

Service and Servanthood of the Lord - Part 8 of 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound nature of servanthood as defined by scripture, emphasizing the characteristics and responsibilities of the Lord's servants.

Duration: 42:07

Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-3, Isaiah 49:6-7, Isaiah 52:13 - 55:9, Isaiah 61:1

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the concept of the servant of the Lord as described in Isaiah chapter 49. The servant is seen as someone who stands against all that is against the interests of the Lord and who tells amongst men. The speaker relates this concept to Jesus, highlighting that His voice can be gentle and compassionate, but also sharp and piercing like a sword. The speaker emphasizes that the church is meant to fulfill a similar service for God, being a presence that registers and has an effect both in the world and in the spiritual realm.

Transcript

As our custom is, we'll close this conference gathering around the Lord's table. The meeting will not be prolonged for that. Those of you who have a long way to go need not be anxious about time.

If you are the Lord's child, we welcome you to join with us in this remembrance of Him. Now we come to the last fragment for this time of this contemplation of the Lord's servant and the nature, meaning of the Lord's service. Behold my servant.

I turn you for this last word to the prophecies of Isaiah chapter 49. Chapter 49, Isaiah's prophecies. Listen, O Isles, unto me.

And hearken, ye peoples from far. The Lord hath called me from the womb. The bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me. And he hath made me a polished shaft.

In his quiver, in his quiver hath he kept me close. And he said unto me, Thou art my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Here then is one more, and for this time the last of this series of conceptions of the servant of the Lord and his service.

He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me. He hath made me a polished shaft.

In his quiver hath he kept me close. Thou art my servant. Now these remaining chapters of this book are not easy to expound for one reason in particular, that there is very little clear definition as to who is in view.

It is very difficult as you move through to see and recognize to whom the various passages refer. Sometimes it's perfectly clear, as in 52 and 53 and 61, no doubt about it there, that it is the coming Messiah, the Christ. At other times it looks to be like Israel, and then you find that even there it's not so clear, not so sure.

For instance, this very chapter, this very chapter is like death as you see. You go on to the chapter, and you have in the chapter, and you have words like these. It is to light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob.

That cannot be Israel raising himself up. And to restore the preserved of Israel. That cannot be Israel doing that to himself.

I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles. We are more familiar with that, aren't we? A light to lighten the Gentiles, the words of Simeon concerning the Lord Jesus himself. Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Well, we are able to identify that one, and yet in the whole setting it seems to move from one to the other. Now, I am not going to attempt to disentangle that and to give you the clear dividing lines. Indeed, it is not my intention to engage in an exposition of these chapters at all.

For as brief a time as I can use this evening, I just want to get a hold of this one conception of the servant of the Lord. Be he the original thought of the Israel, the whole nation? Be he the Messiah, or be he the remnant? Be he the whole church, or be he the church within the church? That does not matter so much to me and to us this evening. The point is, what is this divine conception of the servant and his service as viewed here? We have said that there are many conceptions of the servant in this book, and we have been looking at several of them over the last two days especially.

Here's another one. He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword. He hath made me a polished shaft.

A sharp sword. A polished shaft. That is what the Lord intends his servant, his servants, and their service to be.

With all the other things that they may be, this is one of the things. Not the only thing, but it is here, and it is to be taken note of. Sharp sword.

A polished shaft. And I think we should all say that the element associated with those symbols is that of incisiveness. A sharp sword and a polished shaft are no neutral things.

No indefinite things. They speak of something having an edge and a point. Something that registers and really does have an effect.

That is the overall feature of such things. And at once, we pass to the service that the church is intended to fulfill for God. And if it fails, service that the church within the church, that company within the nominal that is the real, and that really does answer to God's thought, service that it will fulfill.

It will be like this. It will be present, not only in this world and on this earth, amongst men, but as in the heavenlies amongst other hostile forces. A something that registers.

Something that cuts in. Something that pierces. Something that counts and tells.

A sharp sword and a polished shaft. That, dear friends, is what the Lord intends us to be as his servants. And again, that is what he intends not only individuals to be, but his church in representation in any place.

Now, from another standpoint, it is quite right that any company of the Lord's people should be a very loving, happy little fellowship. Enjoying him and enjoying one another, and going on mildly and very pleasantly. Having a nice time.

Everybody saying what nice people they are. What a lot of love there is amongst them and so on. That's right.

But it's only one side. Such, even such, ought to be a terror to everything that is evil. A positive menace to the powers of evil on the earth and in the heavens.

They ought to be there as something that stands against all that is against the interest of the Lord. Something that tells amongst men. Now, of course, it's not at all difficult to understand all this when we come away from the general to the particular and take another look at the Lord Jesus.

Well, in the last conference, we said that his voice was like the sound of many waters. It's only another way of saying there are many aspects of Christ. Sometimes it's very gentle, very kind, very compassionate, very understanding, consoling.

Like that. Sometimes it's reasoning, seeking to reach understanding, see eye to eye, gentle argument, as with Nicodemus. But sometimes the word in his mouth was like a sharp sword.

Sometimes he was like a polished sharp. And you can see that aspect of his presence here. The point, the point was being felt by the people around him.

And you know a sharp sword or a polished sharp is not a comfortable thing to encounter. And how many of them cringed shrank and felt that point and that cutting and that piercing. Really, you know, his crucifixion was very largely because of that.

Their retaliation, their hatred. He was far too straight, far too clear cut. He was far too piercing and exposing for their comfort.

He exposed their hypocrisy. He uncovered their falsehood. He showed up their inconsistencies.

He tore from them their masks. He was a sharp sword. He was a polished sharp.

And he had that effect upon everything that was false and wrong, contrary to God in truth, however pretentious it was. Yes, that was his effect. And that is one aspect of the servant of the Lord, and there'll be no doubt about it.

And it will bring things back on us if we are like that. There is a side of things where you must not condone, where you must not compromise, where you must not be gentle. Your effect must be incisive.

No one can misunderstand a sharp sword or a polished sharp. That's something that no one can misunderstand. And so it is necessary for this aspect of divine service to be present.

May go altogether against your natural temperament. You want to be on good terms with everybody. Well, remember that you may, you may by that way just fail to do a piece of work for the Lord.

Sometimes we have to put aside our own feelings like that and be very faithful. Be very faithful. For I suggest to you that a sharp sword and a polished sharp are very faithful things.

Very faithful. It is speaking the truth, even if it is in loud being faithful. Well, all that.

What I'm saying, and I can add to it, is this, that there is a ministry to the Lord and from the Lord, which is of this character, and it is clear cut, incisive, definite, it registers, and it will have no talk or compromise with anything that is untrue, unreal, that is false, and that is contrary to the Lord. And after all, after all, dear friends, our real accountableness is in the realm of spiritual forces, isn't it? What we count for is known best there amongst those spiritual intelligences. Though how many advantages they get by our weakness and our indefiniteness, our uncertainty, how much ground they hold because we are not as utter as we should be on the things of God.

We are not as positive as we ought to be. We are wobbling. We are weak.

We are uncertain. We are indefinite. We are limping between two opinions and they are holding the ground.

All that. I suggest that these weapons are a contradiction to that sort of thing, and they mean that the enemy will lose ground if we are like this. We're really positive for God.

We are clear-cut for God if we are sharp as his weapons and polished as his shots. Well, that's the real point here. But then we have to ask, how can that be? On what ground can that be? Because this kind of effectiveness, this telling power, this incisiveness, like everything else, has a ground, a basis, and our chapter makes that perfectly clear.

I don't mean that it's written in the chapter, but the chapter itself marks the point which makes it possible, makes it possible for this one, whoever he is, I think these words themselves refer to the Messiah. However, leave that. It is possible for this servant of the Lord to say this about himself.

You can't say it unless you've got the same foundation. You've got to have the same position as he had to say it. And so chapter 49 of Isaiah's prophecies marks the point at which a long-standing controversy is at an end.

The history was this. Israel, the nation, had lost its position of distinctiveness by allowing to come in the gods of the nations, their idols and their altars, their obelisks and their asherah. You know all the prophets had to say about that.

The world and its gods had come in, and that had raised the great controversy between them and the Lord. Idolatry, which is a very big word, a very comprehensive term, idolatry. We need not just restrict it to idols of wood and stone that the heathen worship.

Idolatry can be almost anything. And we can say of it that it is anything that divides life with God. Anything that shares things with the Lord.

When we come to that again in a moment. Now that was what had happened in Israel, and that had raised the big controversy as to who is the Lord. Is the Lord the Lord? And the only Lord.

Are these gods also lords? That's the big question. The prophets fought that battle. The real battle that they were in was just because of that.

They were fighting that whole thing. But Israel persisted. They were wedded to their idols, and they hardened their hearts against the prophets.

And at last, God said, they are wedded, they are wedded to idols. And so let them go to the land where the idols are. He handed them over to Babylon, to Chaldea, way into captivity.

Seventy years. And that did it. Those seventy years were purging fires.

And idolatry was purged out of Israel and never again, Mark you, from that time to this very day, today, in our own lifetime, has idolatry had a place amongst the Jews of that kind. God cut in between them in Babylon, and so far as that kind of idolatry is concerned, that form of idolatry, it was finished. Now this forty-ninth chapter sees the end of that controversy.

It's settled. Who is the Lord? The Lord is the Lord. God alone is God.

His idols are nothing. So far as the Lord is concerned, He occupies the alone place as Lord. And that's the ground.

That's the ground of triumphant warfare. That's the basis of this kind of effectiveness. Now I've broadened that out as a principle.

There'll be a lot more, of course, that will be said presently about Israel. But you know that this chapter is the second half of Isaiah's book, which looks beyond the captivity. It looks beyond the captivity.

A lot to be done. A lot of unsatisfactory conditions. The Lord still has a lot of controversy.

But that, after the captivity, I'm saying, after the captivity, that one thing was settled. Now if this one, in chapter forty-nine, is the Messiah, the servant, thou art my servant Israel, the true Israel, the true Israel, in whom I will be glorified and use you in this way as my salvation to the ends of the earth, and so on. If this is the one, the Messiah, then again, His tremendous effectiveness, His incitedness, was based upon this utterness for God.

It sprang out of there being absolutely no compromise in any direction with anything that was not for God. No doubt about that. Now you see, God has always been against mixture.

And mixture has always been the cause and the occasion of defeat where the people of God are concerned. Mixture. Well, was it not the mixed multitudes that came out of Egypt that were the weakness and the undoing of the nation in the wilderness? It says the mixed multitudes murmured, murmured.

And we know that in the final summing up, it was that murmuring that set that people aside, that they never were allowed to go into the land. The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians, neither murmur ye as

some of them murmured and fell in the wilderness in one day. But it was the mixed multitudes that murmured.

They were the weakness of the whole thing and the cause of their defeat and subsequent loss. Yes, Israel's mixed multitudes and this mixture in Israel later, in the later period of their history to which we are returning, the mixture, the mixture was the cause of their undoing and their going into Babylon. And even when they came back from Babylon, there was still mixture.

And you know how in Ezra, in Nehemiah, the great business of those leaders was to deal with this state of mixture in marriage, get rid of it. The two things that were not the same thing. They laid themselves out to do it.

And when that was done, the people are in a strong position. But let us come to the great servant again, Lord Jesus. It was just this very thing that lay behind his statement, the prince of this world cometh to me and hath nothing in me.

He hath nothing. He hath nothing. Nothing that belongs to him or relates to him or is of him in me.

Therefore, the prince of this world is cast out. His victory over the forces of evil was due to his complete purity so far as the kingdom of Satan and all that belonged to it was concerned. You see, that was the battle of the wilderness, wasn't it, during the forty days after his baptism? What was Satan trying to do? He was trying to defile, to corrupt this one, this Christ, by getting him to accept this world, this world in its unregenerate state, in its unsaved condition, to accept it like that as his dominion.

All this will I give thee, thou wilt fall down and worship me. Why, why did Jesus refuse it? He's not going to be the king of a corrupt world, of a defiled world, of this world? Note, note, not only then but how always he was not having it. When they would come and by force make him king, what did he do? Oh, what a chance.

What a chance. Hadn't he come for that? Ah, no. When they would by force make him king, he departed into a desert place.

I wish we could handle all our temptations to popularity like that. A corrupt popularity. You see, the statement about him is so clear and he is so true to it, he would not commit himself unto them, for he knew what was in man.

And he knew perfectly well the state, the corrupt state of this world and of the crowd, that today they would come and make him king by force and tomorrow they would say crucify him. That's the world. If the world cannot use you for itself, it will crucify you.

That's the kind of world it is. Because the spirit of this world is to use you and everything for itself. It's the spirit, it's the principle of the flesh, of the fallen nature, to use everything for itself.

It's corrupt. Jesus is not having that kind of kingdom. In effect, he's saying, if I'm going to have the kingdom of this world, and I am, I'll have them as redeemed from all iniquity, with the prince of this world cast out on pure ground, holy ground.

And so he hurled the weapon of his mouth, the sword of his mouth, at the tempter and says, it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only. That's the ground of strength. Him only.

Him only. That was the trouble with Israel, brought Israel's downfall, because it was not him only. Well, the point, dear friends, clearly is this, that strength, incisiveness, effectiveness, victory over evil and evil forces, is upon the basis of a heart undivided where God is concerned, where he is Lord and Lord alone.

And Lord alone. So when, in principle, in principle, this controversy as to what place the Lord is to hold and how much of the place he is to have, when that is settled, then it's possible to say, He hath laid my mouth like a sharp sword, he hath made me a polished shaft, his quiver hath he hidden me. I think you see, with all the wrappings, the principle is just this, there's got to be a place with God where this world, this world has no place.

Where all that belongs to this world as Satan's kingdom has no place forever. No place. But oh, after all, dear friends, in far more subtle ways than you or I recognize, the enemy is always at work to weaken our fighting force, blunt the edge of God's weapon in us by some kind of worldliness, some form of worldliness.

For worldliness as a principle, some link with this world, some way of doing things as the world does it, some pandering to some worldly interests, some way in which we use our time and our means, oh, so many, many different forms it takes. This world is wholly inimical to God. It's only as you and I are completely severed from that whole thing in a spiritual as well as in a practical way shall we be a fighting weapon in the hands of God.

This world is wholly inimical to God. It's only as you and I are completely severed from that whole thing in a spiritual as well as in a practical way shall we be a fighting weapon in the hands of God. And I say that is something that the Lord very much needs.

But after all, these symbols represent the belligerent aspect of the service of the Lord. We're in a tremendous battle. We are going to be beaten, defeated, and worsted unless we're on the right ground.

The right ground. And the right ground is the ground that the Lord Jesus was on all the time. No selfish considerations.

No personal interests to sell. That's the spirit of the world. I repeat, the spirit of the world.

Because after all, servant, servant, if rightly understood, just means unselfishness, doesn't it? Unselfishness. It's not true to the principle of servanthood to be using your position for your own ends. That's a violation of servanthood.

The real meaning of a servant is one whose personal interests, considerations, and ends have been completely subjected to the interest of the one to be served. Hold on. They just live for that one.

Never consider how it affects them at all. What it matters to them, they live for the one to whom they have given themselves a servant. It's entirely and utterly an unselfish thing.

And yet that's such a tremendous power as seen in the case of the Lord Jesus. Unselfishness. What a range that covers.

What a range it covers. Selfishness. The only way of being delivered from it is that another should have completely captured the heart.

Another should have taken the place of servant. And that's where the Lord Jesus was. He was just there.

It was another. I come. The role of the book, it is written of me.

To do thy will, O God. Thy law is within my heart. That's the servant.

And again I say, what a power he was and has ever been in this world. Oh, you see, it's just the reverse, isn't it, of the world? If you are going to count for anything at all, if you are really going to mean anything, you must be master. You really must assert yourself.

You must, you really must make your presence felt. You must be something. That's the world.

Always is the world. World cannot understand this sort of thing, that you will ever be anything at all if you're nothing. You never will be anything at all unless you are something.

See what I mean? Sounds strange, but that's just it. Cannot understand this law of the kingdom of heaven, this law of real spiritual power, the meekness of Christ, the meekness of Christ. But, like it or not, dear friends, the most potent thing in this universe was the meekness of Jesus Christ.

Listen. Listen. You know it.

Heard it a thousand times. He emptied himself, took upon himself the form of a bond slave, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, became obedient unto death, yea, and the death of the crown. Why? For that reason, on that ground.

Because of that, God hath highly exalted him, and given him the name which is above every name, and in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, things in heaven, things in earth, things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Is that power? That power is by way of meekness, self-emptiness. It's tremendous.

Tremendous. Well, there it is. All this is just gathered round this idea of service, really to count for God in a definite and incisive way, in the midst of all that is inimical to his interests, really to be somebody who just counts for God, or a company that counts for God, about whose registration there is no mistaking at all.

And the people who are utterly for the Lord will be like that. He will make them a sharp sword, and a polished sharp, a polished sharp. That's something that is not rusty and unfit for use, but something in his hand, in his quiver, ready to be used.

The Lord make us like that.

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