

The Servant

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound implications of Christ's servanthood as the Lamb, the Man, and the King, emphasizing self-emptying and obedience in service to God.

Scripture: Isaiah 52:13

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Servanthood"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound nature of servanthood as exemplified by Jesus Christ, who is portrayed in Isaiah as 'my servant,' 'the Lamb of God,' 'the Man,' and 'your King.' Each designation reveals a different aspect of His service: His self-emptying as a bond-slave, His obedience unto death, His kinship with humanity in suffering, and His ultimate kingship through the Cross. Sparks highlights that true service to God requires utter selflessness and obedience, mirroring Christ's example, and that through His sacrifice, He redeems humanity from sin. The sermon calls believers to embrace a similar spirit of service, recognizing that suffering leads to reigning with Christ.

Transcript

Reading: Isa. 52:13-15; 53:1-12.

"Behold, my servant..." (Isa. 52:13).

"Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

"Behold, the man!" (John 19:5).

"Behold, your King!" (John 19:14).

We are going to be quite brief and simple in what we say in the fourfold connection of service represented here - so very full and altogether defeating every attempt at bringing out its depth, its wonder, its glory; but our hope is that, altogether apart from what is said, we shall be touched in our hearts by the spirit of service breathed by these four designations.

The Servant

"Behold, my servant." It does not need a great deal of insight to see that those four designations correspond to what is in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. (In passing, it is much to be regretted

that what has been called the fifty-third chapter should begin at the question, "Who hath believed our message?" In the original text the new section begins at verse 13 of what is Chapter 52 - "Behold, my servant" - and should run right on as we read it; and then all that follows is the servant seen from different standpoints, and those different standpoints are the four which we have mentioned - "My servant," "the Lamb of God," "the Man," "your King.")

Matthew, when he quotes Isa. 42:1 - "Behold, my servant" - uses the Greek word for bond-slave - "Behold, my bond-servant" or "bond-slave" (Matt. 12:18) - which at once gives a different complexion to the whole matter of the servant and His service; for when it comes to the bond-slave - the indentured, branded bond-slave - you know that all personal rights and liberties have been abandoned. For such, there are no personal rights and no personal liberties, they have been surrendered. The idea, therefore, of the servant of the Lord as represented by the Lord Jesus is that of a bond-slave, and this implies utter self-emptying. (And can it be otherwise with any other servant of the Lord? Surely it is impossible for us to assume any higher position in our service to the Lord than He took.) So Paul, when he says "taking the form of a bondservant" links with it - he "emptied himself" (Phil. 2:7).

You see, He was reversing the whole course of evil. The Cross - which is but the point at which this self-emptying reaches its fulness and finality of expression and demonstration - is the culmination of an undoing and an emptying of something which had no right. By letting go His rights, He undid false rights. The whole course of evil, of sin, began with Satan and is written in the history of man, who, at the instigation of Satan, sought to have personal fulness of rights and liberties, taking it out of the hands of God and having it in his own hands. Satan began it, even in the very height of his glory, and it was a tremendous thing that he lost. We will not go back in detail to those descriptions of him in person, position and office before his fall - the covering cherub occupying the position which those custodians of the very mercy-seat within the tabernacle later occupied, "the anointed cherub that covereth: ...thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire" (Eze. 28:14), and so on. And he sought more than that. What more was there to have but the very throne of God, equality with God, and in that false ambition and aspiration to have the very place of God within himself, to be the central object of worship? Satan brought into man's nature all that which we know exists within ourselves of desire to have things our way, to be regarded as something: or, to put it the other way, all that hatred for being nothing and being emptied. You know what human nature is now. All this that we in our lifetime have seen and known in world affairs is simply the outworking of that original evil - to have within your own power the dominion, the godship, the worship. To undo it all, the Lord Jesus emptied Himself - and that is service; to undo that. It is not only the bringing of God into His place, but also the bringing back to God of everything that has been taken from Him. That is the spirit of service.

It works out this way - that, in order to get everything for God, we have no ground of our own to stand on. If God is going to be all in all, as He ultimately is going to be, it will be by this way of the Cross; firstly, by the Son's emptying of Himself; and then by our being emptied. Our emptying is not in the same realm as His, for we have not His rights and His glories and His fulness, but still it is an emptying, and God only knows what that means in its full measure. We know a little of the way of the Cross in our own lives, finding ourselves all the time being emptied and poured out, every bit of ground of selfhood taken away to give God His full place. "Behold, my servant," "my bond-slave." That means utter self-emptying.

The Lamb

"Behold, the Lamb of God" - and that only carries what we have said to its final step. If the very essence of servant-hood is obedience unto another, the repudiation of all one's own rights, then the Lamb says that that obedience is unto death. "...taking the form of a bondservant... becoming obedient even unto death" (Phil. 2:7-8). You pass at once from the slave to the Lamb, the Lamb obedient unto death. "As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7) in complaint, in revolt, in objection, in retaliation, in resistance, in excuse, in self-pity. No! "...becoming obedient even unto death, yea, death of the cross."

"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" The sin - not the sins - of the world; the whole world's sin. What is the whole world's sin? It is Adam's sin; it is disobedience through unbelief. That is the world's sin. Paul argues that out in his letter to the Romans - the unbelief, the disobedience, from the very beginning. He, the Lamb, takes away the sin of the world, the whole world's disobedience, in His obedience. He compasses all disobedience in His one act of obedience by which He sanctifies them that believe once for all. He takes away the sin.

If you want that illustrated, you have the simplest and most familiar of illustrations. "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Where did that Lamb first come into view, in type, in figure? In Egypt, on the Passover night. "The Lord spake unto Moses... They shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household" (Ex. 12:1,3). Now, there was no virtue in the actual animal or its blood. The blood of lambs, rams, bulls, goats, had no virtue; but the virtue was typically in their obedience which was so utter as to be unto death. The deep doctrine here is that life springs out of death. The death of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb meant the life of the believer through faith. While death swept through the land, life was theirs through faith. "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin" - the unbelief and the disobedience.

You know that is pressed all the way through with Israel. In the brazen serpent - "if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived" (Num. 21:9). It was the obedience, it was the faith, that was virtuous - not the serpent. The faith of the Son of God led Him to death in His Cross - faith in God Who raiseth the dead. He looked through the Cross and was obedient unto death, believing in the God of resurrection. So, life through His faith. The Apostle says, "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20); the virtue of His faith over against the world's unbelief; the virtue of His obedience over against the disobedience of the whole world. The Lamb of God bore away the sin of the world.

The Man

"Behold, the man!" I expect there was a sneer on Pilate's face when he said that. Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and a purple garment. It was all done in mockery and for ignominy, and as He came out these words in Isa. 52:14 were literally fulfilled - "Like as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men)." Pilate doubtless waved his hand in the direction of Jesus and said, derisively, "Behold, the man!" You see the Cross bringing His manhood down to shame and degradation. They despised Him; His visage was marred more than any man; there is no man in the whole race who is such an object of contempt as He; "more than any man... more than the sons of men." This very word reminds us of a title which He chose for Himself and loved to use of Himself - "the Son of man." Why did He use it? Because it related Him to the race, it brought Him into kinship with man. And here in the Cross, as man in this deplorable, ignominious state, He shows what man is like in the sight of God, what the race has come to. That men could bring Him to this shows what

men are like. Here He is on the one hand representing the deplorable spiritual state to which sin has brought man, and He has entered into that in a kinship with all men - "Him who knew no sin he made sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). He has entered into our deepest degradation, in order to be the redeeming kinsman. It is a wonderful change of scene from this man Whose visage is marred more than any man, to the Man in the glory or on the Mount of Transfiguration. All that shame and despicableness was necessary in order that He might bring us to this other; it was needful to bring the representative man to that dishonour in order that we might be changed into the likeness of His glorious manhood. "Behold, the man!" What do you look at? It is a sorry and terrible picture of a man that is here. Was there ever service like that - to God, and to the race?

"Behold, the man!" - a man despised, rejected. But the prophet carries it further. "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." That was the attitude of Job's friends. 'God has done this! This is what you deserve at the hands of God!' That was how man viewed it. A little later the prophet says, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he (the Lord) hath put him to grief: ...thou (the Lord) shalt make his soul an offering for sin." The Lord brought Him down there in order to exalt us. He, as in His own manhood, touched the very depths of sin's outworking.

"The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." That word 'iniquity' carries within its meaning an alliance with Satan. The iniquity of Israel was that they went into alliance with false gods and the gods of the heathen, which are demons. That is the great iniquity of Israel. "He hath laid on him the iniquity." See what Satan would do with the Son of God, how he would degrade Him! That is the work of the devil, and men have done it at his instigation; but, in the risen, ascended, glorified Christ, the deepest, direst work of Satan is destroyed by the Cross. That is service to God.

The King

"Behold, your King!" Again, Pilate, of course, was mocking; as far as a man in his predicament could, he was making a joke of it. "Behold, your King! ...Shall I crucify your King?" It is remarkable how the sovereignty of God is active, even behind a man's joke. There was far more truth in this than Pilate ever intended. "Your King!" Of course, with the Jews, Messiah and 'king' were synonymous terms. Their Messiah was to be king, and their king was to be Messiah. They were refusing Him as their Messiah, and therefore as their king. But note how Divine sovereignty transformed the Cross from what men intended it to be - the gibbet of a rejected Messiah - into the throne of a triumphant Christ. He does reign from His Cross, as you and I know. It is by the Cross that He has triumphed. It is by the Cross that He has gained His great ascendancy in our hearts and drawn from the nations through many generations men to worship Him as King. Pilate said, "Behold, your King!" and the Jews replied 'Crucify him! He is no king of ours!' But God saw to it that in that very hour He ascended a spiritual and moral throne which has shaken this universe to its utmost bounds. Through the door which was opened then and there we are able to look in the book of the Revelation, and we see in chapter 1 the Man; and then we see the Servant, the Lamb; then we see the King. "King of kings, and Lord of lords," yet the Lamb in the midst of the throne. The government, the throne, the kingship are held together from Calvary onward.

Well, that is servanthood, and service, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned. I am not suggesting that we can serve in the same fulness and in the same way. We cannot serve atoningly, but we can serve in the same spirit; and service to God does involve the same principles - utter self-emptying, having nothing of our own, obedience even unto death, allowing ourselves to be marred and broken and humbled and despised; but, blessed be God, "if we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). The Throne

stands at the end of the way of the Cross.

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