

# Prayer Fuel from the Servant Songs of Isaiah.

by Elizabeth Kendal, April 2020

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Originally written for Easter, these short reflections focus on the promises linked to the person and work of God's Servant – the Lord Jesus Christ – in order to address the hope-deficit plaguing contemporary Christianity.

It is all too common today for Christians to have hope in 'heaven' (usually imagined as a future home beyond the clouds) but no hope at all for this divinely crafted and greatly loved world (κόσμος, *kosmos*, John 3:16) in which we live. In this thinking, the Church becomes something like a 'waiting room' into which the saved retreat. Yet the Word of God is clear concerning the spiritual struggle in which we find ourselves: the decisive/pivotal battle has been won! On account of the victory of God's good and faithful Servant, salvation *will* reach to the ends of the earth, just as God planned from the very beginning.

How will this happen? God is working patiently and mostly unspectacularly through the Church – that is, through Christian doctors, nurses, teachers, parents, tradespeople, police, politicians, artists, lawyers, scientists etc. increasingly of '*every tribe and language and people and nation*' (Rev 5). *We* are God's human instruments in his spectacular plan of redemption. God has ordained it, Christ has secured it and the Spirit is working with us and through us to bring it all to pass. Far from being a 'waiting room' where the saved enjoy great music and fellowship, the Church is to be power-house where saints are energised and quipped for this task.

We need a revival of Biblically grounded, theologically rigorous, faith and hope – the hope that inspired the authors of our great creeds and confessions; the hope that inspired the Puritans to transform culture; the hope that inspired pioneer missionaries to 'expect great things from God [and] attempt great things for God,' (William Carey, May 1792; title of a sermon based on Isaiah 54:1-4). Only then will we have confidence to pray for what God has promised in the Servant Songs of Isaiah.

*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* (Ephesians 3:20,21 ESV)

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## (1) PRAY WITH FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Isaiah 42:1-9 and Isaiah 49:1-7

'Behold,' declares the LORD, idols are useless; they cannot speak or guide you in the right direction. Likewise idolaters, they have no answers: '*Behold, they are all a delusion ...*' (from [Isaiah 41:21-29](#)). On the other hand...

*'Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations ... he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth ...*

*I will make [my servant] as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'* (excerpts from [Isaiah 42:1-4](#) and [49:5-7](#) ESV).

Unlike the Judeans, who made idols of wood and metal, modern humanity makes idols of money, political systems, and humanity itself. In these, men and women put their faith and hopes. But like the idols of old, today's idols are useless and without answers - *'they are all a delusion'*. On the other hand, God's servant - the Lord Jesus Christ - speaks truth, has sovereign power and **will** bring forth justice; that is, he **will** establish God's truth and righteousness in the earth; he **will** put things right. Furthermore, because God has made him as a light for the world - a light which *'darkness has not overcome'* ([John 1:4-5](#)) – salvation **will** reach to the ends of the earth!

Today, as we live under the shadow of plague, pandemic and persecution, let us remember that Jesus, God's servant, was obedient unto death. Consequently, the nations **will** see justice and salvation **will** extend to the ends of the earth. God has ordained it, Christ has secured it and now the Spirit is faithfully bringing it to pass. Nothing can get in the way of God's will - not plague, not pandemic and not persecution. And so, dear intercessor, our hope is not diminished! So pray in **faith**, with the energy that comes from **hope** and the passion that comes from **love** for the Church, for the world and for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## **(2) PRAY, WITH CONFIDENCE INSPIRED BY PROMISE**

Isaiah 50:4-9

Isaiah's first servant song ([Isaiah 42:1-9](#)) makes no mention of the servant's suffering, though the second ([49:1-7](#)) does describe him as *'one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation'*. The third servant song ([50:4-9](#)) reveals God's servant as a disciple par excellence. *'Morning by morning'* he meets with God who gives him *'the tongue of those who are taught'*, that he might *'know how to sustain with a word, him who is weary'* (v4). Not only does he obey the word of God, but when God reveals his will to his servant's ear, the servant willingly submits - he is *'not rebellious'*; he *'turns not backward'* (v5). *'I [God's servant] gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting'* (v6). He submitted himself to the path of suffering fully confident that his ever-faithful God would both help and vindicate him (v7).

The scene in the courtroom is extraordinary (50:8,9). The servant rises and issues the challenge: *'Who will contend with me? ... Who is my adversary? ... who will declare me guilty?'* The prosecutors have no case, for the servant is innocent, sinless, holy and God the judge has vindicated him. This is why death (the penalty for sin) could not hold him. This is why his death can be credited/ gifted to others (as the penalty for their sins).

What now of his accusers? *'Behold,'* declares the servant, *'all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up'* (v9).

While commentators mostly surmise that Christ's accusers and adversaries will 'waste away', I prefer to envisage them being nibbled away by those they view as inconsequential pests! Ultimately, Christ's accusers and adversaries will be so full of holes, so lacking in substance, that everyone will simply see right through them.



Their demise, however, will not be instant, spectacular or cataclysmic. On the contrary, it will be slow and quiet, requiring patience and perseverance. Ultimately, however, *'the nations will see justice and salvation will extend to the ends of the earth.'*

Today, as we endeavour to advance the Gospel, conscious of the scourge of persecution; sickened by the lies that ruin lives; anxious about the threat of terror, let us remember that Jesus, God's servant, has been vindicated. Consequently, his adversaries have nothing, their demise is certain. So, dear intercessor, pray with confidence inspired by the promise that all Christ's adversaries *'will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up'*. God has ordained it, Christ has secured it and now the Spirit is faithfully bringing it to pass.

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### (3) PRAY, ASSURED OF GOD'S LOVE

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

Through Isaiah's servant songs, God's Servant - once hidden, as if behind a curtain - is gradually, progressively revealed. With each servant song the curtain is opened a little wider, so we might see and learn a little more. The first servant song reveals God's Servant to be a chosen, quiet, resolute and compassionate; a healer and deliverer who will establish justice on the earth ([Isaiah 42:1-9](#)). The second servant song ([49:1-7](#)) sharpens the focus while expanding the view, adding that God will make his Servant - whose mouth, though quiet (42:2), is like a sharpened sword (49:2) - *'as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'* Wow! What a glorious image! Consequently, we are shocked to discover that, far from being a national hero, God's Servant is *'deeply despised, abhorred by the nation'* (49:7).

The third servant song ([Isaiah 50:4-9](#)) opens the curtain wider still, revealing God's Servant to be a faithful disciple and *'wonderful counsellor'* (Isaiah 9:6), an obedient disciple who says *'Not my will but thine'* (Luke 22:42) and submits to abuse and torture (Isaiah 50:6), confident that God will both help and vindicate him (v7) ... which he does (v8). Consequently, now it is his adversaries who are defenceless, helpless in the face of his truth (v9).

The fourth servant song ([Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12](#)) is a poem comprising five stanzas of three lines each, structured as follows: A B(1) B(2) B(3) A. In the opening and closing stanzas (the two As) God makes declarations concerning his Servant, building again on what we have already learned.

The three central stanzas (the three Bs; Isaiah 53:1-9) reveal in greater detail *what* God's Servant suffers. At the pinnacle of the poem, in verses 4 - 6, we are drawn to look not merely at the scene but through it, into the very heart of God, as we finally learn *why* God's Servant suffers. He suffers that he might bear *our* griefs and carry *our* sorrows, he is pierced for *our* transgressions, crushed for *our* iniquities, chastised for *our* peace and wounded for *our* healing. Though *we all* rebelled and turned away, he - in amazing grace - surrenders his life to redeem *us all*.



Dear believer, are you suffering? Are you afraid, anxious, confused? Do your trials make you wonder if God really loves you? Read aloud this servant song - insert yourself into verses 4-6 - and hear God speak: *'This is how much I love you!'*

Now, dear intercessor - brother, sister - pray with confidence, fully convinced that the one who rules over heaven and earth not only sees and hears you, but loves you with a love already demonstrated and proven on the cross ([Romans 5:8 ESV](#)); a love so immeasurably wide and long and high and deep that it surpasses knowledge ([Ephesians 3:18,19](#)); a love from which you can never be separated ([Romans 8:31-39](#)). God has desired you; Christ has redeemed you, and the Spirit has sealed you. So draw near to him and pray! *'Arise, cry out in the night ... pour out your heart like water ... lift your hands to him'* (Lamentations 2:19) and watch (תִּשְׁפָּח *tsâphâh*) expectantly ([Psalm 5:1-3](#)).

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#### (4) PRAY, ENERGISED BY HOPE IN WHAT IS PROMISED

Isaiah's Servant Songs cannot but elicit a response. We all, like sheep, have gone astray; trusting in idols and walking in rebellion. Lost, captive and condemned to death, we all need a Redeemer; we all need a Saviour. *Behold*, God's Servant the Lord Jesus Christ! Though he suffered unjustly he has been vindicated, meaning the offering he made - of his lifeblood, for our sins - has been accepted in the temple of heaven (Hebrews chapters 8 -10). Now completely disarmed ([Colossians 2:15](#)), Christ's adversaries will gradually *'wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up'* as Christ establishes justice in the nations and extends his salvation to the ends of the earth. *'I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'* (Matthew 16:18).

So good is this news that the most natural response is to burst into song! *'Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth.'* Sing in the coast-lands, the deserts and the cities! Shout from the mountain tops, give glory to the Lord and declare his praises ([Isaiah 42:10-13](#)). *'Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted'* ([Isaiah 49:13](#)).

After the third servant song (50:4-9) we are called to respond by putting our trust in God: *'Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant [the vindicated one of v8,9]? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely*

on his God.' This is followed by a warning that judgement awaits those who reject him, preferring to trust in their own efforts. ([Isaiah 50:10,11](#))

After the final servant song ([52:13 – 53:13](#)), the response is climactic, spanning two exhilarating chapters: [Isaiah 54-55](#). 'Sing ... says the Lord,' for you are going to have more children than you ever imagined! (Isaiah 54:1) 'Enlarge the place of your tent ... do not hold back ... .' Not only will your offspring overflow your current dwelling, but they will 'spread abroad to the right and to the left'; they 'will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities' (v2,3). 'Fear not ... says the Lord, your Redeemer ... my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed ... whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you' (54:4-17).

Then, with voice lifted up and arms open wide, God issues his universal invitation: 'Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters ...' satisfy yourself and delight in God's rich free grace (55:1-5). Repent and turn to God for he is compassionate and '*will abundantly pardon*' (v 6,7). God's ways might be mysterious, but his word - *the sword of the Spirit* (Ephesians 6:17) - will accomplish all he has purposed (55:8-11). The creation that once groaned - as in the *pains of childbirth* ([Romans 8:22](#)) - will rejoice as the Gospel of redemption and restoration goes forth with effectual power across the earth. 'For [or Surely] you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off' (55:12-13).

Dear believer, dear intercessor, do **not** be downcast.

Grasp what God has desired and done!

Understand what Jesus Christ, God's Servant, has achieved!

Have faith that the Spirit is at work in the world bringing it all to pass.

Sing, dear believer! Sing, trust him, extend the invitation and pray! Pray for the persecuted in love and with faith energised by hope - not hope in what is seen but hope in what is promised! ([Romans 8:18-25](#))

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