blessing which was exclusively bestowed on the Jew. Paul in Ephesians 2:17 speaks of Gentiles as those afar off, as he speaks of the Jews as those near.

How glorious to be reminded that Jesus was always destined to be the Saviour of all, and that it was always God's purpose that the removal of the curse due to Adam's sin was for all Adam's children, and not just for a select few. It wasn't a change of direction in the New Testament that Salvation was made available to Gentiles. Some have taught this as God's answer to the apparent failure of

the Jews in receiving their Messiah and the salvation he provided. No! What is revealed here, and later in verse 6, is that it was always God's plan that salvation was to be for the world. How could it be otherwise when God spoke his promise as he did in Genesis 3, when he spoke of the Seed of the woman crushing Satan. The Seed of the woman, Christ, was for all Adam and Eve's posterity. There could never be any other understanding of this first promise than this.

The Jews were never chosen by God in the Old Testament exclusively for salvation to the exclusion of the rest of humanity. Their election as a nation was not for this at all. As far as salvation is concerned, the Messiah was always promised as the one in whom all the nations on earth would be blessed. The Messiah was never exclusively for them. Their election was simply the privilege, and a tremendous privilege it was, of securing the certainty through history of the coming of the Saviour, and because of this privilege they had the added privilege that Jesus in the flesh was a Jew. That the Saviour of the world should be a Jew by his birth as a man is an astounding privilege and one to be rightly praising God for. However this does not mean that the Saviour was only for the Jews. Far from it, Jesus speaks his revelation of himself as Saviour to all.

We can feel the grace and love of God expressed in the way Jesus speaks. As I indicated earlier the very fact that Jesus speaks to the world in this way, shows his loving concern that all may know that he has come and that he is the

one given for their salvation, and that salvation is there for all to receive. Jesus wants all to know so that none may be deprived. How important it is for the people of God today, to feel this concern of our Lord, and so take more seriously his commission to preach the Gospel to every creature.

There is also, in this entreaty to all the world, the call of Jesus to all, to receive the salvation that is on offer, and that he has bought for us, so that we may be saved. Jesus wants people to receive the blessing that he brings and that he is to speak about.

ETERNALLY APPOINTED FOR ALL

If we have seen that Jesus is the Saviour of all in the first half of this verse, we see in this second half that it was the eternal plan of God that Jesus should be the Saviour of the world. This is expressed in the way he speaks about himself when he says "Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name."

These are astounding words. Let us notice every detail so that we may gain the whole message that Jesus has for us here and so gain the maximum blessing which these words hold.

If Jesus was called before he was born, then he pre-existed his incarnation. We have here revealed to us the pre-existence of Jesus, that is his existence from before time and for all eternity. It is a revelation of his deity. The Servant is God himself, and it is God speaking to us in the person of the Servant.

If God called the Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ, before he was born, then we can see that the salvation of humanity was not an afterthought, or change of plan because a first plan had failed, but was for all time. This plan was conceived in eternity. The servant received his commission to be the Saviour in the councils of eternity, before the world was, and before the necessity for salvation had taken place. God was not taken by surprise at the fall of Adam and Eve. God's plans had not been overthrown or thwarted by Adam's sin. God had determined it all before, and the coming of the Saviour was already in the purpose of God, to meet the need of what was known to be taking place, that is the fall of humankind in Adam.

This revelation of God's eternal plan to save is so assuring and reassuring, despite the very big problems it raises in our minds. What the Bible reveals is the truth, even if we cannot always understand how everything fits together. It is so assuring that God has always had a heart of love for sinners, and that he has always known all the awful sins that we would commit, and has from eternity met the great and tremendous cost of saving sinners, leaving nothing for us weak and failing creatures to do. The eternal plan was worked out in such a way that no detail was left out to secure the eternal salvation of all who would listen to the Servant, and receive the love of God poured out in Him.

Nothing God does ever fails. No plan of his is ever thwarted even in the smallest degree. Earthly rulers make

plans, but they have to have contingency plans, because they cannot determine the course of events to ensure that their first chosen plan proceeds without a hitch. God is not like this. He plans and it is done. All the circumstances that are in the situation he knows, and God has made all things work together for the fulfilment of his plan.

We may not be able to understand how this can be, but we know it must be true, for God could not be God unless it were true. We are not meant to get our faith strangled by questions that cannot be answered, nor must we succumb to the devil's temptations to reject the word of God where we cannot find that our minds can get hold of it. We are told what is sufficient, so that we draw the comfort of the assurance that in believing the word of the Lord concerning salvation, we may be sure that we are secure in that Salvation.

This certainty of God's plan is expressed in the way the servant declares his message. The Servant speaks before the event of his incarnation, but he speaks of his birth as an accomplished fact. No earthly planner could speak about future events in this way. An earthly planner would have to say, if such and such happens as planned, then this will follow. The Servant speaks of his birth as an accomplished fact. This way of speaking is proved by history to be sound and sure. Jesus could not have spoken in this way here, if God's plans were not sure, and all things are under his sovereign dominion and rule.

The way the Servant speaks in the

last sentence is most startling. He speaks of knowledge of personal history which has not yet taken place - "from my birth he has made mentioned of my name." We are transported forward in time to the time of the Gospels and the incarnation and the life of Jesus. History is in the hands of God, and though we as human beings act rationally and responsibly, nonetheless all things are already known by God, and nothing happens but he has purposed it. All history is to God like an open book. He knows the end from the beginning.

When we read Romans 8:28-30 we should not seek to get around the truth to make it conform to our earthly limitations, nor must we reject it or refuse to believe it. No! we are meant to get hold of the comfort and assurance of the revelation, as we are meant to get hold of the comfort of the revelation in the Isaiah verse before us. Included in the plan of God was our personal salvation. As the Saviour was eternally the sacrifice for sin, so eternally we were predestined to receive the fruit of that sacrifice, so the Apostle can say with such assurance that our glorification is already an accomplished fact.

CONCLUSION

Dear believers in Jesus, hear him speaking to you in this opening verse of Isaiah 49. He is speaking to you personally calling you to listen to him. You have already heard his voice and believed, so the call to listen here is for your additional comfort and security. Be blessed by the truth that Jesus always was purposed to be the Saviour of all, so to be your Saviour. Be comforted in the

truth that Jesus as your Saviour was in his eternal salvation plan is also an
always the plan of God; and just as Jesus accomplished fact. Though in time
could speak in a way that future events there may seem to be uncertainties, yet
were accomplished facts, so your future in the light of God's eternal plan your
future is certain.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

2 - JESUS, THE GUARDIAN OF HIS CHURCH

“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver”.

Isaiah 49:2

WE COME now to the second verse in this section of the prophet Isaiah which reveals Jesus under the title of the Servant of the Lord. There is no doubt that this verse is not an easy one to interpret, and I have found myself having to resist the temptation of giving interpretation, which though biblical, is my thoughts and not that of the revelation concerning Jesus in this verse. One needs to guard against reading commentaries and taking their interpretation as right. In many cases, though what is said in commentaries is true of Jesus, it is not the truth of this verse. We are meant to receive the revelation of the verse in its truth. By accepting something that is not what the verse is saying, we shall miss the message God means for us.

I believe that the title I have given to this sermon gives the essential revelation concerning Christ which is held in this scripture.

THE DESCRIPTION OF JESUS

It is important in the first instant to

properly see what the picture is which is being portrayed in a verse like this. We must resist the temptation of giving a meaning to the words until this picture is understood, otherwise we will find ourselves dividing up the sentences in a way that destroys the picture.

The picture starts with the words “He made”. I understand this as a reference to God. He, God, makes his servant like the picture in this verse. It is a description of an office God gives to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the picture is of the mouth of Jesus made like a sharpened sword. From the mouth comes words, so the picture is concerned with the words of Jesus and his use of speech. This speech is like a sharpened sword, something that cuts and destroys and kills. The sword is not a defensive weapon but rather a weapon of attack. But notice that the sword is kept ready in the hand of God. It is not being used all the time, but kept in the shadow of the hand of God, ready to be used as needed. It is not simply Christ being hid in the shadow of the hand of God, but rather Christ as the sword of attack being kept

in readiness in the shadow of the hand of God. It is kept in the shadow so that it is not normally too visible to terrify.

There are those who separate the words "in the shadow of his hand he hid me" from the first sentence in this verse, and then, separating these two sentences, make the meaning of this second sentence that of God guarding and keeping his servant safe all through his ministry. This is no doubt true, but it is not the meaning here, however much we may like to make it so. By doing this we also then tend to alter the meaning of the mouth of Jesus being like a sharpened sword to be the tender influences of the Gospel drawing people to salvation. However much we would like the words to mean this, they do not mean this here.

UNDERSTANDING THE PICTURE

The only way we can properly get to any true understanding of this picture is to search the Scriptures to find other references to a sword in the mouth of Jesus, and see what these other passages reveal.

No doubt our minds go immediately to Ephesians 6:17 where we read that the Christian must take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. This is not entirely relevant, because this is not speaking directly of Jesus, but of the Scriptures, which is the weapon the Christian must use to repel the attacks of the devil. However it has something to say to us in our search for the meaning of Isaiah 49:2 because it tells us that the Sword of God's word is the offensive weapon that we use to

attack Satan and repel his attacks upon us. It is the only offensive piece in the armour of God described in Ephesians six. It is a weapon of attack.

From this our minds may well go to Jesus suffering the attacks of the devil after he had fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness, and the fact that Jesus used the word of God to repel these attacks and defeat Satan. Notice that the sword of the word of God is that which is used to put down Satan and keep the Christian safe from his destructive power and influence.

It is to Revelation, however, that we must go if we are to get any real help. There are three references here that directly help us in our quest for understanding, and speak of Jesus in the same way as does Isaiah 49:2.

The first is Revelation 1:16. In verse 12 of this chapter John turns around in the vision he is experiencing and looks upon Christ. He sees the Saviour he had known and loved, but in a very different way. He sees him in splendour and power and majesty. In verse 16 the description of Jesus continues "In his right hand he held seven stars (representing the angels of the seven churches, v20), and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its glory."

The vision is one that struck terror into the heart of the gently apostle. "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead" (v17). The picture is one of Jesus, awesome in majesty and striking terror in all who oppose him. The sword is the sword which executes

judgement against all who oppose him and the Gospel. The faithful servant of the Lord, the believer, has nothing to fear. We hear in verse 17 the tender words of this Lord of splendour to John, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Accompanying these words is the protective and loving touch of the Lord as John describes "He placed his right hand on me". The picture is of the invincible Lord who reigns in glory. To those who believe and are his beloved children, he is wondrous loving, protective and gracious; but to those who oppose him, or seek to harm his church, he is a sharp double-edged sword to cut them down in judgement. The picture of Jesus here as guardian of his church is perfect. He stands in the midst of his church, the seven golden lampstands, and he holds in his hands the seven stars, the defending angels of the churches, ready to be sent out by the Saviour to defend his church.

Our quest for understanding is further enhanced in Revelation 2:12-17. This is the letter written by Jesus to the church at Pergamum. He describes himself in verse 12 "These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword". Then in verse 16 Jesus says "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth". The trouble in the church at Pergamum was that things had grown lax, and some had begun to teach by practice and word that it did not matter if Christians took part in rituals of the titulary deities of the trade guilds, or take part in the

immoral practices that went on at these occasions. This was what happened to Israel through the influence of Balaam (Numbers 25:1,2 connected with what goes before and Numbers 31:16). This also evidently was the approach and teaching of the Nicolaitans. This practice was leading Christians astray and defiling the purity of the Gospel. Notice that Jesus warns of this problem, and he threatens, not to come as judge and cast out the faithful believers, but "them", that is the people perpetrating this evil. He gives them time to change, but he will not stand back idle when his church is in danger and his elect are in danger, and comes to purify his church on behalf of his true disciples. The judgement is not against the believing Christian, who through the weakness of the flesh, fails and falls from time to time, or grievously on occasions, but against those who are actively seeking to lead the faithful sheep of Jesus astray and endanger their souls.

The last reference in Revelation also supports this understanding of Jesus with his mouth made like a two edged sword. The reference is Revelation 19:15-21. Here is the description of Har-Magedon where all those that oppose Christ and his church come up against the awesome Lord Jesus. There is no prolonged battle. In verse 15 we read that out of the mouth of the Lord comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, that is those who come up against him to oppose him. The beast, etc. come up against Jesus v19. There is no prolonged conflict. Jesus immediately captures the beast and all who oppose, and (v21) those who follow the beast are killed by

the sword out of his mouth.

The similar understanding is given in Hebrews 4:12. Here there is a description of the judgement of God on the apostate Israelites in the wilderness who rebelled against God and made the golden calf, etc. They were leading the church of God astray, and they were judged. Hebrews 4:12,13 is to reinforce the warning of this history, and remind that the sword of God, the sword of judgement, cannot be opposed and effectively brings judgement on those who harm the church of God.

APPLICATION

What then is the revelation of Jesus given to us in Isaiah 49:2. The two halves of the verse are the same revelation. The polished arrow concealed in the quiver is the same picture as the sharp sword held in the shadow of the hand of God.

From all that we have considered it is an awesome, but beautiful and reassuring picture of Christ as the keeper and defender of his church. The true believer has nothing to fear, but all to be reassured by, from this picture. It is a picture of Christ watching over his elect, and making sure that the infiltrations of Satan, to seduce the church into error and evil, will be thwarted and overthrown. It is the picture of the reigning almighty Lord Jesus, totally able to judge and overthrow Satan and all who follow him in the seduction of Christ's church.

This picture warns us that if we allow the seductions of Satan to creep into our particular family of Christ's

church, like it did in the church at Pergamum, so that the Gospel is threatened and people are being led astray, then Christ will come and warn us, and call his church to repent. If they do not, he will throw out this evil and purify his church. In the struggle of the church today against all error and evil of any kind, causing grief of those who care for the Gospel, it is comforting to know that Christ does not look on unconcerned, and he will come and deliver his church, and purge out the cancer from it. It may mean the destruction of a particular outward visible church, but not the destruction of the faithful believers who will be gathered into a new fold. There is the danger of any church being overthrown, if error and sin is allowed to continue. In the past God may have graciously come with reviving grace, and brought timely repentance and a return to the truth. but a church can't count on this for ever.

There is a terrible warning here to all in the outward visible church, from whatever denomination they may be, who may have departed from the Gospel, and are teaching and practising that which confounds the Gospel and leads the flock of God astray, and hides from them the saving grace of God in Christ. All those who follow the liberal agenda, or those who militantly set forth the Catholic error, have a terrible warning to take hold of in this majestic and terrible Christ revealed in Isaiah 49:2. The sharpened sword from the mouth of Christ is against them, and will overthrow them unless they change their ways. The church they have created will be swept away.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

3 - JESUS, THE SERVANT

“He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour’”.

Isaiah 49:3

AS I have meditated on this verse, it has been impressed upon my heart and soul how precious and glorious is the office of Jesus as the servant of God. He is not our servant, but our Saviour. He became our Saviour because he was ready to become the servant of God. In their history did they show forth his splendour. Rather for most of their history they brought dishonour on the name of Jehovah by their sin of going after idols. Most of the time they were the servant of Baal or some other false god, rather than the servant of Jehovah.

In this office of Jesus as the servant of God I am brought to look upon my Lord, ready to take the lowest place, that I may be exalted to the place he was so ready to leave for my sake.

THE TITLE OF ISRAEL

Before we can launch into our meditation on Jesus as the servant, I believe it is needful to deal with and explain the reference to Israel in this verse. At first reading we may well be led to suppose that the prophet is speaking of the nation of Israel because of the use of the name Israel, and because he calls the servant of God by the name of Israel.

However, immediately, we have difficulties with such an idea. The nation of Israel, though supposed to be the servant of Jehovah, very rarely submitted to servanthood, and certainly never brought much glory to God, nor

Further the reference in this verse seems to be to an individual and not to a nation. The individual could not be Jacob, who was given the name of Israel, because he had been dead for many years. The passage makes it clear that the subject of these verses is the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, and so there can be no doubt that Jesus is being referred to by the name of Israel.

This giving of a name of someone as representative of an office or position was not uncommon in the Old Testament. For example the name David is used in 1 Kings 12:16 for the king of the day, Rehoboam, because Rehoboam was of the house of David and the line of David. Further the name David is given to Christ in Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekial 34:23 and Hosea 3:5 because Jesus came from the line of David according to his flesh, and because David himself is portrayed as a type of Christ.

It is plain that Israel is the name given to Jesus in this prophecy because when Jacob was given the name Israel, it was because he had prevailed with God, just as Jesus being the servant of God, wholly given over to the will of God, prevailed to win the redemption of God for sinners. So the name Israel here is given to our Lord Jesus as the name for the head and Saviour of the people of God, the true Israel of God, the redeemed church.

JESUS AS SERVANT

Jesus was the perfect servant of God. It was in this perfection of servanthood that he became the perfect redeemer. It was in the eternal council of God, where God planned the redemption of sinful humanity, that Jesus agreed to become the servant of God to do the whole will of God, without any deviation from that will, so that God's plan would be accomplished.

Jesus was ready to humble himself in this way. This is expressed so vividly in Philippians 2:6-7. This becoming a servant involved the divine Son laying aside his glory and position as eternal God, and taking human likeness, and placing himself in the condition of a servant. As the servant he accepted all the degrading which such humbling involved. He put himself under the dominion of God as the second Adam to do all that God, the Father, placed upon him, however degrading or vile that labour should be. He placed himself so implicitly under the obedience of God, that he was willing to suffer, to an infinite extent, all that the plan of God required him to suffer.

So he that knew no sin, was ready to be made sin for us. He who was pure with the infinite purity of the divine, was ready to have the defilement of the world credited to him and heaped upon him. He who knew the intense beauty of heaven, was ready not only to enter this fallen world and live and die, but to live here not in his glory as God, but in the likeness of sinful man. Though without sin, he took on all the miserable consequences of sin in his body.

Jesus as the servant of God took the place of a slave. The slave had no will or rights of his own, and so Jesus was ready, for the sake of sinners, to renounce all rights as God, and of being coequal with the Father, to be wholly submitted to God and to obey his will implicitly without question, whatever pain or degradation it may entail.

It is perhaps unwise to seek to illustrate this servanthood of Jesus, but in order to get over the extent of our Lord's sacrifice for us I will attempt it. In the army, the Field Marshall is the servant of the Crown, and must obey the will of the Crown. Jesus took this servanthood for us, for the majesty of his deity constantly shines through the narrative of his life in the Gospels. But Jesus was also ready to take the rank of the lowest private, and to be the private to clean the latrines, and be despised as the lowest of the low, to do the will of God in redemption. This he suffered when the sin and degradation of the world was heaped on him upon the cross, and he was despised and rejected of men.

The perfection and beauty of this servant place is seen that Jesus was the

perfect servant in every respect. Whatever he was told to do by the Father, he did, without any question or argument or seeking to avoid any of the consequences of such obedience. It was because of this readiness to take the lowest room, that we have such a perfect Saviour and so perfect a Salvation. In this the love of Christ truly shows that it passes human knowledge or understanding. How greatly Jesus must have loved me, to bear my sin in this terrible way, in his body of the cross.

THE GLORY OF THE SERVANT

We are told by God through the prophet Isaiah in this verse that Jesus, through his servitude as servant, would display the splendour of God. Jesus did this to perfection, and in this showed his own glory as the divine redeemer.

Jesus displayed the splendour of God.

Though Jesus took the form of a servant and was made in human likeness, his life was totally without sin or imperfection, and the splendour of the divine person and character shone through. When Thomas in John 14 asked to be shown the Father, Jesus replied that he who had seen him had seen the Father.

The disciples who lived with him and listened to him were struck by the revelation of character which was revealed, and although they took a long time to come to an understanding of the truth that Jesus was God, eventually it dawned upon them, so that John could testify "We have seen his glory, the

glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth".

The world does not turn to Christ, but the world has to acknowledge that when they look on Jesus in the Gospels, they see a beauty and perfection of character that shines with glory. Though they deny it is the glory of God, they can't deny that it is well beyond the beauty of ordinary mankind.

People have many views of God handed down to them from their social environment and upbringing. All have blemishes which mar the splendour of God. When we look on Jesus in the testimony of the New Testament, we behold the true nature of God. We see one who is loving, compassionate, pure, gracious and merciful. It is only when we look upon Jesus, do we see the true splendour of God. This splendour is seen perhaps most in the servanthood of Jesus, for God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. He was involved in the humiliation of his Son, and it cost the Father as much as it cost the Son. So in the servanthood of Jesus we see the splendour of a God full of compassion and mercy.

Jesus displayed the wisdom of God.

The splendour of the wisdom of God is displayed so richly in the servanthood of Jesus. Through taking the form and the place of a servant, and being obedient to God even unto death, even the death of the cross, how gloriously is the wisdom of God displayed.

Who could have devised a way that God should still be God and not renounce or violate any part of his holiness and justice, and still justify the sinner and forgive sin at no cost to the sinner. There is no way in human wisdom that it can be done. Either justice is exacted to the letter, and the sinner is condemned, or else justice is thrown away, and the sinner's sin overlooked.

In the servant taking our nature, and though sinless himself taking our sin in our place, God's great wisdom is declared. By this means God upholds his justice and holiness. Sin is not overlooked. The holy law of God is upheld. The just desert of sin is fully met. Yet at the same time the sinner can be forgiven and accounted righteous without any loss to them. God, in his great wisdom, accepted all the great cost of meeting the demands of his holiness in the punishment for sin being visited upon his Son, who he made the substitute and representative for sinners, and accounted him sin for us, that we might be the righteousness of God in Him.

Such splendour of wisdom do we see in the Servanthood of Jesus, enhanced by the cost of its execution being so infinitely great.

Jesus displayed the splendour of the love of God.

How greatly did Jesus in his servanthood display the splendour of the great and majestic love of God. If it cost the servant infinite suffering, he was God himself and it was God who suffered. If the Son suffered how much

more did the Father suffer, who was willing to put his well beloved Son to such pain and degradation to save lost sinners. Only the infinite love of God could have conceived this and executed it.

We are so poor in loving that we cannot comprehend the love of God in making his Son the servant to suffer in our place. The Word of God expresses it, but we have no words really to expound it. "This is love", says the Apostle John in his letter, "not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins". How great is the splendour of the love of God seen in this servanthood of Jesus, because God took the initiative to love the loveless and the unlovely, the rebel and hater of God, and to do it freely. Love was all at the cost of the lover, and none to the one loved. Quite rightly we might say in the words of a hymn, "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me".

Jesus displays the splendour of the majesty and power of God.

Such a plan as was involved in the servanthood of Jesus was no easy plan to carry out. It took the invincible purpose of God to carry it out in love for sinners. It took the complete submission of the Son to servanthood and total obedience whatever the cost, for it to be carried through. Great almighty power is demonstrated in this.

We human beings make grandiose promises, and start with magnificent plans. We do not count the cost. We have neither the power to perform what

we say, nor the power of perseverance to carry the plans through to the promised conclusion. Our God and the servant Jesus not only conceived the plan, but in great power executed it to the glorious conclusion that wins eternal redemption for all who believe. What splendour of the power of God is displayed in the servant Jesus.

But the display of the splendour of God's power in the servant Jesus is further enhanced because it was executed in the face of all the opposition of the might of the evil one and all his minions. Jesus came and disarmed the strong man, the devil, and took away all his power to hold sinners in damnation. All Satan struggled to do to prevent this, and to overcome the Saviour, he failed in. Now is the prince of this world judged, said Jesus. Satan is overcome and this is displayed in the mighty power of God displayed through Jesus being so perfectly the servant.

APPLICATION

Let us adore the Saviour, who was ready to be the servant of God in order to save us, and now give him all the honour which is his due. Jesus is now on the throne, high over all, administering salvation according to the purpose of God. We can not exalt him higher than he is, but we can submit our hearts and minds to give him the place in our love and obedience that is his due. He became the servant to redeem us. He is now our king to be adored and worshipped and loved and obeyed.

If Jesus was willing to go to such sacrifice as to become the Servant to redeem us, such love calls us to be ready and willing to give ourselves to him as the servants of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul owned himself as such so that he might be in the hands of Christ to make known the wonders of his redeeming love. May we, for Christ's sake, give ourselves as his servants that his love may be made known, and for his sake not counting the cost.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD
Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

4 - A TRUE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SERVANT

“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 hand, and my reward is with my God’”.

Isaiah 49:4

THERE IS no doubt that it is the Servant of the Lord who is speaking, and because of this I for one find myself on unfamiliar ground as to the experience of the Saviour. The big question is what is the Lord Jesus speaking about and expressing in this verse. It seems at first that we see our Lord in despair, but this cannot be true, though we have an example in St. Matthew 23:37 where Jesus speaks in a similar vein - “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”.

What then have we in this verse in the Servant speaking in this way. After spending much thought and prayer, I believe we have a description of the reality of the way the Jews received their Messiah, and in this sense the words of Jesus have a prophetic quality to them. Having said this I am ready to confess that I have really very little

understanding of what Jesus is saying here, though what I do perceive I believe to be of utmost importance. I believe also, in the two halves of the verse taken together, we are given in the Servant’s words a true perspective on his life and ministry which God’s people and specially those in ministry are meant to take hold of.

THE MEANING OF THE VERSE

I find it helpful in difficult verses to first of all, as it were, speak to myself, so that I am clear what the words are saying. Let us do this now.

These words of the servant are a reaction to the words of promise in the previous verse, where God says that in his servant he will display his splendour. The servant looks at his life and feels that there seems to be no splendour at all. These words are prophetic so in them we see the servant living his incarnate life, evaluating it and thus making this statement. I feel there is no doubt that Jesus is looking at his earthly

ministry over the period of around three years, when he taught and healed in Palestine. He is viewing his ministry to the Jews and expresses a feeling that all his energy has been in vain. Jesus expressed a very similar emotion and thought in St. Matthew 23:37 quoted above.

There is no doubt that Jesus worked immeasurably hard in teaching the people, and that he showed very great love and caring in the way he dealt with their needs and problems. Further he exerted great power which demonstrated his divinity in the doing of many miracles. There could have been no better or greater ministry and caring than this which Jesus gave in his earthly ministry. History reveals, however, that comparatively few people responded. There was an initial surge to follow him, but as John 6 tells us, it was more for what people got out of Jesus, than any real desire to follow Jesus. Later as the time of his crucifixion drew near, the crowds dwindled away. It is true that on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem a week before his death, Jesus drew a large crowd who acclaimed him as Messiah, but all this acclaim changed to rejection very, very quickly.

Jesus came as the promised Messiah to the Jewish nation, and the testimony is that the Jewish nation, specially represented in its leaders, rejected him. They were not moved by his teaching, or impressed by his miracles, or drawn by his caring love; rather they hated him and feared him and wanted to get rid of him. Well do we read in St. John 1:11 "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not

receive him". I have no doubt that the words of the servant in the first part of Isaiah 49:4 have reference to this reaction of the Jews and the world to the ministry of Jesus before his death.

Let us notice how truly human the servant was. Jesus became man truly. Notice how he suffered all the pains and disappointments which come upon the human race due to sin and the curse upon Adam and his posterity because of his sin. The Scripture tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin. Here we have Jesus going through the human experience of disappointment, discouragement and depression. He truly took our sorrows and carried our griefs, and can truly help and understand us in our sorrows and griefs. Notice also that disappointments, discouragements and depression and the feelings that come to us in them are not sinful, though exceedingly hard to bear. The servant committed no sin, nor was he actually in despair. Nonetheless he really suffered and felt and experienced this suffering, and this is revealed in the very human reaction to it all.

But the words of the Servant continue in the second half of the verse, and this is very important. Though the Servant felt the pain of the rejection he experienced in his earthly ministry, he knows that this is not a true perspective on his ministry. He knows that there is a more important aspect and action in all that he has done and was doing, and that because of this the Lord evaluates his ministry in a different way, and the reward will be revealed in the setting forth of the value and glory of what

Jesus did. On this our perspective on Jesus and ministry must be moulded.

THE TRUE PERSPECTIVE

Jesus did not come first and foremost to teach, and care in a physical way and heal. These things are of very great value and blessing, but this was not the real reason he came. Jesus came as the second Adam. The first Adam had failed. He had plunged the whole human race into misery and curse. The business of the second Adam was to reverse all this and to succeed where the first Adam failed.

The first Adam's business was to go through the period of probation set him by God on behalf of all his posterity, the human race. He was to show his total obedience and allegiance to God expressed in the one prohibition not to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. By this obedience, which was by no means difficult, he was to have shown that he chose God to be his God and that all his heart and affection was the Lord's. Adam was positively righteous. He had been created to love God and desire him. God walked with him in fellowship, and so he knew the blessedness of the benign rule of the Lord. Yet when Eve, having been deceived by the Serpent, offered the fruit of the tree of good and evil to him, with his eyes open and knowing full well what he was doing, he chose to eat, and thereby renounced the Lord for the devil. Adam was far worse than Eve. Eve was deceived and led astray by the sophistry of the serpent. Adam made his choice in cold blood really knowing all the consequences.

The second Adam, the servant Jesus, came not to change the hearts and minds of people by his teaching, or win their love by his care and healing, but came into the world to perfectly serve God on behalf of his posterity, just as the first Adam had been meant to do. Jesus came to live for God and not in the first place for mankind. His actions were directed at God and for God. The difference for him from the first Adam was that Jesus came into a fallen and blighted world, and so was fighting a greater and more difficult battle.

The servant came therefore to fulfil all righteousness. The purpose of his life and living as a man was to live a life for God and in obedience to God that was perfect. To meet all the temptations of the devil, and all the hate and persecution of men, together with facing all the stress and strain of living with a human nature suffering under the pain of the curse of God because of Adam, and to perfectly live in the righteousness which God required. He was acting on behalf of his posterity, all those who would believe on him, just as the first Adam was acting on behalf of the whole human race. Jesus perfectly achieved this and fulfilled this.

Further the second Adam had more to do. He had to pay the price of the failure which the first Adam brought upon the world, and all the sin that followed from this. To fulfil all righteousness, the servant had to satisfy the whole justice of God on behalf of those who believed on him, so that the just punishment upon their sin and the sin of the world may be paid. This Jesus did on the cross, obtaining perfect

redemption for us.

So by his living for God and his dying under the justice of God, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, fulfilling the whole of God's requirements for mankind, both in precept and living, and also in penalty, that is the taking of the punishment which sin demanded. By this he provides his people perfect and complete redemption.

The true perspective of the ministry and work of Jesus was not in his teaching, caring and healing, but in his living toward God and dying before God as a sacrifice for sin. This is the perspective which the Lord saw, and acclaimed because this is what God sent his Son into the world to do. Not first and foremost to teach, but work out and provide justifying righteousness for his people. This is what the Lord rewards the Servant for, in giving him all those he had promised him before the foundation of the world (St. John 17:2), and exalting him to his throne on high, and glorifying him with the glory he had with the Father before the world was.

This is a perspective of tremendous import. It is a perspective of infinite depth and excellence. It leads us into the wisdom, majesty, love and mercy of God in a way beyond our hearts and minds to conceive. It leads us to a wonderful and perfect redemption achieved for us, which no amount of teaching could ever provide for us.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

Firstly, we learn that the important thing in the work of Jesus is not his teaching or miracles, great and valuable

though these are, but his fulfilling righteousness in his life, and atoning for sin in his death. It is not his teaching or miracles that save, but his work of atonement; his vicarious work, his doing and dying in the place of others, that brings deliverance from death, and entrance into the blessedness of life.

There was a movement early in the last century when the emphasis was on the historical Jesus. It was said that all that mattered was the sublime teaching of Jesus, specially shown in the sermon on the mount. All that people needed to know is this sublime teaching, and when people were told it, they would perceive its wisdom and excellence and embrace it. As this happened the troubles and problems of life would disappear. The flaw in this thinking is seen that this has failed. Not only do people have no desire to approve and live the teaching of Jesus, but even if there is some success here, there is no answer in this to the problem of our being under the wrath of God because of sin.

Secondly, we learn the failure to which all emphasis on social reform and caring in the community is doomed. The problems all around us in society; the abuses, the violence, the deprivation, the exploitation, etc. has driven the church to concentrate on social reform. The lesson we learn from the complaint of the Servant in our verse is that this is doomed to failure. Jesus could not have done it any better. Of all social caring, his was the best and the model for all others. We need to be busy in such caring, but on its own it will fail, and the church which gives all its energy to this, and puts this first, is

doomed to complain with the servant "I have laboured to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing". There is more social caring today than ever before. There is more welfare and help for the needy. There are more resources available in all directions. With all this the problems, far from decreasing, are growing greater and overwhelming all the caring that seeks to overcome it.

Thirdly, the paramount ministry of the church, the first action and preoccupation of the church, is to preach Christ crucified as the Saviour of the world. Social endeavour without the cross will always fail, for it can't reconcile us to God, nor can it change the inner corruption within the human soul. Jesus complained that people would not come to him to receive life. Why because there is no desire basically, and at the core, for life. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. (John 3:19)

It is only when the church has preached Jesus as the provider of righteousness to make us just before God, and Jesus as the one on whom all our sins were placed on the cross, and Jesus as the provider of new life, that salvation has come to individuals and society. It is only after we have been justified through Jesus before God and born again of the Spirit that we love and approve the teaching of Jesus. When people are brought into fellowship with God in this way, then social reform has advanced and achieved the desired change.

Fourthly, we learn that it is not the miracles of Jesus that save people, or

draw them to him. People gawp at, and are excited by, such things. They even come to Jesus for the results of the miracles to be seen in their lives. They may even put on an outward show of allegiance to Jesus, but there will be no real change within, or any true life, and when persecutions and difficulties come, or other attractions press, they will fall away. If they do not fall away, then they will pervert the church away from the gospel that saves, the living and dying of Jesus for us, and so bring about the death of the church which we are seeing so much of in the church today.

CONCLUSION

What a tremendous prophetic message is given to us in this verse. How powerfully we are told that the victory of Jesus was not in his teaching and miracle working, but in his living for God and dying to fulfil the justice of God on behalf of our sins.

How challenging this is. What must the church be about? The church must be like Paul and say "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'". (Romans 1:17,17) Being like this, like Paul, the church will have one supreme desire, which is to preach Christ crucified and the glory of the redeeming Servant Saviour.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD
Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

5 - THE REWARD OF THE SERVANT

“And now the Lord says - he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring back Jacob to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength -”.

Isaiah 49:5

A GAIN I see how the Scriptures are not a series of isolated thoughts, but a continuous speaking of the revelation which God has caused to be written for us. As we come to this verse, we see that it commences ‘And now’. From these two opening words we can see immediately that what the Lord is going to say here, follows on from the previous verse, and commences the answer of the Lord to the words of the Servant in verse 4.

In verse 4, the Servant has been seen to have viewed his ministry and been disappointed in the results of what he sees in that ministry, and we saw that this referred to the earthly ministry of Jesus up until he was brought to trial and crucified. We heard the Servant also indicating that he trusted in God and God’s purpose, and that God’s reward for him was in the crucial work God had sent him to do, which was to die as a propitiatory sacrifice, that is to receive all the wrath of God upon himself for our sins, so that we might be saved from the consequences of our sins.

In the words ‘And now ...’ we are led to see what this and the next verse is

concerned to tell us, which is the reward that God had planned and would give the Servant for the accomplishment of his work in dying and so paying the price, the punishment, for our sins. This verse and the next one, verse 6, in Isaiah 49, is God telling the Servant what he has really in mind for him, and that it would bring this great reward. The reward is described to us in these verses.

THE REWARD

The reward that God had for the servant was that he would be a Saviour, the one who would bring in eternal salvation as a reality. He was to be the one who would make it possible for sins to be forgiven by God, and that God may justly overlook the sins in humanity, and account sinners righteous, without any violation of his law.

In the past, in the history of Israel, God had sent many prophets to his people to call them back to himself, and to show them where they were going wrong. Even though God followed these messages with warnings and promises of judgement if the message was not

heeded, it made little difference. The people of Israel mostly ignored the prophets, and went on in their sinful ways. When there was reformation, it was only partial, and never permanent, and the people soon went back to their former ways. The prophets also were treated badly and forsaken, so the rejection of the servant during his earthly ministry was simply a repeat of all that had gone before.

It was true also that during all the times when Israel was faithful, salvation was temporary and imperfect because it was dependent on ineffective means of atonement. Though the people repented and sought the Lord, Israel were still sinners. The sins already committed and the sins they continued to commit could not be overlooked by the Lord. God could not violate his holiness and justice by forgetting them. They had to be atoned for and the punishment exacted. Throughout the Old Testament time, the only form of atonement, whereby the guilt of sin could be purged, was the sacrifice of innocent animals in the place of the sinner. The fact that these sacrifices were not effective to cancel the debt of sin, was seen in the fact that they had to be repeated time and time again. Even when the sacrifice had been offered, there was no real lifting of the burden of guilt, and the achieving of true peace with God.

The Servant was to be the one to make full and perfect atonement for sin, so that the sinner may know the lifting of all his guilt, his condemnation forever removed, and the blessing of living at peace with God. The effectiveness and

reward of the Servant was in the fact that God had given him a people who would be saved and that this was his reward, a countless multitude of people who would be redeemed forever by the atoning work of the Servant.

THE ETERNITY OF THIS PURPOSE

This fruitful purpose was from eternity. The servant was cast down by the fact that the people were so unresponsive to his miracles done with so much love, and of the teaching which fell as drops of dew from his lips; but there was no need for this disappointment. It was never the purpose of God that he should just be another prophet, with the same unsuccessful ministry due to the sinfulness in the human heart. It was always the purpose of God that the Servant would be priest and sacrifice to take away the sin of the world.

The Servant's work was to offer himself in the place of sinners and make a full, perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world, and the fact that this was the eternal purpose of God is seen in the Servant reminding himself of the facts of the case. The Servant reminds himself that he was formed in the womb to be the Servant, who would humble himself in total servitude to do the will of God, and accept responsibility for the sins of the world in the place of others. He became man in order to do this and be the second Adam, and to do what the first Adam failed to do.

Because he was formed in the womb for this purpose, it follows with

utmost certainty that this was always the plan of God, and that all the promises of his coming had this purpose and work in view. From all eternity God had planned in sacrificial love to give his Son a ransom for many. All the sacrifices ordained through the Old Testament were simply a stop-gap, until his perfect purpose of salvation would be accomplished. Indeed all the temporary sacrifices were meant to be prophetic and conveying the message, that as there was no remission of sin without the shedding of blood, God had in hand the precious blood that would be shed, which would be sufficient to atone for all the sin of the world.

THE EFFECTIVENESS IN THIS REWARD

Notice the assurance of the words uttered by the Servant when he says 'to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself'. Gone is the depression and discouragement of the first part of the previous verse as the Servant is reminded of the real purpose of God for him.

His reward was this effective result that he would do what all the other prophets had tried so hard to do and so obviously failed to do. He would bring Israel back to the Lord. There was no strength in Israel to respond to exhortations to return to the Lord. This was why the prophets' messages were bound to fail. A message or command coming from outside, even with threatenings and promises, was bound to fail, and that for two reasons. Firstly, because there was no desire or motivation or even power to respond. The corruption of the human soul gives

all born into this world a bias away from God and a bias to sin and the world. It was sure to fail, secondly, because whatever new leaf was turned over in the lives of the people, there was no remedy in the message, to atone for the sin of the past, which was sufficient to cut the soul off from God forever.

The servant would truly bring Jacob back to the Lord, because he would remove forever, and completely, the barrier between the sinner and God. He would cancel the debt because of sin and satisfy all the demands of the law of God, and so remove all the guilt which keeps people from God. Further all this wonderful work was in the Servant's capable hands, leaving nothing in the hands of weak sinful humanity. Thus it would be effective and not prone to failure.

Further the Servant would bring the restoration of life. The gift of eternal life through his sacrifice is the gift of life that is created in righteousness and true holiness. Life that has fellowship with God, because it is holy. Life which can not be taken away, and which eternally brings the soul into fellowship with the creator, which fellowship had been lost by sin. A life which is to be born into the kingdom of heaven with all the joys and blessings which belong to this kingdom. A life which changes attitudes and actions in this earthly life, for never again will the sinful flesh have uninterrupted sway in the redeemed person's heart, because this new life asserts its will, and so makes it impossible for sin to have dominion any more over the ones the Servant has saved.

THE HONOUR IN THIS REWARD

How great is the honour done to the Servant by this reward given by God to him. There could not be any higher and more exalted office than the office of Saviour and Redeemer. There could be no greater and more honourable work than to save men and women from eternal death and hell. It was because of this, that when the servant had humbled himself and become obedient to death, God highly exalted him and gave him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth.

All creation looks upon the Servant and bows in wonder and adoration at the office he was given, and the perfection with which he has and is performing this office. But it is not just honour from creation, the Servant rejoices in the greatest of honour of all as he says 'I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord'. God the Father gives the greatest of eternal honour to the Son, and honours the Son before all, because the Son, as the Servant, was perfectly obedient to his will, performed all his saving purpose, and by it brought great glory to the name of God, the renown of God for all eternity, that God in wondrous sovereign love wrought a perfect and complete salvation for fallen mankind.

This honour was seen when Jesus ascended into heaven after finishing his work of atonement on earth. It was God who welcomed him back into glory as the victorious redeemer, and showed his pleasure and pronounced the

completeness of his grand work, by causing him to reign with him on the throne. The Servant Jesus was raised to sit at the right hand of God, there to reign until he had brought all his enemies under his feet.

GOD WAS IN THE VICTORY

God in his eternal purpose planned that the Servant, his only begotten Son, should make atonement for sin, so that he could be just in forgiving the sin of sinners, but God did not make the decree which the Son accepted so willingly, and then leave the Son to be on his own. This would have been a violation of the unity and love in the blessed and eternal Trinity.

The Father was involved. It is set forth here in the words expressing the reality known by the Servant 'and my God has been my strength'. God the Father sustained the Son in the work and the victory. It is true, as we read so vividly in the vision of the redeemer given in Isaiah 63, of the Saviour taking on all the forces of sin, represented by Edom, and that he trod the winepress of God's wrath alone, and executed all God's wrath against sin upon himself for he had to go alone into the fight as the second Adam; but it also true that though on the one hand God had to forsake the Saviour on the cross to execute the full punishment for sin, so that Jesus cried, 'My God, why have you forsaken me'; yet at the same time the Father was strengthening the Son that he may in no way fail to bear the full and complete punishment for sin.

This is what Jesus prayed for in the

Garden of Gethsemane, and in John 17 where he prayed in verse 1, 'Father, glorify your Son, that your Son might glorify you'. So the wonderful loving gracious purpose of God is seen in this reward for the Son. It was God in three persons that brought the Servant through to his reward so glorious.

CONCLUSION

So we see the real truth about the Servant, not the discouragement and apparent failure expressed in the first part of the previous verse, but this glorious reward, that he would perfect such a work of salvation that Israel would most certainly return to the Lord, because the servant would make it eternally possible, and effectively achieve it by the new life which is the result of the atonement for sin. It needs to be said at this point that in the context of the redeeming work of our Lord, the term Israel contemplates, not

the nation of Israel, but the elect of God both Jews and Gentiles who are the true Israel and the people of God.

New life must be the result of the atonement for sin, for once the guilt of sin is removed, there is no grounds for God to continue the curse where humanity is cast out of his presence. Once the barrier of sin is broken down, full and wonderful fellowship with God must necessarily follow. This is the great reward for the Servant. So being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There can be no greater name than Jesus, the Servant of God, for there is no greater work done than he did on the Cross. As he is honourable in the eyes of God, how much more we who benefit so richly from his work for us, should honour him and give him all the honour, which such blessing given to us demands.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

6 - THE WIDENESS OF THE SERVANTS REWARD

“He says, ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

IN ONE sense verses 5 and 6 of this glorious chapter should be taken together, but because of the amount of matter in them we have had to separate these verses into two meditations. You will remember from the previous meditation, that the Servant was rewarded with a great victory, which achieved complete atonement and salvation for his people. Instead of coming, like the prophets from outside, and exhorting the House of Israel to return to the Lord, he, through his perfect work, brought them back to the Lord, by a complete cancelling of the debt of their sin, and a renewing of their hearts to be in tune with God.

This is the great blessing of grace through the Saviour, the Servant of the Lord. All efforts of the prophets before were ineffective owing to the corruption of the human heart. The prophets could not provide atonement for the sins of the people, and the sacrifices the people offered were totally insufficient to cancel the debt of their sin, and satisfy the just demands of the law of God. The reward of the servant, the Lord Jesus

Christ, was that he did, by his dying and rising again, achieve a complete cancelling of sin and satisfying of the holy law of God, and so bringing his people into fellowship with God again with renewed hearts, so that Israel and Jacob are brought back to God, or at least the complete enabling was achieved so that they may be reconciled to God.

THE WIDENESS OF THE REWARD

In the Old Testament God was the God of the Israelites and not to the rest of the world. Their's were the covenants and the promises. Their's was the promise of the Messiah who was to come to save them. This at least was what the Jews believed from the election of Abraham who was their national father. It was true that in a very special way, throughout the Old Testament, the Jews were a very special people to God, and were known amongst the nations as God's chosen people in consequence. Because of this they had come to believe that God's blessings were exclusively reserved for them and

for no one else.

This was always a superficial understanding of their election, because Abraham's seed, the Messiah, was to be a blessing to the nations, and in this sense Abraham was to be the father of many nations. This was the promise made to Abraham when his name was changed from Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:5). The Bible always looks upon the true fatherhood of Abraham to be that of a spiritual people, the redeemed in Christ, out of all nations and peoples. Thus it was never the purpose of God that the Servant Messiah should be just the redeemer of Israel, but of the world. This is what is affirmed in the text before us now.

Although in verse 5 God speaks to the prevalent understanding of the Jews that God was the God of the Israelites only, this was always too small a thing for the Servant of the Lord to perform. His reward was to be much greater, and this is what God affirms in our verse, verse 6. It was always too small a work for Jesus to save only the Jews. He was always to be the Saviour of the world. It is strange how the Jews always missed this or refused to see it, because this purpose of God was being constantly declared to them throughout the Old Testament. Thus it is told and revealed here that the servant should be "light to lighten the Gentiles", and that he was to "bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth."

AN ETERNAL PURPOSE

We have seen already that this had been declared concerning the Messiah from the earliest time. At the time of the

promise at the occasion of the Fall of humanity in Adam and Eve, God made his promise of the seed of the woman crushing the serpent's head, and thus, because Jesus was the seed of the woman, and Eve the mother of all living, this promise was to all Adam and Eve's posterity, and not just to a small part of it.

If it was simply God's purpose to save the Jewish Nation through the Messiah, Jesus, this servant of the Lord, then when the Messiah came God was singularly unsuccessful in bringing them back to himself. Jesus preached and healed and loved them, but in the end they shouted "Crucify him", and in blackmailing Pontius Pilate into their desire, they rejected this Servant of the Lord. The Chief Priest of the day took responsibility for this rejection, not only upon himself but upon all the nation and their posterity. The Messiah had come, and the Messiah had been rejected, and the Jews as a nation were not brought back to God.

If just the salvation of the Jews as a nation was the mission of the Messiah, then he singularly failed. The fact is that this was never the mission of the Messiah. He came to redeem a spiritual Israel, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and this he was to do and so did by giving his life a ransom for them. Because this redeemed Israel were totally unable to save themselves, and were totally disinclined in themselves to be saved, the Servant of the Lord was made by God their complete redeemer. Not only does he pay the price of their sins and so reconcile them to God, but, just as being in the first Adam they

suffered his death and guilt, so they die and rise again in him, the second Adam, to newness of life, and are newly created in righteousness and true holiness. The Servant truly restores the new redeemed people of God by a total salvation that does everything that they may be saved.

THE REAL PURPOSE FOR THE JEWS

But what of the Jews? Was their election in the Old Testament a fiction? Certainly not! Their election was very real, and the privileges it brought them were real. Throughout the Old Testament period, God was very much their God and dealt graciously with them. He kept them so they remained a nation set apart up to the time the Servant of the Lord came. When Jesus was born, the purpose of the election of the Jews as a nation was ended. The election was to insure the coming 'seed' (Galatians 3:16). When the 'seed' had come the reason for their election was over. If the Jews had had a right attitude to the promise of their Messiah, and had not taken to themselves a false pride in their position before God due to their election, they would have entered, no doubt, into the New Testament age, welcoming their Messiah as the Saviour of the world, and welcoming the Gentiles into fellowship with them. But in fact they did not, and so when the Servant came they found him unacceptable, and they rejected him. Because of this God also rejected them. Jesus declares this rejection in St. Matthew 23:38, "Look, your house is left to you desolate", and in the next verse "For I tell you, you will not see me

again ..." indicating that their peculiar position as an elect nation was now forfeit, and to look for their Messiah in the terms of King coming to making their nation top in the world would never take place.

But does this mean that God has rejected the Jew and cast them off for ever. In no way! The close of Matthew 23:39 indicates that they are now in the same position as all the rest of the world. As individuals, like every one else in the world, they would find their Saviour Messiah when they were ready to own Jesus as Saviour, and own that God had sent him as Saviour, and that he was one who had worked out eternal salvation for them. This is embodied in the words of verse 39 of Matthew "until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". They had to change their attitude to Jesus and acknowledge that he was and is the Servant of the Lord and sent by God to save them. Unless they are ready to do this then they will never see their Messiah again. But if they are ready then he will very much reveal himself to them as Saviour and Lord, and in no way less than to the Gentiles.

The previous verse 5 of Isaiah 49 indicates this. The Servant was to be the redeemer of the Jews as well as the Gentiles. He came as Saviour to all Adam's race. How this understanding of the place of the Jew is seen to be reasonable. They are not excluded in any way from the benefits of Salvation, and nor are they treated in some special way that gives them privileges above the rest of the world.

VICTORIOUS SERVANT

There is assured victory in this declaration of God concerning his Servant. The words are that God “will make you a light to the Gentiles, and that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth”. God expresses his plan and purpose for the servant. This is that his servant would be the Saviour of the world. God declares he will engage to bring this about. God’s power and predestination is expressed. There is no doubt about the outcome, God will make his servant victorious in this great work of salvation.

The very fact that the time came for the fulfilment of this great project, and that the servant fully achieved this purpose at that time, is the indication of the certainty of the victory. Nothing is left to chance. If it were, or if God were impotent against the forces set against him, salvation would have always been uncertain, and if there was this impotence in God then our perseverance in grace and salvation would be in doubt. However, God says, “He will make” the servant a victorious Saviour and so not only is the working out of Salvation completed at the cross, but the salvation of the elect included in this certainty and their final perseverance to the end. When God says he will make, it declares a absolute certainty. Let us get hold of this and praise him for such a sure means of life.

As we see the whole earth included in salvation, it leads us also to see the real conflict with which God and his servant were engaged. It is the spiritual forces behind humanity which hold people in bondage and death that is the

real problem. If the servant is to be made victorious, then it is in the battle with Satan and all the forces behind him that must be overcome. Also if that which gives Satan power over fallen humanity is the broken law of God this must also be fully satisfied.

The wonder of the great power and wisdom and sovereignty of God is seen in the way the victory was won. Satan, by his own free and evil will sought to defeat the purpose of God by the death of the Servant, but this was the purpose of God for the deliverance from Satan. Although Satan was doing his own thing, yet God turned that evil to his own ends to achieve Satan’s defeat. This illuminates how God’s sovereignty and freewill and responsibility go together, and the certainty of the purpose of God does not in the end overthrow freewill and responsibility. This sovereignty and human freewill and responsibility is illustrated in Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:23 expresses this in the following words “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

SERVANT DESIGNATED FOR THE WORLD

What a glorious cosmic picture is given here of the purpose of God concerning the Servant as the Saviour of the world. God and his servant are not concerned with small things, nor just pockets of human failure and degradation, but with the whole cosmic problem of sin in the world. The

purpose of God in redemption encompasses the whole of the earth, and anything else is too small and unworthy of his great wisdom and love.

How this enhances the great love of God. God is the one offended, and his creation spoiled. It is Adam's race that have caused this tremendous offence. For God to think of saving just a few would have been incredible love, but this is too small for the love of God. His love encompasses the whole earth. This is the love of the Servant also, for he is one with the Father in all this purpose.

In the same way we have opened to us the immensity and wideness of God's

grace. Just as the heart of God surrounds the whole earth so does his mercy. We cannot have too large a view of God in his power, love and grace. His power is sufficient to bring salvation to the whole earth, and his love and grace are large enough to enfold the whole of the world.

CONCLUSION

What wondrous assurance and consolation is this that God has given his servant for all of mankind. It would have been a terrible thing if God had only elected the Jews. His love reaches to every race, colour and nation, and because of this the Gospel has been brought to you and me.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

7 - THE HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION OF THE SERVANT

This is what the Lord says - the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel - to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and arise, princes will see and bow down, because the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy one of Israel, who has chosen you."

Isaiah 49:7

IN THE last two verses of this chapter of Isaiah we have heard the Lord declaring and appointing the Servant to be the Saviour of the world. It was far too small a task for Jesus to be just the Saviour of the Israelites. It was far too small a concept in God that God should send a Saviour for anything less than for all the nations upon earth. In the verse before us we have God's way of Salvation, the Lord setting forth the humiliation and exaltation of the Servant. It is a prophecy of the cross, resurrection, ascension and glorification of the Saviour, of how the servant would accomplish the salvation of the world. How mind stretching is this certainty of purpose in God, and the certainty of its accomplishment. The servant was chosen for this great work, and there is no doubt, at any time, that the servant would accomplish this glorious work of salvation.

THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION

In this text it is God the Lord who is speaking, and in this we see that God is the author of salvation. The Servant,

who we know from the New Testament as the Lord Jesus, is indeed the Saviour, but it is God from whom salvation originates. He is the one who chooses the servant for this task.

We may be tempted to think of God simply as the judge of all the earth, and in distinction we may be tempted to think of Jesus simply as one who saves us from the wrath and judgement of God. This is not untrue as far as it goes, but it paints God as one not very much concerned with the plight of sinners, and without love, whereas Jesus is the one alone who loves and cares.

This verse in its beginning and end corrects this view. Who is the Redeemer? It is God. The Lord who speaks, reveals himself as the Redeemer and the Holy One. As the Holy One God cannot condone sin, nor can he overlook it, or in justice leave it unpunished. However though he is the Holy One, he is the Holy One who cares and loves sinners, and knowing they can not pay the price of their debt to his law, takes it upon himself to pay the debt. He redeems sinners from their

debt to his holy law, so that he in love may forgive and accept them. He does what he knows the sinner cannot do, and this is a demonstration of his mercy and grace. God is both Redeemer and the Holy One.

In the title redeemer is wrapped up all the infinite mercy, grace and love that is in God. God did not shirk in anyway the enormous cost of being the author of salvation and providing redemption. Redemption always has cost. To redeem the redemption price must be paid. In this case the redemption price was the life of God's only begotten and well-beloved Son. Because there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, and no other sufficiently valuable to pay the price of sin, God in infinite love gave his Son to die and bear the sinner's guilt on the cross. This is the burden of the Gospel verse John 3:16 - God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

So God reveals himself here in his true colours. As the Holy One he must judge sin, but because he loved us with so great a love, and knowing we have no way of satisfying his law ourselves, he takes the infinite cost upon himself, and bears all the pain and loss. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This act of God, which reveals his true character and attitude towards us, is further supported by the end of this verse. A redeemer needed to be provided. The only one who could be redeemer was his Son, the second

person of the Trinity. So God chose him to be the servant, and so chose him for the humiliation and eventual exaltation which was involved in this redemption. Never let us think of God as one who only condemns. No! God is the redeemer and he pours out grace and love and salvation upon sinners. Although the Servant is the Saviour, God is the redeemer who is the author of Salvation.

THE SERVANT HUMILIATED

How does God, as redeemer, save? It is through the humiliation of the Servant, his Son and well-beloved. This humiliation is described in our text by the words "who was despised and abhorred by the nation."

Again we have the prophecy, several hundred years before it took place, of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this verse the description of the Servant is mirrored in the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:6-11. Being prophesied in such words we can see that the way, the only way, for salvation to be won was through the humiliation and death of the Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter tells us in his sermon on the day of Pentecost that Jesus was delivered up to those who humiliated him by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God. This intense suffering was what the Son agreed with the Father to undertake before the world was.

The first part of what God says in verse seven about the servant is that, although he was the Servant sent by God, and was the divine and eternal Son of God, not only would he be

despised but abhorred and hated by men. He was despised and abhorred by the Nation is what the text says, and this nation must have been the Jews to whom he had been specially promised all down the history of the Old Testament, but even though the Jews are specially mentioned in this way, there is no doubt that the despising was done by the rest of the world as well. When Jesus was taken captive and tried, the Romans were just as much involved in the crime as the Jews, and if anything they despised the Servant even more than the Jews.

The wonder of this humiliation can be seen when we consider that the ones who did the despising were really the ones to be despised, whereas the Servant was, by his origin and his character, to be honoured and acclaimed. Yet it was the redeeming grace and love of God the Holy One, and Jesus, the Son and Servant, that the Servant was willing to be despised in order to bring salvation to sinners.

The nature of redemption is therefore embedded in this humiliation, and set forth in it. The way of redemption was by substitution. The glorious Son of God had to become man, and take our nature, and then in mercy take our place, bearing our sins and taking upon himself our guilt, and in our place bearing all the demerit and punishment and debt of our sin, and so satisfying the holy law of the Holy One, thus setting us free from condemnation, judgement and death.

Notice how the humiliation of the servant, in the way the Lord speaks, is accepted as a fact and inevitable. In

Isaiah 53 we have this substitution more fully declared when we are told that he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, that the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. The inevitableness of this humiliation is in the fact that this was the plan of God, being the only way God could accomplish his aim of redeeming sinners, so also in Isaiah 53 we read that it pleased the Lord to bruise him.

There are times, at least I find it so to my great sorrow, that because of circumstances in my life at a particular time, and because of the circumstances in the world, that I am tempted to view the Holy One as if he were a hard and implacable Lord and master, dealing out rebuke and punishment, without any mercy or grace. When we look into the humiliation of the Servant, and that it was God as well as the Servant who was willing to give, in such a sacrifice of love, any views of God as without mercy and love must fade away, and in its place come a sense of the enveloping love and compassion of the Holy One.

Wonder of wonders that the King of kings and Lord of Lords was ready to become the servant of sinful earthly rulers in order to save them and mankind.

THE EXALTATION OF THE SERVANT

The exaltation of the servant is expressed in our text in the words "Kings will see you and arise, princes will see you and bow down."

This is what St. Paul's declares in Philippians where he says, "Therefore

God exalted him to the highest place that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ...". When our text speaks of Princes and Kings giving honour, it is in the terms which royalty was in the days of the Old Testament. For the prince to acknowledge the Servant means also that the people he rules do so also. That kings shall arise in his presence, indicates that they honour him as higher than themselves and worthy of greater praise. For princes to bow down indicates that the Servant is to become a person to be worshipped for his position and for the greatness of his achievements.

It is glorious to hear these words, for it indicates the certainty and sovereignty of God's plan of redemption. God declares that the Servant will be raised to this honour, position and worship. God prophesies that it will be so, and for God to so foretell, means that God engages that it will be so. Again, although the Servant at the time of his humiliation suffered alone as the second Adam, and knew the judgement of God and separation from God on account of sin in his humanity, yet still God engaged his almighty power that he would not fail, for as we have seen, God is the redeemer and he cannot allow any failure in his gracious purpose of ransoming sinners.

There can be no doubt that here we have a prophecy of the victorious exaltation of the Servant Son after he had most completely and gloriously met all the demands of God's law for sinners, and brought in everlasting atonement. His victory was none other than being raised, ascending to the

glory he gave up to suffer humiliation, and being seated at the right hand of God on the throne of heaven, in order that he may make his salvation effective in lives he had come to redeem, whom the Father had given him before the foundation of the world.

This arising and bowing down of kings and princes, etc. is firstly indicative of the honour God gives Jesus in heaven over all. Jesus is now in the highest place seated at the right hand of God, before whom every knee should bow. It is secondly the effective calling by his Spirit of souls from sin to salvation, so in repentance and faith they own him Lord and Saviour. It is thirdly the looking forward to his second coming to judge the earth, where all creation shall see him in the clouds of the air coming in power and great glory, and not only will the saints, that is believers, be raised to reign with him for ever in glory, but all the unbelieving world, who have denied him honour and deity, will bow down before him and own him God and judge.

This position of honour and glory is our Lord Jesus' exaltation even now and has been ever since he ascended to glory after his glorious resurrection from the dead. He shall reign, the apostle Paul tells us, until he has put all his enemies under his feet, and Satan and death is destroyed forever. It is the wonder of his achievement in salvation that is his glory, and the glory of God, and will be the new song of the redeemed, which only the redeemed will be able to sing, for all eternity when they give glory to the glorified Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ.

BECAUSE OF THE LORD

These four words - 'because of the Lord' - at the end of our text, just ring with power and glory. These words describe why the Servant will be victorious, and come through his humiliation to his great exaltation. The victory of the Servant, the victory of the death, resurrection, ascension and glorification of our Lord Jesus is because of the Lord, the Holy One.

The words which follow, giving a description of the Holy One, "who is faithful", marks out the fact that the victory of the Servant was promised and purposed by the Lord in his eternal purpose of love and grace, and therefore because the Lord is faithful, that victory could not fail to be achieved. Thus the power of the almighty Father was engaged with the Son to achieve this great victory which brings so much blessing to this world of defeat.

The servant had been chosen for the task by the Lord, so the Lord would not let him fail. Again we have the strength of the declaration which we considered at the beginning of this meditation, of the Lord as the redeemer. God the Father was and is engaged in the victory of the Servant, because it is in the heart of God to save. It is God's character to love and be merciful, as well as just and holy, and his desire is that sinners should be saved. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked.

So we see that God is not only faithful to the servant, his only begotten Son, that he should not fail but be

victorious, but he is faithful to himself and his desire to show effective love, grace and mercy, and that he would not fail to provide everlasting salvation for those who are unable to save themselves, or do anything whatsoever to deliver themselves from his just wrath against sin.

If we are ever in doubt of the great love and mercy of God to us sinners, let us consider this verse. God is the redeemer in no less way than the Son is the redeemer. The Father conceived redemption, and the Son accomplished redemption. Also the Spirit applies redemption, but this is one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and this one God is the redeemer, who conceived and worked out this redemption because of his great love wherewith he loved us.

Let us take this to heart and never separate, even in our thinking, the persons of the Trinity, the one true God. The truth is that God so loved the world. We sing 'Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly.' We can just as well and as truly sing, 'God, the lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly'. Yet perhaps we feel that in coming to Jesus there is all sympathy and forgiving love, whereas in coming to God there is fear. It is true that we come to the Father through the Son, and that it is the Son, through his effective mediation, and by virtue of his death, that wins our approach to the Holy One; but it is the Father that chose the Son for this work, and the faithfulness of the Father that brought the Son through to victory, and the faithfulness of the Holy One to his grand purpose to save, that assured the victory of the Son. God is love, Father, Son and Spirit.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

8 - THE TIME OF GOD'S FAVOUR

"This is what the Lord says: In the time of my favour I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and make you to be a Covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"

Isaiah 49:8,9a

IN THIS section of this chapter in Isaiah the Lord is speaking. At first we may suppose that the Lord is speaking to Isaiah and of some deliverance promised through the prophet for Israel. However, we know of no such deliverance for Israel in Isaiah's day, nor of Isaiah being a Saviour. Further we have found that this prophecy is concerning the Servant of the Lord - the Messiah. Further in this verse before us the Lord says 'I will make you a covenant for the people'. From all these considerations we must come to the conclusion that the Lord is speaking of and to the Servant, who is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The next thing that we have to establish is what period of Christ's life the prophecy is concerned with. The Lord tells us it is in the time of his favour. For this reason and because the servant is to be made a covenant for the people, I would say that this verse and half a verse is speaking about the time of Christ's humiliation and the time he worked Salvation. This is the time of God's favour to the world. With this

introduction we can now see the wonderful revelation we have here concerning the time of the Lord's favour for the world.

GOD'S TIME

As we see again and again in Scripture concerning redemption, God planned it and there was a determined time when it would be carried out. Here in our text this fact is mentioned again. The Lord says, "In the time of my favour ...". This is the time appointed when God had purposed to send forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law..." (Galatians 4:4). How beautiful is the way God speaks of this time. It is the time when his favour is poured out on this world of sin. It is the time of the opening of grace, his unmerited favour, to save sinners from the eternal consequences of their sin. It is a time of great blessing for the world. The incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus was a time of the favour of the Lord being shown to the world so that his favour may always be available in the Saviour.

GOD'S ACTION

God was sending the Servant of the Lord into battle with the powers of darkness when Jesus came into this world, born of a virgin. It was a time of enormous spiritual conflict. Jesus was to engage in the severest and most important warfare of all time. He was to take on the enemies of sin, Satan, death and hell, and deliver the world from them. This was a task of awful proportions, but notice the promise of the Lord to the Servant.

God is not inactive. God does not make a plan and then be totally unconcerned how it is to be accomplished. The ways of God are not like this. The three persons of the Trinity are in this time of favour together. There is no doubt of the wounds and weariness of the battle, for the Lord indicates that the Servant will be crying out to the Father in the fierce heat of the conflict. Throughout the life of Jesus we read of him in the Gospels going apart by himself to pray. In the temptations early in his ministry we see something of the severity of the conflict. Jesus went apart to cry to the Father that he may not fail; that he might not fail in keeping the whole law for us who cannot keep it. If Jesus had sinned even once, he would have been destroyed as the Saviour.

We see Jesus praying in John 17, and we feel the agony of the conflict when Jesus prays so earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest and crucifixion. This is a glimpse into the ordeal of the Servant which is expressed more explicitly in Hebrews 5:7 - "During the days of Jesus' life on

earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud crys and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission". This statement is what we can deduce from our text in Isaiah. The Lord promised to hear Jesus at this time of God's favour for the world.

The next clause speaks of the Lord helping Jesus in this task of bringing in salvation. What was this help? The text above from Hebrews speaks of Jesus praying that he would be delivered from death. This was not a prayer that he would be saved from dying on the cross. This would have been totally impossible, for without the experience of the cross there would be no atonement for sin - the time of favour would not be accomplished. The cry of Jesus is that he may be brought through death to resurrection. It is a prayer for aid from the Father so that he may go through the conflict with victory. He prayed that God may so aid him in the ordeal and the battle that death would be defeated and victory won. This is in fact what happened. God's promise in our text from Isaiah was fulfilled, for we read in Acts 2:24 "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep hold of him.

What a tremendous statement for us is this phrase, 'it was impossible for death to keep hold of him'. It has all the assured victory of Christ. The meaning expressed here is not that, Jesus being God, it was impossible for him to remain dead. If this was the meaning it would make his atoning sacrifice a farce

and unreal. No! it is an expression of the fact that the reason for death had been fully met by Jesus in his dying, so death could not any more hold Jesus in its power. Jesus when he was dying on the cross was dying as the second Adam, as the substitute and representative of his people. If he had not fully atoned for sin he would have had to remain dead. This was the reality of what he was doing on the cross. The fact that it was impossible for death to hold him, tells of the fact that Jesus exhausted all that causes death and ended death forever. It is because of the victory of Jesus, that in the same way, for all who believe on Jesus, it is impossible for death to hold us. There is, because of Christ, no reason for death any more.

This scripture we are considering in Isaiah is a wonderful declaration and revelation of the time of favour - the conflict of Christ and the ultimate victory which brought God's favour for the world.

GOD'S PROMISE OF VICTORY

The next part of our text carries on this theme of assured victory. The Lord promises concerning the Servant "I will keep you and make you a Covenant for the people". The Covenant is the promise of God to provide redemption and salvation from the consequences of sin. In the Old Testament this Covenant was not only promised, but given a focus in the sacrificial system. Sacrifices for sin had to be made continually for the forgiveness of the sins of the people, but they were not only an awful and bloody sight

purposed to show the seriousness of sin, but they were also ineffective for the accomplishment of their purpose. All this suffering of the animal creation and the loss it meant for humanity was ultimately in vain. In them there was no real and permanent atonement for sin. The Covenant was the bringing in the end of sacrifices by the Lord Jesus, who would offer the most awful and costly sacrifice for sin, and end all the need for sacrifice for sin in the future, because his sacrifice was a full and complete sacrifice for sin. We have this expressed in Daniel 9:27.

Thus we have this promise of Victory that God would cause the servant to work. So the Servant becomes the Covenant. Just as the Passover Lamb is referred to as the Passover, because through its dying the destroying angel passed over the sins of the Israelites and they were saved from God's judgement, so Jesus is called here the Covenant, because he was the Lamb for sacrifice for the Covenant. (Exodus 12:11). In a similar way the communion cup is spoken of as the communion of the blood of Christ in 1 Corinthians 10:16.

Jesus thus is promised in our text as the one who provides, for all who believe on him, eternal redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of life, which is fellowship with God.

The Victory is further expressed in the next clause of the verse before us in Isaiah - "to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritance". What is this referring to? The desolation of the land is a way of expressing the desolation that was brought upon all

flesh, not just humanity, by the fall of Adam. This curse caused humanity to be cut off from God and brought under the sentence of death, but also the ground was cursed as well. Paul tells us how the creation has groaned and travailed in pain because of this curse (Romans 8:19-22), and also in this passage of his Roman letter, Paul tells how, in Christ and his redemption, the desolation is repaired, and the creation looks forward to the fulfilment of this promise at the creation of the new heaven and earth when Christ returns to judge the earth.

GOD'S PROMISE CONCERNING CHRIST

The last clause of this scripture in Isaiah that we are looking at speaks of the blessing that the favour of God will introduce into the world.

God is to help the Servant so that he may win such a victory that he may be able "to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness 'Be free!'" There can be no doubt that what we are being told here is a description of what the blessings will be which come from Christ's victory. It is an actual spiritual view of reality.

Because Satan became the god of this world through Adam's sin, the whole world is under the dominion of Satan. We read that the whole world lies in the evil one. So human beings are in captivity. Far from being free agents, everyone born into the world is under chains to Satan. It is a strange thing that everyone believes they are free, and that if they come to Christ they will lose their freedom, but this is the devil's lie. The

truth is quite the opposite. It is Christ who sets us free. This captivity can be seen. Firstly, it shuts us from the best in life - that is the spiritual realm and the blessings of God. Secondly, this captivity is seen in that we have no ability to turn to God and escape from the world. Thirdly it is seen in the chains which bind us in the corruption of our nature, which makes our thinking, however clever we are, deficient so that we cannot see life from the right perspective, and also we are unable to truly love what is good and hate what is evil. Satan is very clever. He allows us much good, so that we can say we hate this wrong or that wrong, and would never commit it, but there are areas in all our lives where we are totally unable to desire what is good and to overcome the bias to wrong within. Fourthly, this captivity is in the fact that we belong to Satan by right because of our sins, and we are captive to the sentence of death God pronounces on all sinners.

Jesus, by the work he accomplished through the mighty hand of God, removes all the claims that Satan has upon us, and so sets the captive free. He leads those who were captive to Satan to freedom and into the blessing of his own loving captivity (Ephesians 4:8).

Then because of the fall in Adam the world is in darkness. The separation from God which was the result of Adam's sin shuts the world off from the light of God. We are dead in spirit and so there is nothing in us naturally that can appreciate the light of God and the spiritual realm. The freedom that comes from Christ, which is declared

here in Isaiah is the light which comes from new birth. We can in Christ be born again spiritually of the Spirit of God, giving new life within us which is created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. This is to be born into the spiritual realm of God and this realm can therefore be experienced, known and tasted. The spiritual realm is experienced only partially while we still live in our earthly body, but we are truly raised to sit in heavenly places with Christ, and heaven is real to us and its life.

God's favour, the time when Christ entered this world to be the Saviour of the world. This is the reality which Christ won by the help of the Father; and this is favour that is now available to all who will receive Christ, for as many as received him, God gave the right to be called children of God (John 1:12). This is the favour that all of us who are believers live in. Let us so enter into the truth of it that it may be an ever increasing source of blessing and strength for us, and continuing and increasing pleasure of knowing God.

CONCLUSION

This is the truth about the time of

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD
Meditations on Isaiah 49:1-12

9 - THE TIME OF GOD'S BLESSING

"They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger or thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them besides streams of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads and my highways will be raised up. See, they will come from afar - some from the north and some from the west, some from the region of Sinim."

Isaiah 49:9b-12

A GAIN AS we come to these last verses in this part of Isaiah concerning the Servant of the Lord, we need to establish exactly what these words apply to. On the surface, particularly as all the imagery is in concrete temporal terms, it would seem that the prophecy is concerned with some restoration of the people of Israel after a period of captivity and trial. There is no reason why this should not be so in part. Most, if not all, prophecy in the Bible has a progressive application, where it can refer to more than one period of time and more than one time of blessing. However I do not believe that this is the chief application here.

We have seen that the chapter opens with very distinct revelation concerning the Servant of the Lord, who we have rightly identified as our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In the last meditation on verses 8-9a we identified the words of restoration as being fulfilled in Christ because it speaks of things which are only truly fulfilled in Christ spiritually, and again

the one spoken of is made a covenant for the people, that is a Saviour in the terms of God's eternal promise of salvation. The verses before us are definitely a continuation of the prophecy of the preceding verses, and therefore conclude that they also refer to the spiritual blessings of the reign of the Messiah.

We saw verses 8-9a in terms of the salvation brought about by our Lord Jesus Christ in his doing and dying here on earth, and we also saw verse 9a as speaking very definitely of the deliverance from Satan's bondage by the Saviour, which is the work of conversion and new birth, where Jesus pays the price of all our sin, so that Satan can have no more hold on us, and the Law of God can no more condemn us, and we are reconciled to God. Verses 9b to 12 go on from there, and speak of all the blessings that Christ provides for his redeemed people in the earthly pilgrimage to heaven, and indeed speaks in such terms that we are even taken into the experience of the glory of heaven. Verse 12 also speaks of

the blessing of salvation being extended to a vast number of people who are being saved by the grace and power of the Saviour.

THE IMAGERY OF THESE VERSES

It is good first of all to look at the verses and the imagery that is used, because this will give a lovely impression of the love and goodness of God in his grace flowing to us.

The imagery is all in nature and the countryside and in the first place is concerned with abundant provision. God's promise is to place his people in pleasant places where the climate is kind and warm, and where there is an abundance of food. Then as we proceed, the imagery changes to the business of journeying and there is a beautiful picture of the Lord smoothing the way, and making it easy, and at the same time providing refreshment at the appropriate places along the way, and rest for a while. It is a wonderful picture of the loving care God promises for his people. In this we get a kind and beautiful revelation of God, which Satan would try and makes us miss, forget or ignore.

There are two things further about the Lord that come through in these verses and which are precious. The first is the activeness of the Lord in loving care of his people. He is not one who gives things, but stands back himself in a disinterested way. The picture is of God amongst his people actively concerned for their welfare and providing and protecting right there in the midst of them. The other thought about God

which is revealed is of the Lord engaging to be the provider for his people and also the guide of his people. He is not one who gives some resources and then lets us get on with life in our own strength. Rather the Lord Jesus is one who engages to protect and guide his people and be their strength and daily salvation. This is the concept which the imagery of Jesus as the Shepherd in John 10 and of Jesus as the Vine in John 15 also convey. He is a leader and God who knows our frailty, and that we cannot live savingly and rightly on our own, and he engages to keep us in the right way, and provide all we need for this purpose.

The last verse speaks of the openness of the Lord to welcome all those who seek him, and of the fact that the Holy Spirit makes the beauty of the Lord visible to many, many people and cause them to desire to come to him. The words of Psalm 34:10 "They that seek the Lord will lack no good thing" is a clear support of this revelation.

SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT AND PROTECTION

Now let us look at the three divisions of this section of Isaiah 49. The first is from verse 9b to 10a. The words speak of the supply of plenty of food, and comfort from the trials and hardships of life.

When we get to heaven, then this condition of blessing and joy will be ours to perfection. Not until then will the fulness of this promise be known. Further the words look more at the people of God collectively as the

church, than of individual Christians, although in a real sense, what is said for the church as a whole must also be applicable to each individual Christian.

What is the spiritual nourishment which we know through Christ in our Christian lives? The promise essentially is a promise that the church will never be without the necessary gifts and nourishment that it needs to persevere in the walk of life.

Firstly, with regard to spiritual food, we have the provision of Christ that he would preserve his church in the heavenly doctrine which saves the soul. This is the spiritual food and nourishment that feeds the church. In Ephesians 4:7-16 Christ promises such grace to his people that they will be provided with the teachers and ministers so that they may be kept in the way of truth, that is the truth that in Christ is all things sufficient for our acceptance with God and our continuing in the faith. It is this grace that causes the people of God to grow and the body of Christ the church to be united, and the church to be built up in the knowledge of God. It is this spiritual nourishment that keeps the church healthy and safe from all the ills that the evil one may bring, and free from the uncertainties which are in the world. It is the grace of the spiritual food which builds the church up into complete health and development.

Further God has promised to his church, and this is revealed by Jesus in John 14 to 16, that he will cause the Holy Spirit to dwell within his people in order to guide them into all truth, and so nourish their spiritual lives on the

Word of God. It is important, therefore, that we use the means of grace, that is daily feeding on the Word of God, and seeking the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit; and also to never neglect meeting with the church to hear the Word of God preached and expounded in the way indicated by the promise of grace to the church mentioned above from Ephesians 4. In this case it is important to find a church where the Word of God is preached faithfully under the grace of God powerfully working in the preacher. This is not always possible. Even in this enlightened land of England, where there are Christian churches everywhere, it still is not always possible in the spiritual deadness prevalent in some churches today, to find a congregation where the Gospel is truly expounded. In such a case we need to seek special grace from God that we may find nourishment in our own reading of the Bible and in the books we are led to read.

Secondly there is the promise of spiritual protection and care which is found in the words 'nor will the desert heat or sun beat upon them.' The protection which Christ gives to his church is in two directions. It is from the temptations and assaults of the devil on the one hand, and from the persecutions of the world on the other. The moment we believe, there is danger from both these directions. We are hated by the world and under the direct target of Satan. We are protected from Satan's assault by the armour of God which Paul details for us in Ephesians 6:10-18. This is the Gospel of Christ to defend us, and the Word of God to fight back with. Jesus gave us example of the use of

the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, when he answered the devil with the word of God, when tempted in the wilderness, saying 'it is written'. Jesus warned his church of the hate of the world in John 15:18-27 and he assures us that the antidote to this affliction is the gift of the Holy Spirit who is our Counsellor, who leads us into all truth, and will testify of Christ, and bring to the afflicted soul the assurance of the presence and love of Christ.

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE AND SAFETY

The second section is concerned with guidance and safety and is found in verses 10b to 11. This promise has in mind how easily we can be led astray and find ourselves on the wrong road. It has in mind the fact that the journey to the promised land of heaven is too difficult for us unless the way is made more easy. It further assures us of the compassion of the Lord in our weaknesses in the journey of life.

This section commences with this wonderful assurance concerning the Lord. He is the one who has compassion on us. This is the compassion which we are led to behold in the parable Jesus tells of the Good Shepherd who goes out to seek the sheep who is lost in Luke 15:3-7. The shepherd understands how easily the sheep goes astray, and is ready to seek and bring back the sheep into the safety of the right way and the shepherd's care, without chiding and anger. Then in the likening which Christ gives of himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10, we have the assurance that Christ goes before his

sheep to lead them in the right way, and into pasture in order to sustain them, and so loves them that he knows each sheep by name. Like the shepherds of Palestine, Jesus lives with his sheep all the time leading and guiding, providing and caring. The times of spiritual refreshment, when the journey is hard and we need rest, and the way that Christ leads us to lie down beside still water, is beautifully set forth in the experience of David which he writes about in Psalm 23.

Christ has also assured us that there will be grace sufficient for every contingency in life. The Apostle Paul speaks of being told by the Lord, and finding it true in his experience, that God's grace is sufficient in all circumstances. Then in 1 Corinthians 10:13 the apostle reminds us that there is no temptation or testing that befalls us that is not within the experience of mankind, and that God is always tempering our experience and giving us grace so that no time of testing is beyond our strength and the grace given for us to overcome. The Apostle Paul also speaks in Romans 5:2 of the grace in which we stand. This is the fact that we are children of God through Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of God, and that we are thus under the care and protection of the King, and provided with such blessings as to make the way ahead easier and the journey full of joy.

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

This last section which is verse 12 is a promise that the church of God will

grow as the Lord adds to it daily those who are being saved.

The church is not a static body. The church is a people who are steadily being led higher to their destiny in heaven, and being made more fit each day for that high destiny by the work of God within them. The church also is a body that is ever increasing. God is adding to his church those who have been elect before the foundation of the world. Thus in the experience of time, the people of God are increasing in number as more and more people seek the Lord and come to faith. We are always finding there are new members of the family to come to know and to have fellowship with.

This is a promise that the church of God will never die or be overwhelmed. In every period of history there will always be those coming to the Lord and being saved, even in the hardest times for the church, when the world and the devil seem to be winning the day. There will be other times, those glorious times of revival, when those coming from afar will be coming in great numbers and the church will be visibly seen to be triumphing over the world.

The reference to people coming

from afar can be interpreted as being the fact that we could not be farther from the heavenly country when we are still in the kingdom of this world. As we come from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God, from darkness to light, we come from a far country and are brought near to God.

CONCLUSION

This last section is a wonderful promise from our Lord Jesus of his provision and protection of his church, and the assurance that he is with and in his church by the Holy Spirit to sustain each believer to glory. There may be times when the promises of these verses in Isaiah seem to be hardly realised, but the fact is Jesus is still honouring these promises even though we may not be able to see or feel it. We shall find when we do eventually get to glory, that there was no time when Jesus was not feeding us, and no time when he was not ordering things so we may accomplish within our strength the journey before us.

So let us read these promises before us in these verses in Isaiah with a believing and thankful heart, and refresh our souls and raise our spirits thereby.