

Isaiah Chapter 20 the Servant of the Lord

by A.B. Simpson

To be a true servant of God means to recognize yourself as His property and to let Him shape your plans, direct your will, and control your life.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:7, Isaiah 42:19, Isaiah 43:10, Isaiah 45:2-3, Isaiah 49:3, Isaiah 50:4, Isaiah 52:7, Isaiah 54:17, Isaiah 55:11, Isaiah 61:6

Topics: "Commitment to God", "Servanthood"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the multifaceted role of the 'servant of the Lord' as depicted in Isaiah, highlighting that this title applies to Israel, Jesus Christ, and individual believers. He stresses that true service begins with belonging to God and being equipped by the Holy Spirit, urging believers to embody the characteristics of a servant, priest, and witness. Simpson calls for a commitment to glorifying God through our lives and actions, while also recognizing the promises and resources God provides to His servants. He challenges the congregation to reflect on their own service and dedication to God, encouraging them to be active participants in His work.

Transcript

"You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." (Is. 49: 3.)

We have already seen that the expression, "servant of the Lord," is used in three senses in the book of Isaiah. The first has reference to Israel, the second to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the third to the individual believer. Israel, having failed to meet the conditions of His high commission, Christ took His place as the Father's Servant, and has transferred to us, the members of His body, the fellowship of service. It is in this latter sense that we are to consider the expression at this time. We find very much in this prophetic book about service.

I. The names given to the Lord's servants.

1. Servant. This is the first term applied to us. It is used throughout the Scriptures in the strong sense, not merely of an employee, but of a bond slave. The Bible servant is the property of his master. The very principle of Christian service is that we first belong to Him ourselves and then we give Him our service just as in a royal palace every vessel bears the monogram of the king. He will not use any vessel that is not exclusively his own. So the Lord wants us to bear His monogram before He employs us on His commissions. The watchword of the true servant of the Lord is, "Whose I am and Whom I serve." This is

the source of constant weakness and failure in Christian work: the attempt to do things for the cause of Christ by people who do not themselves belong to Christ. This is all untempered mortar and worthless work. "Whose pocketbook is that?" was asked of a Christian gentleman. "Why, mine of course." "To whom do you belong?" "I belong to the Lord." "Ah, you belong to the Lord and the pocketbook belongs to you." That is about the measure of average Christian service.

Paul gloried in calling himself the bond slave of Jesus Christ. Oh, that we might better learn his message to the Corinthians: "You are not your own; you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body which is God's." (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20.)

Beloved, are you a true servant of God? Have you ceased to own yourself? Are you His property and do you recognize yourself and all you own as absolutely at His disposal, and are you letting Him shape your plans, direct your will and control your life? This is to be a servant of the Lord. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service."

2. Priests and ministers of God (Is. 61: 6.) The word "minister" also means a servant, but not in the extreme sense of the slave. It represents rather an official servant, one who holds an office in the public service. In this passage the two expressions "priests and ministers," undoubtedly refer to the two official classes among the ancient Hebrews, namely, the priests and Levites. These together comprised the official servants of Jehovah, but they were quite different in their functions. The priests represented the idea of worship, the Levites, work. The first ministered directly to God; the second, to their brethren. The business of the priests was to offer sacrifice and incense in the holy place. The business of the Levites was to set up the tabernacle, to take it down, to carry it on its wilderness journeys, to teach the people to perform the manual duties connected with the camp and the service of the sanctuary.

In the Christian Church there are not any longer two classes of servants, but the two kinds of service are combined in the life of each of us. We are to be both priests and Levites. One part of our ministry is to worship God, to love Him, to pray to Him, to praise Him, to pour forth continually the sacrifice of a loving, reverent heart in praise, communion and prayer as an "odor of a sweet smelling savor." The other part is to be active, useful, helpful, practical, to serve one another by love, to work for the cause of Christ, to build up His Church, to seek and save the lost, to supply the means by which His work is carried on, to be teachers of His people and the active promoters of His work in every proper way. We are to blend the fervor of Mary with the hands of Martha. We are to be at once busy and devout, faithful in every earthly trust, yet "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Beloved, are we thus ministering in His Church, a holy priesthood, true ministers of the sanctuary which God has built and not man?

3. Witnesses. (Is. 43: 10.) "You are My witnesses says the Lord." A witness is one who bears personal testimony of what he knows. We are to know God so that we can make Him real to men. We are to know Christ and be able to communicate Him to others. This we are to do not only by what we say, but our whole life should be an object-lesson of witness-bearing for God. Is it truly so? Do we constantly reflect Him? Do we make Him real to the people who know us and see us from day to day? Do we make Him attractive to them so that they are hungry for the Christ that we have found? Do we always act as though we were on the witness stand for Him? Do we bring credit and honor to His name? Or are we sometimes like the man who had forgotten his sacred trust and although a prominent member of the Church of Christ,

had allowed himself to be drawn into compromising friendships, fellowships and amusements, and was often found in the company of the ungodly, countenancing things which God could not approve. One of his truest friends had long tried to draw him away from this false life, but failed to impress him. One day he sent a card in to him as he sat at a worldly entertainment with a lot of godless companions, and on the other side of the card were these simple words, "You are my witnesses, says the Lord." As he read it, he flushed crimson. He looked at the friends around him. He realized how out of keeping the whole surroundings were with his high calling as a witness for God, and he soon excused himself on the plea of an emergency call and left the forbidden world in which he had been betraying his Master, never to return again.

Beloved friend, are you a witness for Christ or against Him?

II. The qualifications of the servants of the Lord.

1. The fire-touched lips (Is. 6: 7.) It was thus that Isaiah's own service for God had begun. It is thus that all true Christian service must begin, in the baptism of the Holy Ghost and the cleansing of heart and tongue by God's consuming fire. Then his ears were opened to hear the voices of heaven. Then his eyes were opened to see the needs of the world. Then the message was understood, "Whom shall I send, and who will go?" and the answer came springing from his lips, "Here I am, send me."

Beloved, it is not your natural abilities that can equip you for the service of the Lord. You must receive the definite baptism of the Holy Ghost. Have you received Him? If you have, the first place where it will be evident will be your tongue. It will show its reality and power by what you say, and still more by what you do not say. Oh, has it burned up the frivolousness, the flippancy, the folly of unholy speech, and burned in God's messages to your trembling lips as in the days of old?

2. Opened ears. (Is. 50: 4). "The Lord has given me the tongue of one that has learned, that I may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. He awakens my ear morning by morning that I may hear as one that has been instructed." We must first hear our own messages from His lips before others can hear them from ours with any profit. The true servant of the Lord has a quickened ear. He knows the voice of his Master. "He hears the word at His mouth." His messages are not merely reasoned out and gathered up from the newspapers and the current religious literature of the time, but they are echoes of a heavenly voice, and back of them the speaker and the hearer recognize, "This says the Lord."

Fellow workers, do you know His voice? Do you wait for His messages and do you speak as one that has been instructed a "word in season to him that is weary"? It is not a great many words that help. It is not a whole sermon or talk. It is one single word that falls into one heart and another message into another. This is God's way of warning, quickening, convicting, comforting and inspiring His people.

Those who can thus hear God's voice and bring His message are the true prophets of every age. God give to us the prophetic spirit and the God-touched ears and tongues of Pentecost.

3. Eyes blinded to all else but His work. (Is. 42: 19.) "Who is blind but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect and blind as the Lord's servant?"

God's true servants have to be blind to everything else but their business for Him. Like a driving horse, whose eyes are shaded from all side views and can only look straight on, so God would have us go with eyes concentrated on His work and will. How many things there are by which the adversary would

side-track us or distract us. The world's attractions, the people about us, the things they say about us or do not say about us: all these we must be blind to and our watchword be, "This one thing I do."

4. Swift and willing feet to run His errands. (Is. 52: 7.) "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings." The Lord's servant must not only know, but he must go. His work will call him to the mountains, the hard place of service, but his feet will be "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace," and he will leave behind him a shining track of beauty and of light.

There is another fine passage about consecrated feet in Isaiah 32: 20. "Blessed are you that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass." Sowing beside all waters has reference to the irrigated valleys of the Orient and the planting of our seed where the waters have prepared the soil. We are to follow the Holy Ghost as He opens our way and prepares the hearts of men. "The feet of the ox and the ass" are very suggestive of true Christian service. The ox is the toiling beast, the ass, the burden-bearer. The one works, the other suffers. Both suggest the fine symbol used by the Baptist Missionary Society as its trademark: an ox standing between a plough on the one hand and an altar on the other with the inscription over him, "Ready for either or both." The true servant of the Lord is ready for service or suffering as the Lord may call for the plough or the altar. This is finely worked out in the Gospel of Mark, which is a picture of Jesus Christ as the Father's servant. There we see Him as the toiling Christ first and then as the suffering Christ.

Beloved, are our feet following His footprints, going forth beside all waters in ministries of loving service and patient suffering.

5. One more qualification for the true servant is found in our context. "He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand has He hid me and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver has He hid me." It is to be hidden in the shadow of His hand, while His hand alone is seen, and we are out of sight. The bane of much service is the blaze of publicity, the blowing of the trumpet of the worker and the bid that is so often made for popular sensation, applause and admiration. God only can use His hidden workers. The seraphim used four of their six wings to cover their faces and their feet and the true servant of the Lord will always seek to be out of sight himself that Jesus may be glorified.

Beloved, are we thus divinely equipped and consecrated for the service of our Lord?

III. The ministries of true service.

1. To give the light of the gospel to the world. In Isaiah 42: 6-7, we have the commission of the Master which has been passed on to His servants. "I will give You for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles to open the blind eyes and to bring out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." This is our supreme service; to give the light of His gospel to the world and set free the prisoners of sin and Satan. Are we doing this? Is the chief business of our lives to spread the Gospel and save our fellow men?

2. "To speak a word in season to him that is weary." (Is. 50: 4.) This is for the comfort and edification of His people. It is just as important that we minister to Christians as that we save sinners. God's people need much comfort, quickening and spiritual help. They are often weary. Hearts are fainting all around us and we do not at all seem to care. Oh, for the men and women, that are ready to speak a word in season! If you are much with your Master, your lives will drop the oil of joy for mourning, and your hands will bring balm for broken hearts. The social call, the chance meeting on the street, the journey on the railway train,

the call of some burdened business man for counsel and advice: all these will give you opportunities quite as valuable as the inquiry room, the Sunday school class and the religious meeting to speak such words for Christ and the comfort of your fellows. God help us, beloved, to be true to this wayside ministry.

3. We are called to work for the age to come. There is a very sublime passage in Isaiah 51: 16 which appeals to the highest feelings of the earnest Christian. "I have put My words in your mouth and I have covered you in the shadow of My hand that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth and say unto Zion, you are My people." What a superb figure! "Plant the heavens." "Lay the foundations of the earth." The trees of righteousness and the amaranthine flowers that are filling the paradise of God are planted by our hands. Oh, some day to find in your home above innumerable souls that have been brought there through your instrumentality to be your joy and crown of righteousness forever. Thus we may "plant the heavens" and we may "lay the foundations of the earth." That is the future millennial earth. The work we are doing in calling out a people for His name, in evangelizing the world and in preparing for His coming. Truly this is laying the foundations of that new earth where Christ shall reign and we shall sit with Him upon His throne.

Beloved, is there any earthly ambition that can compare with this? Is there any sort of hope that shines with so bright a luster? Is every recompense that earth can offer you worthy of comparison? Oh, turn from the tinsel baubles of a vain and passing world and begin to lay up treasure beyond. Come into that splendid partnership with Him where we receive our wages now, but our dividends by and by and the dividend shall be the whole inheritance. "He that reaps receives wages and gathers fruit unto life eternal." Shall we "plant the heavens" and "lay the foundations of the earth," and invest our lives in the age to come?

4. We are called to restore the things that have been lost by a faithless church. Here is a fine description of the ministry to which God is calling many today. Isaiah 58: 12: "They that shall be of you shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations and you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in." How much has been lost since Pentecostal days! How much has been missed from the full heritage of His will! Thank God, His faithful servants today are being used to repair the breaches; to restore the old paths and show us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

5. The supreme business of the servant is to glorify His Master. "Oh, Israel, you are My servant in whom I will be glorified." (Isa. 49: 3.) Are we glorifying Him? Is it our supreme aim to do so? At a railway station an officer of the company was very strictly carrying out the instructions of his chief and excluding many from the gates. All sorts of devices were used by the knowing ones to get through but he was inexorably firm both to flatteries and frowns. At last one man said to him, "You seem to be absolutely indifferent to what anybody thinks of you in this crowd." "Well," said he, "my one business and my only ambition is to please the man that employs me, and he is the only man I am trying to please." Oh, that loyalty to Christ might be as true! Are we glorifying Him?

IV. Promises to the servants of the Lord.

1. Upholding. (Is. 42: 6.) "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness and will hold your hand and will keep you." The servant of the Lord is held and upheld by Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand.

2. All necessary resources. (Is. 45: 2, 3). "I will go before you and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron. and I will give you the treasures of

darkness and hidden riches of secret places." His mighty providence will go before us and prepare our way. His infinite riches will open to us the treasures of darkness and He will supply the means and resources we require as we go forward and trust Him for His work.

3. Protection. (Is. 54: 17.) "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of Me, says the Lord." It is not because of our righteousness that He does this, but because He gives us His righteousness and guards us for His own name's sake that our reputation is safe in His keeping and our lives are immortal until our work is done.

4. Efficiency and success. (Is. 55: 11.) "My word shall not return unto Me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The fruit may tarry long, the work may seem in vain, but nothing that His Spirit has prompted can ever fall to the ground.

5. Compensation for seeming failure. (Is. 49: 2-6.) "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. It is a light thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles that you may be My salvation unto the end of the earth." Our work may seem to fail as the great Servant's did in one direction, but we shall still be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and as He promised Christ, so to us He will also give a new and larger ministry in some other direction and make glorious compensation for every hard place and seeming failure.

6. The recompense of joy. (Is. 65: 13,14.) Here are some of the recompenses of the sorrowing and toiling servant. "Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty, behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed; behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit." Such is the joy of true service. Such is the recompense the Master holds for all that follow Him. He is a good Master. Let us be true and faithful servants. He was the great Servant Himself. Let us follow in His footsteps and count it our highest honor to say, "I serve." Shall He have our lives? Shall He have them wholly, gladly and forevermore?

"Give me a faithful heart,

Likeness to Thee,

That each departing day

Henceforth may see

Some work of love begun,

Some deed of kindness done.

Some wanderer sought and won

Something for Thee."

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