

Service and Servanthood of the Lord - Part 7 of 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound nature of servanthood in Christ, emphasizing the necessity of personal experience and the challenges of true ministry.

Duration: 49:30

Scripture: Isaiah 21:10, Isaiah 28:28, Isaiah 41:8, Isaiah 41:15, Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the significance of the sharp threshing instrument in the ministry of Jesus. The instrument represents the dividing line between the false and the true, settling destiny and determining the end result. The speaker emphasizes that the Spirit of God is focused on the positive side, seeking to gather the wheat rather than condemn the world. The instrument also serves to provide for the continuation of the testimony, rather than simply storing it away. The sermon references various Bible verses to support these points.

Transcript

We have proceeded too far now with the matter that has been brought to us for this time for any kind of review or retrospect, but suffice it to say that what the Lord is saying to us is gathered around the first words of 42nd chapter of Isaiah, Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delighteth, I have put my spirit upon him, the servant of the Lord. The meaning of servanthood and service. A glance back to the chapter before that, chapter 41, at verse 8, we see that this divine conception and thought of servanthood was in the first place related to Israel.

Thou Israel, my servant Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. We have seen that whereas the great thought of ministering to God in the midst of the nations and unto the nations was wrapped up with the call of Israel, these prophecies and others show how lamentably Israel failed and had to be put on one side as the servant of the Lord. Then, in the prophecy, the Lord brought into full view the one who would not fail and who would fulfill all that thought of ministering to him.

And here he is in these words of chapter 42. Then we have seen that the Lord has not departed from his first thought and intention to have all that meaning of servanthood as now gathered up and set forth in his Son, expressed in a people. We move on to the later prophecies, not only in this book, but in the other

prophecies.

See, that thought and purpose deposited in a remnant. The main nation failed. The Lord secured everything in his Son and then found for himself his answer.

As in a nation within the nation, we have seen that that is exactly what we have in the New Testament. Church, in general, not answering to the Lord's purpose and his calling to satisfy him, to minister to him and his pleasure, failing again. But the Lord moving on and appealing to the Church and in the Church for a Church within the Church, a company not nominal but actual and true.

That is very evident truth in the New Testament. What we are then concerned with is the nature of this kind of service and servanthood that will bring to God that upon which his heart is set. Will satisfy him in establishing in the universe that law of service or ministry to God.

Now I want you to just look at one or two other fragments to bring us to the one particular matter that will occupy us in this connection this afternoon. It is in chapter forty-one to begin with. Chapter forty-one, we've read the words of Israel in verse eight.

Israel, my servant, look at verse fifteen. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth. Thou shalt thresh the mountains and beat them small.

Thou shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fend them. The wind shall carry them away.

The whirlwind shall scatter them. Now would you just look at some words in chapter twenty-one and verse ten. O thou my threshing ground and the corn of my floor.

O thou my threshing ground and the corn of my floor. Turn on to chapter twenty-eight and verse twenty-eight. Bread corn is ground, for he will not ever be threshing it.

Though the wheel of his cart and his horses scatter it, he doth not grind it. This also cometh from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. Here is one more of the number of conceptions of the servant of the Lord in these prophecies of Isaiah.

A new sharp threshing instrument. How many-sided is this service. How its complexion changes.

With this note something strong, something almost terrible comes in to the service. The servanthood takes on something very severe. There are other aspects.

There is the gentleness. There is the meekness. He shall not cry, nor lift up his voice, cause it to be heard in the street.

Brood, breed, shall he not break dimly smoking flanks, shall he not quench. That sounds far removed from a sharp threshing instrument having teeth. But it's the work of the same servant.

It's only another aspect of his business. There is the goodness and the severity of God. They are both of God.

Now before we look at this sharp threshing instrument, let us note one very important thing. While I read those other passages in chapter 21 and 28, there coming to this passage in 41, you can observe a transition. It is the transition from being threshed to become yourself the thresher.

In the two passages it's quite clear that Israel was threshed. O thou my threshing, seed corn is bruised, I will make thee a sharp threshing instrument. And the point is this, that before we can do any effective work for the Lord, that work must have been done in us.

This is a very important, a very vital part of the service of the Lord, to be a sharp threshing instrument, as we shall see. It is something important to the Lord, something necessary to him. He must have it.

He must have a ministry that corresponds to this idea of a sharp threshing instrument. But, dear friends, it might be all too easy to assume the business of a sharp threshing instrument and begin to handle people and situations very roughly. Any such business can only be done by those who themselves have been through the threshing and the bruising.

It's only safe and only right that it should be so. And so it was with Israel, what a threshing the Lord did with Israel, what a bruising he gave them, many times, particularly in their history. And I suggest to you that the remnant that returned from the exile knew in their own experience what being threshed means, and really bruised, softened, broken, humble, and then used it this tremendously effective way.

That may explain a very great deal. The strength, the power, the tremendously searching, effective ministry of the Church can only be done as the result of the Church having itself been dealt with in that way. I have said that this is a ministry that the Lord needs, a service that he requires.

And to have it, he must take those whom he will use through the experience that he is seeking in those to whom he uses them. It's a law of service, however it may be, individual servants of God to be effective. I suggest the sharp threshing instrument having teeth is quite a positive thing.

It is an effective thing, nothing negative about that. For any individual servant of God to really be like that, positive and telling and counting, effective, that servant will go through some seemingly rough handling by the Lord. It's a law of service.

If it should be a company, we have sought to emphasize this repeatedly these days, the Lord needs companies of people who stand in this servanthood ministry. Here, there, and there, standing as his servant whom he upholds, upon whom he makes his spirit rest. And such companies, local assemblies, in order that they shall really be effective, will go through devastating experiences.

Make no mistake about it, the sharp threshing instrument carries out a devastating work. The Lord is very practical, he is not theoretical, he makes things very real. So that this, which here in the symbolism is likened to a machine, is not really a machine, it's a people with a spiritual history.

A sentient people, unlike a machine, sensitive with feelings, with a heart, with a soul, with a human nature. And this people, this machine, if you like, here is a people or a machine with a spiritual history. It's been through it.

This people, when they came really to fulfill this ministry, were in a position to say, well, I know what I'm talking about, I've been through it, and it's been through me. I'm not giving you just a subject, and a theme, and a theory, and a teaching. I know this thing in my very being.

I've been through it. That is what is here. You dare not come to Isaiah 41.15, I will make the sharp threshing instrument until you have been to Isaiah 21.10, my threshing machine.

Realize that? Well, now that sounds pretty hard, but as I've said, that may explain quite a lot, may be. Why the Lord deals with us so severely? Why he is not going to allow us to be in a false position if we are going to be of any value to him? Why he takes us through it? Why we become his threshing? And the corn that is brewed. The corn that is brewed.

Well, having said that, and I trust you grasp it, and that it may be some help, some explanation of your experience, we can proceed to look at the function of this instrument. That is what it does, its effect. This ministry, this kind of service, is in the first place something that challenges.

Gazing your eye, mine's eye, the threshing instrument advancing toward the standing corn. And as it comes into contact, it's an interrogation. It's a challenge.

It says, in effect, what are you? What have you got? Are you worth anything? I'm going to find that out. It's a challenge. And is there anyone here this afternoon who will say that such a ministry is unnecessary in these times or at any time? The interrogation of profession, of what is standing there in the field, is occupying the ground.

The interrogation of it as to what it is. What are you? No, when the Lord gets to work on us, that's the thing that immediately arises. What we are.

And what we've got. This is only one way of speaking of it. Speaking in general, you can say, whenever the Lord begins to bring us under His flame, under His testing, into days of severe trial, the very first thing that is discovered is what we are and what we have got.

Can you really stand up to this? Have you got something with which to meet this testing? Don't you think it's important that that should be discovered and revealed? Say again, it is not the Lord's will that any should be in a false position, a mere profession without possession. So, He needs a ministry, a ministry. He needs you and me and He needs companies.

Oh, He would that the whole church would be of this kind as He intended Israel to be and did intend the church to be. He would have this kind of ministry fulfilled that, first of all, is ever discovering what there is for God in profession, in the whole system of things. All that which is spread over the earth, standing there and occupying the ground.

What is its worth? What is its value? What has it got? What is the truth about it? The Lord has to have a ministry that does that. The Lord finds it out. See, I only heard last week or heard only last week of somebody who had thought that they were Christians and having been asked if they were Christians, they were a Christian, said yes, went to church, took communion and read the Bible, prayed the prayers, went on with the whole Christian form of things, and then came into the home and circle of some very thoroughgoing Christians.

Nothing was said, but here it was. There was something different. This was not just formal, the Christian system.

This was not the nominal state of things. This was real. Real.

Life with God there. And that person went to her room and had a bad night, came down next morning and said, look here, I don't think I'm a Christian at all. Really, am I saved? Can you tell me? Of course, that opened the door for some very thoroughgoing dealings between the difference in mere profession,

nominalism and Christian practices and life.

Reality knowing the Lord. And I'm glad to say that that person came clean through into a new place altogether of assurance. But it required, you see, something that really exposed the falsehood, manifested real state of things.

And that is a ministry that is necessary. The people who've been through it with God, had some very drastic handling by Him, will, amongst other things, have that effect of being present as His challenge to all unreality. His challenge to all falsehood.

His challenge as to what really is there. And it may be that here this afternoon the Lord would do that work. Find out things and challenge someone here.

You've gone to church. You've taken communion. You may read the Bible, more or less.

You may pray, sometimes. But the sharp pressure instrument would challenge you today. What really have you got if you were put to the test? What have you got? Believe me, dear friends, the whole of Christianity is going to be put to that test.

It has begun. It has begun. Christians all over this world are being challenged by the situation.

The pressuring instrument is at work. And it's being found out whether they've got the real thing or whether it's only a profession. It's at work.

The day has already begun when this very thing is coming to the whole of the professing church. Let there be no mistake about it. Well, first of all then, the pressuring instrument challenges and asks or confronts with the question, what are you? What have you? And then as it proceeds with its work, it separates.

It separates. It discriminates. You see what it is doing? There is the chaff.

There are the husks. There is that which is apparent on the outside. There is that covering.

There it is. The sharp pressuring instrument gets to work to separate between what is merely and only external, outward, and that which is truly inward, the grain. To separate.

Yes, it's a great discriminating ministry. Another prophet, the prophet Jeremiah, whose life and ministry had so much to do with the false, the false in Israel, asked a question in the name of the Lord of the people. His question was, what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord of hosts? Chaff.

Chaff. Now, that which is so light, so flimsy, so superficial, can be so easily carried away by any draft that blows, goes with the wind. The light stuff.

Oh, I'm not trying to make up something this afternoon. Anyone who has any concern about the state of things today will feel a poignancy, a pain over the superficiality, the lightness, the frivolousness of a great deal. Indeed, it seems that some people have laid themselves out to make it so.

Turn Christianity into having a good time and the best of both worlds. All their attractions are, come and have a good time when you look into it to see what it is. It's all so light, so frivolous, so superficial.

A lot of that today. I'm not exaggerating, and God knows how I hate anything like unnecessary criticism. But the spirit of a prophet, I don't claim to be a prophet, but the spirit of a prophet demands that the

ministry of the sharp-pressing instrument shall come alongside of every other kind of ministry.

To first challenge, then to discriminate, to separate between what is true and what is false. The chaff may be a deception. It may be a deception.

You may go to the wheat field where it's all growing, standing up, take hold of an ear, and when you press it, you find nothing in it. Husks. Empty.

It's a lie. It's a deception. Do you think God is going to be ministered to by that sort of thing? Just an outward deception.

No. The sharp-pressing instrument, a ministry of such character, will always find out whether the thing is true or false. It's a very necessary thing.

It's necessary for it to be done in you and in me, finding out whether there's any deception about our position, any lie in our position, how far it is true. And I say again, God needs a ministry that will do this, that will, by his mercy, make those who are in a false position realize how false their position is, and seek for reality. Chaff.

Would you like to feed on chaff? How much satisfaction and growth would you find in a diet of chaff? And is it not true? There's very, very much today in ministry, in Christian life, upon which Christians are feeding that brings no satisfaction. It's empty. It is not ministering to their spiritual building up and strength and constitution.

It's not doing that. Far, far too many Christians who are in spiritual debility because of the lack of solid food, real food, bread, corn. How necessary it is, the Lord must have a ministry that finds out and discriminates between that which is only chaff and never, never does build up, and that which ministers to spiritual stature and food growth.

If we take the great servant, the Lord Jesus, that one who did satisfy God with all the other aspects of his ministry, how true these things were of him, how challenging he was to the situation in his day. Oh, it was not possible for him to be anywhere without the state of things being exposed. It was a vital part of his servanthood to challenge, to challenge, and how thoroughly he did it.

Yes, in that respect he was a sharp, threshing instrument, having teeth, and how true again it was of him that he was all the time discriminating, setting things in their place. This is the truth and that's the falsehood. This morning we referred to the vine, Israel, as God's vine.

We read from Isaiah chapter 5 how the vine had disappointed the husband man. Then Jesus came in, and we have to put a circle around one word, I am the true vine, the true vine. This is but a tradition.

This is but a profession. This is an empty thing, a pretense. I am the true vine.

I am the truth. His presence as well as his ministry had that effect of dividing between the false. The next thing that the sharp threshing instrument does is that it settles destiny.

It settles destiny. The chaff, the chaff, and you know why it was said, when the Lord Jesus first came into his ministry, he will truly purge his threshing floor. The wheat will he gather into his garner.

The chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire. The garner and the fire, two destinies. And the threshing floor decides and determines that destiny, what the end is going to be.

Its positive object, of course, is not to send to the flames. I think that some ministries, especially in past days, have thought that that was the supreme thing to do, to send men to hell, to hold flames before them. Well, it may be necessary to keep in view the one side of destiny, whatever it means, whatever it means, with unquenchable fire.

That's a destiny. And the threshing instrument determines that on the one side. But the positive intention and purpose of this instrument, surely, is to get wheat and to garner it, to preserve it, to secure it against loss.

That's really what it is after. If this chaff threshing instrument had intelligence, it would not come with this attitude, I'm going to find out all the chaff, that's my business. And to be occupied with the chaff and talk about the chaff and condemn the chaff, that's easy.

You don't want to be caught in that. The instrument would say, no, I'm here, though I know there's much chaff, I'm here really to get wheat. That's what I'm after.

I'm after the positive thing. Dear friends, let us always remember in our ministry that the Spirit of God is concerned with the positive side and not the negative. He has to take account of that and deal with it accordingly.

But what he is really here for is to get the corn, the bread corn. The real thing is after that. Not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved.

So said the great servant of his coming. And then the chaff threshing instrument had as perhaps its last and final function, expression of its ministry, a providing for the continuation of the testimony. The last thought is not to put it away in the garner and shut the door and leave it there.

And that's that. We've got it. We've got it.

That's all that matters. No, it must be sown again. It must be the start of further harvest.

That is what the Lord is really after, to carry on, perpetuate and extend the testimony. He's after spiritual increase. But to get it, it's a chaff threshing instrument.

You see, something very drastic. The continuation of the testimony of Jesus through the ages has ever been on this way. It's never been an easygoing, superficial kind of thing.

We know from the New Testament, we know from John the Apostle in Patmos, that the continuity of the testimony was coming through very drastic handling, the Lord with the Church. Oh, listen to those words to the seven churches again. What is it that the Lord is after? The preserving and the going on of the testimony of Jesus.

That is the heart of it all. But in order that that might be this chaff threshing instrument of discrimination, of manifestation, of separation, must do its work in the churches, in the believers, in the whole church. And if the testimony is to be perpetuated, it will be like this.

But let us take some heart from this, which sounds a bit disconcerting. Let's take some heart from this, dear friend. The thoroughgoing dealings of the Lord with us are to make things permanent and to give increase.

They are not destructive and limiting in His intention. They are that He might have more and more. It's like this.

But having said all that, we must take note of one thing here as we close. You see, Isaiah's context, these words about the chaff threshing instrument beating the mountains and the hills. And if you want to know what that means, I think you'll find it in verse 11.

Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded. They that strive with thee shall be as nothing and shall perish, because I will make thee a chaff threshing instrument having teeth and you'll beat the mountains alone. These mountains correspond to those adverse forces, those forces that were against the Lord and against His puppets and His servants.

In some, some way, some mysterious way, they were going to be broken and they were going to be given like chaff to the wind through the ministry of this people. They were going to be proved incapable standing before the Lord. The mountains, the hills, the incensed against thee will not be able to abide if you are a people like this.

Well again, take one glance at the great servant, what mountains of opposition, what mountains of incensed people against him. What's he done with them? Goliath was a tremendous mountain against him, set for his destruction, incensed against him. Oh, how incensed against him! Crucify him! Away with him! Crucify! What's he done with it? He's plucked that mountain up and cast it into the sea, the sea being the nations.

It's sunk in the nations. He's done it. Now that sounds hard, but you know the Lord must have a ministry that really does overthrow the forces of evil.

More to say about that perhaps later, but there it is. The letters close. A disciplined, purged, separated people are a great force against everything that is set against God.

They are. They mean something to the hostile forces. Well, this was very true of the Lord Jesus, and it is intended to be true of us.

I wonder if you can really grasp this and appropriate it. See, the Lord wants a ministry of this kind today. He needs it.

He needs your company where you are. And I could mention the various places that are represented here. He wants that company there and there and there to be, amongst all the other things of servanthood, a sharp, threshing instrument having teeth that will challenge all that is around as to what it's got and what it is.

Not by your words, but by what you are. What you are. And that will discriminate and separate.

It will go on. You get into trouble for it. And a lot of trouble.

But it's got to be done between falsehood and truth. It will do all this. The Lord needs such an instrument.

Well, I haven't made this up. This is not my conception. I have given you the scripture.

The Lord said to Israel, and Israel failed. He transferred it to an Israel within Israel. He said it concerning the church.

The church is not doing it as a whole. And so he transfers it to the church within the church and says, I have made these sharp, threshing instruments having teeth. Lord, give us all the meekness, humility that is needed to fulfill that ministry.

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