

# Service and Servanthood of the Lord - Part 1 of 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The book of Isaiah reveals the importance of service and servanthood, and how it relates to the nation of Israel and the church.*

**Duration:** 34:53

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah 53:11, Isaiah 54:17, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Servanthood"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the concept of the servant of the Lord as described in the prophecies of Isaiah. The sermon explores the nature, method, and means of true service to God. It contrasts the failure of the nation of Israel in fulfilling their calling as servants of God with the introduction of the person who embodies the true servant, Jesus Christ. The sermon also touches on the themes of suffering, triumph, and the judgment of the nation.

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## Transcript

The words around which our thoughts are going to be gathered today are at the beginning of the 42nd chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 42, verse 1, Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delighteth, and for the moment the first clause. Behold my servant.

And we are going to be occupied with the servant of the Lord. That is, with the nature, the method, and the means of the service of God. What is true service to God? How and by what means God is most truly self? I am sure that we are all concerned with the matter of this kind.

That our being here on this earth, our passing this way only once, and when it comes near to the end, it seems to have been so short, so swift, that it shall have meant that in some vital way the Lord shall have been served by our being here. That I say surely goes to the heart of every one of us, and therefore we will respond to any help that may be given in the understanding of how that can be. And that is the thing that the Lord has laid on my heart for this time.

For those who have but a superficial knowledge of the Bible, it only needs to be mentioned in order for it to spring into life and recognition. That the idea of service, the law of service, is a dominant one throughout all the scriptures. When we open our Bible and begin, we find that man was not only made himself as

something to satisfy a divine idea, not only was he given a great wealth of things to enjoy by which to profit, but he was given a trust.

He was put in trust by God. He was called immediately into a vocation. And from there right on through the Bible, that law of vocation, that principle of service, is a golden thread running through the whole.

So till we reach the end of the Bible, amongst the last words are these, and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his. Abraham's election and call was, above everything else, vocation. The same was manifestly true of Moses, who goes down in history with the title, Moses my servant.

The servant of the Lord. Israel's very constitution and redemption was on the basis of, let my people go that they may serve me. The law of service governed their very beginnings and remained the law of their life.

It determined everything where they were concerned. It is very clear that this is true of David, and of all the intermediary servants of the Lord. The priests, and the kings, and the prophets, and the nation.

They all represented this divine idea of a purpose to be served. A vocation to be fulfilled. A work to be done for God.

And when we pass into the New Testament, this truth is so self-evident that we should be perhaps wasting time to stay to point it out. There is a great phrase, which we are very familiar, used by the Apostle Paul, called according to his purpose. And that is a very comprehensive.

But we must interpret it right. Called according to his purpose does not just mean called to be something, although it does mean that. Or called to have something, although it means that.

It means supremely called to a great vocation. Called according to his purpose relates to a work to be done. Something in which God himself is to be.

The idea of service and servanthood runs through these prophecies from which we have extracted this fragment. The prophecies of Isaiah. And in a certain section of this book, this idea comes out as being the very core and the very sum of everything else in the book.

You will think about it and go back to it with this thought in mind. You will find that all that is in this book, and there is much in it, circles around this vocation of the servant of the Lord. Much of the tragedy that is recorded here is simply the tragedy of the Lord's people and their failure in this very matter of vocation.

And all the hope and the prospect that is presented is closely bound up with the recovery of this vocation. I would like to spend time with this book, taking you right through with this word servant. I think I shall not do that, although I have underlined in this book the word.

But I am myself tremendously impressed, and you would be also, with the large number of times that the word servant occurs in these prophecies. If you have not noticed it, I suggest that you do what I have done. Lift the book of Isaiah right out, and then read it in the light of this one word, the word servant.

And you will come to the same conclusion as I have come to, that the core of everything here, the sum of everything here, is servanthood. Or the service of the Lord. Now when we do consider the book in the light of this dominant factor, we find that it resolves itself into three aspects.

First of all, the fact that this servant vocation was fundamental to the choice of the whole nation. That is, the people of God as a people. We will repeat this.

It is made perfectly clear that this conception of servanthood was fundamental to their election, to their choice and separation, their calling and their constitution. In a sense, in a very real sense, this book reveals that their existence was hanging upon this one thing. A divine vocation.

Their service to God. And should they fail there, there is no longer any justification for them being that nation. But then, that is exactly what did happen.

There is the fundamental calling, or law of their calling, service, or servanthood. But as a whole, as a nation in entirety, they failed in this very thing. And because of that, they are put aside.

And this book sees the nation, at least for the time being, set on one side. Put out of its place. And totally inoperative in relation to God.

Time of suspended usefulness and poverty. Right out of the way. And all because of this one thing.

Failure in the very constituent of their existence. Servant of the Lord. Well, you will be recalling some of these passages which I have not stayed to quote or turn to, which relate this very phrase, my servant to Israel.

Thus said the Lord, to Israel, thou art my servant. To Jacob, thou art my servant. That's a collective term.

So it was. That's the first thing, that the idea of the people of God as a corporate whole, is that of servanthood. Let's hold that because we've got to come back and say much more about that.

The second thing. Because of the failure of the nation as a whole, we find a transition. A transition from the nation to a single person.

Person spelled with a capital P. Whereas in the first instance, the nation was termed, my servant. That was taken away from the nation. And transferred to this individual.

This person. And so we could take up a second series of passages from the book, which brings that partial interview, my servant, my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth. That is a contrasting picture of that which has ceased to satisfy the soul of God.

There begins then this presentation and unveiling of the servant of the Lord as related to the Messiah. All these messianic prophecies about the Lord Jesus as the servant of Jehovah. In that person, all the original, full, perfect thoughts of God as to servanthood.

The essential meaning of it. All that was taken up, exemplified, and fulfilled in this individual. In this one.

My self. That's the second thing that this book brings so clearly into view. The third.

The reappearance and perpetuation of the idea in a remnant. Lost in the whole nation. Saved in the individual.

Deposited in a remnant. A remnant constituted on the basis of the individual. Taking its character from the servant of the Lord.

As that one, the word remnant, occurs some dozen times in this book, but we know so well that it runs through most of the prophets. It is a governing idea in the prophets. Our remnant shall return.

The Lord will preserve unto himself a remnant, and that remnant becomes the repository of this divine law of servanthood. One of the last things said about the remnant in the Old Testament is, my peculiar treasure. My peculiar treasure.

And not because of what they were in themselves, but because of the purpose which they served in. Recovering the divine thought of servanthood. So we have here these three things.

The nation, its calling on the principle of servanthood, and its tragic failure. The person introduced, and what an introduction in chapter 9. What an introduction of the servant of the Lord. Everybody is familiar, descriptive of him there.

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. He is introduced in full terms, chapter 11, unto us a son is born, unto us a child is given. Here he is described in the following verses, that presentation as to his spiritual nature and character.

Not staying with all those details at the moment. Here he is introduced, appointed, tested through suffering. For remember at the heart of Isaiah 53 is, my righteous servant, my righteous servant shall justify many.

Tested through suffering and triumphant, my servant shall be very great, very high. And then the remnant, purged, purged also through suffering. And finally, attested, my peculiar.

Let us step back a moment. This book has a very great deal in it about the judgment of the nation. That nation.

Its judgment fills many pages. And while wildness was the cause of the judgment, it was the vocation that was the crux. You must ever remember this, that the vocation of the people of God rests entirely upon their separateness from this one.

Therefore, to destroy, to nullify, to paralyze their mighty God-given vocation, the great enemy will always seek to create a link between them and this one. That was the burden of the prophets, the link that had come about between this nation and the other nations and this one. And resulting in their being found totally incapable of fulfilling their vocation in the world and among the judgment was not only because of condition, but because of failure in the very object of their existence.

If something ceases to fulfill the purpose for which it was created, it may still be that object, that entity. But with God, it no longer stands where it did stand in his acceptance when the purpose of its creation is lost. Well, that, of course, is something quite obvious.

But you know, there's a principle wrapped up in that. We all ought to recognize what matters to God is not that we are just Christians, called God's people. It is that we are fulfilling the purpose of our existence as such.

The vocation of the people. Walking wildly of the calling wherewith we are called. As to the person, it is quite clear what I have said and from the reading of this book that he is central.

He is central to everything. It is impressive that so early in the book, the point marked by our division of chapters as chapter 9, so early he is introduced, as though he is placed there to dominate all that follows. A great deal is going to follow, but it will all be under the shadow of this one whom God has himself appointed.

He is central. As to the remnant, all we at this moment would say, but we've got a lot more to say presently, is that the remnant represents the abiding principle of God's purpose and God's method. We are familiar with this fact, that when the large, the main, the big, the extensive thing fails God, his reaction is not to abandon his purpose, but to take it up in a representative company.

Called in the Old Testament, the remnant. That is God's principle and God's method of continuity. He has followed that all through history.

Now, when we pass to the New Testament, for it is possible that you have been thinking, well that's all Old Testament, that's all Israel, what has that to do with us? Well listen, when we pass to the New Testament, what we find in the first place is that that nation as such is displaced. No doubt about it. You open your Gospels, that nation is no longer in the place of divine favor, no longer standing in the place of divine vocation.

It is under judgment, which judgment is coming near to fulfillment. It is displaced. But secondly, we find this person, not now in prophecy, but actually present in all the terms of the prophecies.

Here he is, his presence, and all that the prophet and the prophets said about him is now actually on the spot. He is here with all the features that have been foreshadowed about him. But thirdly, a new nation is being brought in.

To use Peter's description, Mark you, Peter was not speaking of the Israel after the flesh, he was speaking concerning the church. Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellences of him who brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. That's a summary of calling, and the purpose of calling, and the nature of the call.

A new nation is being brought in. In the fulfillment of one judgment phrase of the Lord Jesus to the old nation, the kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof. So with the New Testament, the new nation is introduced and on the way to being made up, added to.

But shadow comes in too soon. The fourth thing that we find before we are through our New Testament is incipient decline and apostasy. Worldliness again, that devastating thing creeping into the church and judgment of the church now being both foretold and begun.

As a whole, this new nation is beginning to fail in the purpose for which it was raised up. And this in general is nigh unto, to use a very unpleasant phrase for this scripture, being spewed out of God's mouth. Terrible thought concerning a holy nation, but there it is.

But that is not the end of the Old Testament. There is God's acting again, and his own law and principle being followed out. The remnant he that overcometh.

I was impressed in reading through Isaiah again and coming to the later chapters where the servant idea is in the plural so many times. I think if I remember rightly some eleven times in the later chapters after

chapter 54 that here it is in the singular. That is servants, servants.

Right up to that point it has been collective. Now it is individuals, servants, servants, my servants. Now let us be careful.

That does not mean that the divine idea of collective servanthood has been abandoned, as we shall see in a minute. But it corresponds to what we have in those early chapters of the book of the Revelation. He that hath an ear to hear.

See, it is personal. And as in the last chapters of Isaiah, so in those first chapters of Revelation, the corporate is made up of individuals who got the idea. Now it is not something just general, vague and indefinite.

Now it is people, individuals if you like, who have seen what God intended. Who have grasped the divine meaning in the existence of the church. And who have made a personal response to stand for that.

And they become the new representation of the divine intention. They are corporate by reason of their one vision, their one apprehension. But it is like that.

But it is like that today, isn't it? In general, there is a very uncertain and indefinite apprehension of God's eternal purpose.

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