

*Good News for the World!*

Isaiah 50:4-52:12

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Ames, Iowa

Dec. 18, 2022

So far, I have begun the last few sermons by asking questions about how you and I have blown it in life. Things we may have said and things we may have done. The reason is that in this new section of Isaiah, God is letting us know He has a plan to save us, change us, renew us and give us a second chance.

Have you ever wanted a second chance? Of course, you have. We all have made such dumb decisions that we want second chances.

The point of the third Servant's Song is that we need more than a "do-over," a second chance. We need someone to do it for us. We need a substitute and friends; that is humbling because almost all of us believe we can eventually get it right. However, there are a few of us who have blown it so badly or so many times we have come to realize that it does not matter. We have learned the hard way that we need to give up and give control over to God's Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, whether you are a Christian this morning or if you are here considering trusting Christ, or if you are just here and far from Jesus, here is what you need. You need a Savior. Every day of your life, you need Jesus. You need to give up to the only One who has ever lived life perfectly and then died on the cross to pay for all of your dumb stuff (your sin).

The third Servant's Song points to our need of a Savior who will be our substitute to live the life we could never have ever lived in a million years. We need more than a "do-over." We needed someone to live it for us. Jesus did that, and then by our faith in Him, He gives us credit for His perfect life.

After that, He gives us His Holy Spirit to help us live our lives. Jesus is better than a second chance—He makes us new creations. This is what the third Servant's Song is pointing to in Jesus.

Echoes of the third Servant's Song in Isaiah 50:4-9 can be heard in the Apostle Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21:

*<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. <sup>19</sup> That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." <sup>21</sup> He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

This text is the heart of what we are examining this morning. God's Servant is our substitute who became sin so that we may be made right with God and given new lives. Then, to top it off, He gave us the same mission as His Servant, proclaiming the good news of new life in Jesus to the world. This is God's gift to the world—all who trust in Jesus may be saved.

The text we are going to study is multi-layered. It not only speaks of the restoration of Mt. Zion (Jerusalem) by God's servant Cyrus after he defeated Babylon, but it also looks out into the future to when Jesus would make us new by being our substitute and righteousness.

There are four gifts from God in this morning's text. I want us to open them and enjoy them this Christmas season.

I. The Servant is Our Substitute (Isaiah 50:4-11)

Before we look at the third Servant's Song, we need to do a little refresher. Look back at Isaiah 6:9-10. Do you remember what Yahweh had called Isaiah to do?

*[God to him]:<sup>9</sup> Go! Say to these people:  
Keep listening, but do not understand;  
keep looking, but do not perceive.  
<sup>10</sup> Make the minds of these people dull;  
deafen their ears and blind their eyes;  
otherwise they might see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears,  
understand with their minds,  
turn back, and be healed.*

God called Isaiah to preach to people who would not listen. Not only would they not listen, but the more he preached, the duller their hearts got and the less they heard. Isaiah had a miserable calling.

What was the answer? How could God's people be changed and made to listen? How could they be saved and put in right relationship with God? What they needed someone to do for them was what they could not do and would not do. They needed a substitute.

The third *Servant's Song* shows us that God's Servant would listen and obey God because they wouldn't and couldn't. Look in vv. 4-5

*<sup>4</sup> The Lord God has given me [God's Servant]  
the tongue of those who are instructed  
to know how to sustain the weary with a word.  
He awakens me each morning;  
he awakens my ear to listen like those being instructed.  
<sup>5</sup> The Lord God has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious; I did not turn back.*

So, what is going on in this text? God's Servant is doing for the people what they didn't want to do and could not even begin to do—by faith, He was listening to and obeying God.

The Servant Isaiah spoke of in this text was the Messiah, Jesus. He tells us what Jesus would do for His people when He came. By faith, He would listen and obey God. He would not be rebellious like His people were.

So, the first way Jesus is our substitute is that He listened to God. When we wouldn't and couldn't.

The next way we learn Jesus is our substitute is in v. 6. Verse 6 is an allusion to what Jesus did to pay for our sin of not trusting God, listening to God, and obeying God. In other words, Jesus listened and obeyed God in our place, and then He suffered our punishment, our humiliation, our scorn, our ridicule, and our shame of not obeying God's word.

Look in v. 6, and we see what happened to God's Servant for our disobedience to God's word and His obedience to God's word:

*<sup>6</sup> I gave my back to those who beat me,  
and my cheeks to those who tore out my beard.  
I did not hide my face from scorn and spitting.*

In v. 6, we see the long shadow of the cross hanging over God's Servant as He became our substitute.

Finally, in vv. 7-9, we see that God vindicates His Servant. So, what looks like a shameful defeat for God's Servant is, in reality—victory. As the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus scorned the shame of the cross.

His vindication becomes the vindication of all who have faith in Jesus because He is our Substitute. Look in vv. 7-9:

*<sup>7</sup> The Lord God will help me;  
therefore I have not been humiliated;  
therefore I have set my face like flint,  
and I know I will not be put to shame.  
<sup>8</sup> The one who vindicates me is near;  
who will contend with me?*

*Let us confront each other.  
 Who has a case against me?  
 Let him come near me!  
<sup>9</sup>In truth, the Lord God will help me;  
 who will condemn me?  
 Indeed, all of them will wear out like a garment;  
 a moth will devour them.*

The Apostle Paul helps us understand this text in Romans 8:33-34:

<sup>33</sup> *Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies.*

<sup>34</sup> *Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.*

Paul is telling us that Jesus' condemnation means that we will not be condemned. God vindicated Jesus by His resurrection from the dead so that His vindication in His resurrection becomes the vindication of everyone who has faith in Jesus as their substitute because, in Him, they are made new creations.

In other words, when a sinner is born-again, given new resurrected life in Christ (eternal life)—they foretaste Jesus' vindication in His resurrection. The fullness of the vindication will come when Jesus returns to take His people home for all time and eternity.

The application of this first gift is further unpacked in the second gift to us in God's Servant.

II. The Servant is our Righteousness (Isaiah 51:1-8)

When Cyrus, God's servant (small 's'), came on the world stage, he set God's people free to go back to Jerusalem. He was a kind of messiah, but his work did not change their hearts and cause them to love God and His word. They needed a great Messiah, a greater Servant.

When Jesus came on the scene, He did something no one else could do. By His listening and obeying God, He earned His people's righteousness.

When we read these eight verses, I want you to notice something. Thirteen times the Lord uses a form of *listen to me: pay attention, look to me, listen to my instruction or just listen to me*. When God uses these phrases, He is saying He is calling His people to listen and, by faith, obey His promise to save them.

Then at least thirteen times, He tells us that He will fulfill His promise to us in words like *salvation, righteousness, justice, called, comforted, and hope*. Every sentence is loaded with the promise of salvation, and we are called to see it in God's word and listen to it.

Look in vv. 1-8 of Isaiah 51:

*Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,  
 you who seek the Lord:  
 Look to the rock from which you were cut,  
 and to the quarry from which you were dug.  
<sup>2</sup> Look to Abraham your father,  
 and to Sarah who gave birth to you.  
 When I called him, he was only one;  
 I blessed him and made him many.  
<sup>3</sup> For the Lord will comfort Zion;  
 he will comfort all her waste places,  
 and he will make her wilderness like Eden,  
 and her desert like the garden of the Lord.  
 Joy and gladness will be found in her,  
 thanksgiving and melodious song.  
<sup>4</sup> Pay attention to me, my people,  
 and listen to me, my nation;*

*for instruction will come from me,  
 and my justice for a light to the nations.  
 I will bring it about quickly.  
<sup>5</sup> My righteousness is near,  
 my salvation appears,  
 and my arms will bring justice to the nations.  
 The coasts and islands will put their hope in me,  
 and they will look to my strength.  
<sup>6</sup> Look up to the heavens,  
 and look at the earth beneath;  
 for the heavens will vanish like smoke,  
 the earth will wear out like a garment,  
 and its inhabitants will die like gnats.  
 But my salvation will last forever,  
 and my righteousness will never be shattered.  
<sup>7</sup> Listen to me, you who know righteousness,  
 the people in whose heart is my instruction:  
 do not fear disgrace by men,  
 and do not be shattered by their taunts.  
<sup>8</sup> For moths will devour them like a garment,  
 and worms will eat them like wool.  
 But my righteousness will last forever,  
 and my salvation for all generations.*

Here is a summary of these verses:

*Listen to Me and trust Me by obeying the call I am giving you through My Servant.  
 My promise is dependable. Just as I made Abraham and Sarah many, I will fulfill My  
 promise to save you. Here is what I will do if you will trust me. Through My Servant's  
 sacrifice I promise to reverse the curse given in Eden when you sinned against Me by  
 not listening to Me. The salvation I give through Him will last forever and you will be  
 made righteous in Him for all eternity.*

So, here is what Jesus did. In the face of disgrace and taunts, Jesus obeyed God. He did what we could not do—obey God. By doing this, He became our righteousness. He earned it and gave it to us. He is the Servant God promised to send to be our righteousness. What an amazing gift to us.

But, here is our problem. In v. 7, we see where we struggle:

*<sup>7</sup> Listen to me, you who know righteousness,  
 the people in whose heart is my instruction:  
 do not fear disgrace by men,  
 and do not be shattered by their taunts.*

Many of us struggle to trust God when we are faced with being shamed, disgraced, or rejected by people.

When God's people lived in Babylon, they were disgraced for their faith in Yahweh. They were mocked, ridiculed, taunted, and rejected as backwoods hicks. They weren't the cool people, the in-crowd, the intelligent people, or cosmopolitan. They had funny accents and strange religious traditions. They only had one God who seemed to do nothing for them but let them suffer and be defeated. Everything about them seemed backward to the culture in which they lived.

Do you ever feel this way in our contemporary culture? Friends, the way we make sense of our suffering is to remember the suffering of our Savior. When we feel rejected, despised, marginalized, mocked, made to look small and

even backward for our faith in Christ and hold to the word of God, we need to remember the work that Jesus did on the cross.

Friends, it is in these times we will need to preach the gospel to ourselves. We will need to preach Isaiah 50:5-6 to ourselves because Jesus did not hide from scorn. He embraced it so that He would be our righteousness and strengthen us so that we would outlast the taunts, ridicule, and persecution. You will need to remind yourself of what will happen to the taunts and disgrace of evil people so you will endure persecution because these things will eventually be devoured in Christ's victorious return. Look in v. 8 again:

*<sup>8</sup>For moths will devour them like a garment,  
and worms will eat them like wool.  
But my righteousness will last forever,  
and my salvation for all generations.*

Brothers and sisters, sometimes all we can do is preach to ourselves that Jesus is our gift of righteousness. The world may reject us, but Jesus never will. He is our acceptance before God. His righteousness is near, His salvation is sure, and His justice will one day be revealed. Jesus' gift of His righteousness is an amazing gift we do not deserve, nor could we ever earn. Simply receive it this morning and let it be your comfort, which is the next gift.

### III. The Servant is Our Comfort (Isaiah 51:9-23)

The third gift is in vv. 9-23, the Servant is our comfort. So, when we endure taunts and disgrace for our faith in Jesus, what we need is the gift of comfort.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus' comfort and strength are always fresh. So, we will need to look in God's word to remind ourselves how God fulfilled past promises. However, this does not mean His comforting power is stuck in the past. What it actually does is remind us of His ongoing, continual comforting for us in our weakest and most difficult times in life.

Listen to Isaiah 51:9-10:

*<sup>9</sup>Wake up, wake up!  
Arm of the Lord, clothe yourself with strength.  
Wake up as in days past,  
as in generations long ago.  
Wasn't it you who hacked Rahab to pieces,  
who pierced the sea monster?  
<sup>10</sup>Wasn't it you who dried up the sea,  
the waters of the great deep,  
who made the sea-bed into a road  
for the redeemed to pass over?*

What was going on in these two verses? First, God's Servant is the *Arm of the Lord, who is clothed with strength*. It was Him who destroyed *Rahab (Rahab is Egypt)*. It was Him who dried up the sea so that His people could pass over in peace and be redeemed.

These two verses are like a prayer that reminds us of the power of God's Servant so we will cling to Him in the worst of times.

These two little verses remind us to look back at the Exodus event and see God's great salvation for God's people. However, it is not the ultimate Exodus that we look to when we need comfort in our distress.

We look to the salvation given on the Hill of Golgotha, where Christ was crucified. We look to the empty tomb where Jesus came back to life and is alive and in Heaven even now, mediating for His people who need Him to act on their behalf.

However, v. 13a reminds us that we still need to remember:

*But you have forgotten the Lord, your Maker,  
who stretched out the heavens  
and laid the foundations of the earth.*

*You are in constant dread all day long  
because of the fury of the oppressor,  
who has set himself to destroy.*

Friends, we are like the Jewish people in exile. All they could see was their oppression. All they could see were their problems.

That's what happens when we have problems. Our eyes get trained on our problems like crosshairs in a scope. When this happens—we forget what Jesus has done to save us. We forget the gospel.

Then, when we forget the gospel, we do not suffer well. We do not accept the discipline we need so that we may grow in our faith. We see our suffering and discipline as being disconnected from the cross of Christ, and when this happens, we might as well be going through life asleep at the wheel.

Finally, in vv. 17-23 are actually words of comfort. God's eye was trained on their pain. He knew what they were going through.

Verse 19 says that although they had experienced *devastation and destruction, famine and sword*, God was going to turn the tables and reverse their fortunes. Now He was going to give the Babylonians a taste of their own medicine for how they treated God's people. He was going to take the cup of discipline from the lips of His people and pour it down the throats of the Babylonians.

Friends, here is our gift of comfort. There was a cup of God's wrath that was poured for us because of our sin. But God took it from our lips, and in the Garden, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus submitted to God's will and drank the cup of God's wrath for us on the cross.

Jesus is God's Servant who drank the cup of God's wrath for those who trust in Him. He drank it down to the dregs for us so that we will never have to drink it. We may experience suffering and endure God's discipline, but we will never experience God's wrath. God's wrath is only reserved for those who reject Jesus Christ as their Substitute.

*Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath for us, and now all we get is God's grace, and that is a comforting thought.* This leads us to our fourth and final gift to open.

#### IV. The Servant Sends Us! (Isaiah 52:1-12)

In these last twelve verses, we are hearing once again the message we heard last Sunday. It is a calling and commissioning. In Isaiah 52:1-12, God calls His people to 1) Wake up, 2) Stand up, 3) Speak up.

*In v. 1 is wake up.* God called His people to stop feeling sorry for themselves and put on their party clothes. He wanted them to celebrate what God had done to save them.

*Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion;  
put on your beautiful garments.*

*Then in vv. 2-6, He called them to stand up.* He calls them to shake off the ashes of mourning. They needed to remember they were not sold into slavery. Their captors had no claim on them. They had been exiled because of their sin. They had been disciplined and not sold.

Now they were set free. They needed to experience their new position, their new identity. They needed to stand up and trade their ashes for the beauty of God's Servant in Isaiah 61:3, [*God's servant will*]:

*Provide for those who mourn in Zion;  
to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
festive oil instead of mourning,  
and splendid clothes instead of despair.  
And they will be called righteous trees,  
planted by the Lord to glorify him.*

Verses 1-6 are a clear picture of what Jesus would do on the cross by redeeming His people. No one can make any payment for their salvation. Only God can redeem at no cost. The Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 1:18-19:

*For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold,<sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb.*

Finally, in vv. 7-12, we see we are called to speak up. When the people of Judah were delivered and left Babylon, they were going to leave joyfully, proclaiming the glory of God. Verse 7 says we are to be like the herald who proclaims good news on the mountaintop that the victory has been won. Verse 7 says:

*How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of the herald,  
who proclaims peace,  
who brings news of good things,  
who proclaims salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"*

The Apostle Paul transformed this passage in Romans 10:14-15 by making the Servant's commission our commission. We are ambassadors of Christ who are commissioned to preach the good news. The Apostle Paul says:

*<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?  
<sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.*

Conclusion:

Now that we have opened these four gifts, let's read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 one more time and hear the words of the Apostle Paul:

*<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. <sup>19</sup> That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." <sup>21</sup> He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

So, there we are, God's gift to the world this Christmas season. Jesus is our Substitute, our righteousness, our comfort, and He commissions us as His new creations to preach the good news to people who need new lives, second chances, and fresh strength in this dark world. I hope you will enjoy the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas season.