



Passion of our Lord - Good Friday

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



Friday 15 April 2022

READING

Isaiah 53: 1-12

The Suffering Servant

One of the amazing things about our faith is the ability God gives us to look back over time and see how everything that is happening now is part of His plan for our lives. As we study the Old Testament in light of Jesus' coming, we are able to do just that – to see how God had been planning to send Jesus, preparing His people and the rest of the world for that event, and even giving us detailed pictures of events long before they came about.

In the book of the prophet Isaiah, there are four passages which talk about “the servant of the Lord.” The book of Isaiah clearly presents a picture of the coming Messiah as a Suffering Servant. There are four passages which are often called the “Servant Songs”. They aren't actually songs, but they are like the Psalms in their poetic and lyrical style. The four Servant Songs present a description in poetry of the one the Lord calls “my servant.”

1. Isaiah 42:1-7; presents the mission of this mysterious figure. He is the one whom the Lord has chosen, in whom He is well pleased and upon whom His spirit rests. This is reminiscent of the baptism of Jesus when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and the Father said to Jesus "You are my beloved Son. On you my favour rests" (Mk. 1:10-11). The mission of Suffering Servant is to bring justice to the nations through the instruction for which the entire world is waiting.

2. Isaiah 49:3-7; describes the chosen servant of the Lord and the world-wide scope of his influence. He would bring salvation to Israel and be a light to the Gentiles. The Lord will offer the Servant as a covenant to the people, providing restoration and comfort to the afflicted.

3. Isaiah 50:4-10; Details the obedience of the servant and his vindication after suffering.

4. Isaiah 52:13 – Isaiah 53:12; Explains the atoning sacrifice of the suffering servant who is described as despised and rejected yet obeys to the point of death and is therefore highly exalted by God. He was despised and rejected, described as a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Isaiah was a prophet; and like other prophets, his role was (if I can oversimplify it) to speak to the people on behalf of God. Sometimes this was forward looking – “God will do...,” but the main concern was always to speak to the people regarding their present circumstances. One of the amazing things about how God works is that He can speak to His people in their circumstances but also see far ahead and have the words mean something far more significant later on. That is what we see happening in the servant songs in Isaiah. If we were to take the time to look at the history and background in depth, we could identify the

servant in Isaiah's time. But because we now look back through the lens of Jesus and His work on the cross, we see that Isaiah's descriptions are most true about Jesus.

The portrait in Isaiah is more than simply that of a servant, however: it is of a servant who suffers. And the picture of the suffering is severe: (read 53:3ff). Once again this description of suffering finds its most complete fulfillment in Jesus' suffering on the cross.

Jesus Meekly Accepted Suffering for you and I:

Almost always, whenever we confront suffering the first question is "why?" That is always a hard question, often one for which there is no good answer. Isaiah 53 is really clear, though, about the "why" of Jesus' suffering. He did it for us. 53:4-6: "he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows... he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." This is nothing new to us, yet we can never allow ourselves to become casual about it. Jesus suffered on the cross as an act of loving self-gift in thanksgiving for you and I. Not the penal substitution theology of St Anselm of Canterbury, which suggests that the primary purpose of Jesus' death was to satisfy God's justice – that God cannot just sovereignly decide to forgive us, he also has to punish sin. There is something slightly offish about that isn't there? This is something on which Thomas Aquinas is very helpful, and absolutely clear: God did not need the Cross in order to forgive sin. God's forgiveness of sin is simply the product of God's merciful and sovereign desire to forgive sin. What we glimpse in Isaiah's Suffering Servant is a deeply trinitarian act, and cannot therefore be understood unless the Trinity is at the root of our understanding of it. And the doctrine of the Trinity talks about the Father generously begetting the Son, graciously imparting His nature to Him in self-gift, and the Son responding to the gracious loving gift in thanksgiving, and the "breath", the "ruach" of this mutual fatherly and filial love is what we call the procession of the Holy Spirit. If that is the character of God, then out of love can only pour out mercy and loving kindness.

What else do we glean from this passage?

-- Jesus knows what it means to suffer -- when Jesus came to dwell among us, He came as one of us -- He was not clothed in glory -- He was not clothed in majesty -- there was nothing to draw us to Him physically

-- Jesus lived as one of us -- He got hungry -- He got thirsty -- He knew what it was to feel cold and hot -- to feel tired and exhausted -- to feel alone and abandoned -- He suffered just what we suffer -- He experienced everything we experienced, but even more so, because He was despised and rejected by His own people -- by the people He came to save.

-- None of us ever want to go through a season of hard times but we do -- the cross or suffering, is part of our holy journey. Because when you're in the valley -- when you're suffering through the hardships of life -- those are the times when you come face to face with what you truly believe -- with what you truly stand for

-- it's times like these that force us to ask the questions, "What am I really counting on? -- Am I building my life on a foundation that's solid enough that circumstances beyond my control cannot take it away?"

-- Here at the cross is the "one hope that has [sustained] human beings across every continent and culture for two millennia [as they have struggled through the] difficult times of poverty, disease, pain, hardship, [and] death itself

-- here at the cross we gather to proclaim with all the world, "Christ died for us" -- and we are reminded that He suffered for us so that we might have abundant life.