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The Servant of God, Part 3

Isaiah 49:1-6, Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.
The LORD called Me from the womb;
From the body of My mother He named Me.
2 He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.
3 He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel,
In Whom I will show My glory.”
4 But I said, “I have toiled in vain,

I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;
Yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the LORD,
And My reward with My God.”

- 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
And My God is My strength),
- 6 He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

The Preparation of a Servant of God

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul describes the “training” to which he daily subjected himself as a servant of God.

1 Corinthians 9:27, “But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Paul’s commitment here was for good reason. Truly, God is always training His servants. Salvation brings with it this calling.

- Moses spent forty years in a desert in preparation for ministry.
- Paul spent three years in the desert of Arabia.
- Elijah spent time in the wilderness being fed by Ravens.
- Joshua studied under Moses.
- Mark sat beneath Barnabas.
- Titus and Timothy were disciplined by Paul.
- The disciples were trained under Christ for three years.

Now in the context of ministry, we are not surprised at this.

2 Timothy 2:1-2, “And the things which you have heard from me [Paul] in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men [which implies training/discipleship], who will be able to teach others also.”

Matthew 28:19-20a, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I [Christ] commanded you...”

All would-be servants of God must be prepared for their work. This raises a rather interesting question: Did Christ undergo any training for His ministry? Was our Lord prepared for His service?

Indeed He was! In fact, Isaiah 49 indicates that an important part of Christ's work as "The Servant of God" was His preparation.

Isaiah 49:2b, "and He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me, and He has also made Me a select arrow."

At first glance it appears that Christ is making further reference to His tool. As such it appears that this is talking further about "The Tool" of the Servant; and to a degree that is the case. Recall the contrast; this Servant would conquer NOT with a sword (like Cyrus), BUT a dagger which was His mouth (i.e., teaching and preaching, engaging people one on one with the truth of God's Kingdom). And here we read that God also deigned to use His Servant as "an arrow"- which would involve distant attacks. From this we can conclude that the Servant would be available for every use which God might ordain; whether that be close encounters (and hence the "sword"/"dagger") or distant attacks (and so the reference to the "arrow"). Yet that is NOT the emphasis of this latter phrase: "...and He has also made Me a select arrow."

Notice the contrast between the two statements in this verse.

- He has made My mouth like a sharp sword. The focus of this phrase is on the "mouth" of the servant and so His tool.
- He has also made Me a select arrow. The focus of this phrase is NOT on that which the servant would use in His ministry, but on the Servant Himself. He wasn't "like" BUT in fact WAS "a select arrow." He literally was a forged/sharpened weapon in the hands of God!

The emphasis of the latter phrase is on the manner of preparation to which God would subject His Servant in order to use Him: "He was forged into a select [lit. a "sharpened" (cf. Jeremiah 51:11)] arrow."

Let me ask you this question: What does it take to make an arrowhead?

An arrowhead is made by the patient chipping of particles from a rough rock until a polished/sharpened shaft is ready for the quiver of the huntsman or warrior. That is exactly what is implied. When Isaiah tells us that God had transformed His Servant like an arrow, he is telling us that the Servant had undergone the cutting of the chisel; a slow and grueling process filled with pain, difficulty, and hardship. This is the focus!

And this was the case in the life of THE Servant, Jesus Christ. When we think of Christ and the suffering He underwent as God's Servant, we typically think of the cross. And yet, that wasn't the only place where He suffered. He suffered in His life as well.

Hebrews 5:7, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death..."

Hebrews 5:8, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered."

Isaiah 53:3-4, "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...He was despised...smitten of God, and afflicted."

Unlike the popular notion of Christ today, Jesus wasn't a "magical" god who when hungry spoke and there was bread;¹ when thirsty, He spoke and water came from a rock; when cold, He spoke and He was warm. Rather, "He suffered in all ways as we, yet without sin," (Hebrews 4:15). In fact, Christ said that one of the reasons He came to this world was to suffer (John 12:27)!

And yet, He also suffered the blows of the Master craftsman in His death, both physically and spiritually. Physically:

Isaiah 53:10a, "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief..."

According to Isaiah 53:5, Christ was "crushed for our iniquities." And yet, how was He crushed? It began in the garden.

Luke 22:44, "And being in agony [Jesus] was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."

This is why an angel had to strengthen Christ in order for Him to go on (Luke 22:43). And we read of the cruel treatment of Christ at the hands of the Roman soldiers, their cruel mockings, beatings, and torture (Matthew 27:27-31). All of these led to the unthinkable suffering of the cross! Yet that wasn't half of it! Notice He also suffered spiritually.

Matthew 27:45-46, "Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'"

When one studies Christ's prayers throughout His life, you learn that when Christ prayed, He always prayed "My Father..." In fact, referencing God as "His Father" got Him in trouble with the Jews in John 10. And yet here, for the first and last time in His life, Christ referred to the Father as, "My God!" Why? Because here the Father had turned His back on His Son! At this point, Jesus did not enjoy the privileges of a son; rather, He suffered the consequences of a sinner.

Truly, throughout His life, Christ suffered the crushing blows of the Master. His life being chipped away, cut, and shaped by the Master's sharpening tool. And why did Christ go through all of this hardship? There are two reasons First, in order that He might be a sympathetic High Priest.

Hebrews 2:17-18, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."

Hebrew 4:15, "...we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

This is great! All that Christ endured while on this earth enables Him now to sympathize with us! There is no one with any problem that Christ cannot understand. And yet more importantly is the second (less understood and rarely considered) reason why Christ suffered on this earth. He suffered that He might be made an appropriate sacrifice for our sin.

Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect [or "been shown to be authentic"], He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."

It was His suffering that demonstrated the genuineness of His character. As Hughes put it, "His sufferings both tested and attested His perfection" (Hughes, 1993) that is the idea behind "having been made perfect." It was the crushing blows of the Master that prepared Him and thus qualified Him:

- For His ministry.
- For His office.
- To be the sacrifice for our sin!
- To be our Lamb of God!

If all that was needed for our salvation was simply the sacrifice of a perfect being, we could have just killed Him as a baby! But if what was needed was a *fitting* substitute, a second Adam, and thus the best of the best, it therefore was necessary for Christ to endure ALL that Adam and mankind faced; and more! All the...

- Trial.
- Hardship.
- Difficulty.
- Temptations.
- Weaknesses.
- Misery.
- Suffering.
- Sadness.

Now having successfully endured the sharpening of the Master's tool (Hebrews 4:15), THE Servant demonstrated His qualification as "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And thus a perfect/mature sacrifice, "...He became... the source of eternal

salvation” (Hebrews 5:9).

This was the preparation of THE Servant of God. He was shaped and molded into a “select arrow” of the Lord!²

Now it should not surprise you that as the Master goes, so goes His servants! Truly, if Christ was made to be “a select arrow of God,” you can be sure that we too will undergo the cutting and chipping of the Master’s tool as well!³ And yet this was just the beginning, Christ having been shaped and molded by the blows of the God was made ready for service, which brings us to the next statement of Isaiah 49:2.

Qualified

Isaiah 49:2, “He has hidden Me in His quiver.”

The quiver was the place of readiness.⁴ It was the place where you put arrows that were ready to be used! That this passage says that Christ was made to be an arrow and so “hidden... in [God’s] quiver” tells us that as a Servant of God, Christ was a ready Servant. And that truly is what we see. He never was too preoccupied with life to be used by God. His eating, drinking, resting, wants, likes, and dislikes never distracted Him from God’s purpose for His life! In other words, and this is saying something, Christ was never inconvenienced by God! Every interruption, difficulty, set-back was understood by Christ to be a divinely appointed opportunity for service in the Kingdom of God!

This likewise must be our attitude and outlook when it comes to God’s kingdom. When we’ve worked a hard day and come home only to discover that more ministry awaits us there; when we encounter the “unfortunate” circumstance, the uninvited guest, the undesirable position, job, or duty, the inconvenient providence, we must understand that as sServants of God these are not obstacles, but opportunities for service! Think of it, Christian: Where are you at this moment? You may think, “I’m licking my wounds!” But that is not where you are. Like Christ, you have been “hidden in God’s quiver” which means that you are next up for service in the Kingdom of God. Like it or not... ready or not, your next!

That is what God has in mind in terms of training us for service in His Kingdom:

1. The shaping of us through suffering and
2. The cultivating in us a heart that will never be inconvenienced by ministry!

Now you must see that God does not wait until we arrive before He uses us. Rather, it is “as we go” that the Lord shapes and forms us for His purpose! And that purpose is twofold. First it is to serve God.

Serving God

Isaiah 49:3, “And He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel...”

Thus far we’ve looked at this phrase a couple of times primarily because of the identification of “My Servant” as the true “Israel.” And because of this, it is easy to read past the point of this passage which gives us “The Purpose” of God in raising up this Servant.

Why did God raise up this Servant? Why did Christ come to the earth? And what is God’s plan for you who have been made a servant in His Kingdom?

Our first thought might be that Christ came to this earth for the purpose of salvation. After all, Jesus did say that He came for that purpose.

Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Yet believe it or not, our salvation was not Christ’s ultimate purpose in coming. Rather, based on the text before us, we learn that Christ came to this earth ultimately to Serve God!

Isaiah 49:3, “And He said to Me, ‘You are MY Servant...’”

Truly, Christ came to serve God! And thus we read what Christ said to His disciples when they were concerned about His health:

John 4:34, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.”

John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

And we read about this in Christ’s prayer in the garden.

Luke 22:42, “Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.”

Truly, Christ came for a very important reason; to Serve God/to uphold God’s will! Now as we have seen, that “will” included our salvation. But let us NOT conclude from this that

- Christ is OUR servant.
- Redemption revolves around us.
- God exists to please man, to give us what we want, or to fulfill our will.

Indeed, we must understand that Christ first and foremost is THE Servant of God! And herein is the reason why God saved you! Ultimately it wasn’t so that we’d be happy. Rather, it was to

use us for His purpose, His pleasure, His will!⁵ And what ultimately is that will?

To Glorify God

Isaiah 49:3, “And He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory.”

Literally this reads “...in whom I will manifest My glory.” This gives us the second purpose which God has deigned for THE Servant Jesus Christ, He came to glorify God.

And what does that mean? Again recall that “glory” has the primary meaning of “weight or heaviness.” As a description of God, for example, it references the weightiness or substance of God’s being. It is the opposite of “vain” which means “light” or “of no substance.” Christian, whatever it is that is moving you or compelling you at any given moment that is what has substance in your life. That Christ was raised up to “manifest the glory of God” tells us that through Christ God deigned to make us see that God is and that He is a being with whom we must reckon. And Jesus had no qualms in proclaiming this when He walked the earth!

John 14:13, “And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

Christ would answer our prayer that God might be praised, honored, worshipped, obeyed, and served! And thus He prayed this:

John 17:1, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee.”

In other words, Christ prayed, *show the world who I really am that this realization might result in a world showing their reverence for You!* And not surprisingly, this is why God saved you as well! When Exodus says to those just redeemed from slavery, “You shall not take the name [or the “character”] of the Lord your God in vain...” the question of God’s glory or the weightiness of His being is directly in view! Truly as redeemed individuals, we have been saved to demonstrate the glory of God! This will take two forms:

- Ourselves giving weight to God in our thoughts and doings and so living in light of His character: His love, sovereignty, mercy, and holiness!
- Understanding that God has intended to use us to manifest/demonstrate the weightiness of His being to the world.

Trial, difficult circumstances, “hope against hope” are the things out of which God will bring about His deliverance! That is the purpose behind your redemption! That is the purpose for why Christ came to this earth: to serve God and so manifest the weightiness of His being! Listen to the intent behind the ministry of the Servant of our passage:

Isaiah 52:7, “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who

announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

This is what life is all about as servants of God; proclaiming to any and all who will listen: God Reigns! William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury ⁶ said that the aim of all genuine worship is “...to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

Christian, this is what your life as a Servant of God is all about!

End Notes

¹ Far from it, think of the first temptation (Matthew 4:3-4)!

² This passage also clearly has as a nuance the fact that as a sharp arrow, Christ is a penetrating tool of the Master (cf. Psalm 45:5). Unfortunately with the time constraints of the American listener, time did not permit me to expand this truth!

³ If life is about glorifying God, enjoying Him, and serving Him, then we must understand that God is in the business of equipping and preparing us for so high and noble a purpose! And how does He do this? By refining us and chipping away at us. Hebrews 12:11 says, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” Truly, with each blow from the Master, we are better able to yield “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” Second Timothy 2:21 says, “Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things [wickedness, cf. v. 19], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

How is a man made to be a vessel, useful to the Master? When he is cleansed from wickedness! And how does this occur in the life of the child of God? Peter gave us the answer in 1 Peter 1:6-7 when he wrote, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” There is a parallel concept in this passage: the purifying of our faith through trial, and the purifying of gold through fire. What an incredible analogy!

In order to purify gold, you have to burn it with fire. You place the impure gold in a crucible and began applying heat. When the temperature reaches 1200 degrees, the gold melts and pools in the center of the dish. As the heat increases, the impurities bubble to the surface and ascend as sparks in a fire. Now do you know when the gold is pure? When, at the temperature of 1945 degrees, you can see your reflection in it!

Such is the medium and goal of the trials in our lives! God uses trial to burn away the excess, purify our faith, reflect His image in ourselves, and make us a fit vessel, useful to the Master! That is the point of 1 Peter 1:6-7! Truly, God is in the business of sharpening us, refining us, and molding and shaping us that we might be vessels of honor for His glory! Dale Martin Stone put it this way...

When God wants to drill a man, and thrill a man, and skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part,
When God yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man,
That all the world should be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways.

How He ruthlessly perfects, whom He royally elects,
How He hammers him, and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him

Into trial shapes of clay which only God understands,
While his tortured heart is crying, and he lifts beseeching hands.

How God bends but never breaks, when His good He undertakes,
How He uses, whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses him,
By every act induces him, to try His splendor out,
God knows what he's about.

From all of this I conclude that each of us are at some point in the refining process. Some of our trials are known, but most are hidden. Accordingly, let me speak to the one in the crucible this day. For so long you have prayed for God to make you a man or woman of God. Well, God is answering that prayer as each blow of His sharpening tool refines you and makes you His! In the words of Hebrews 10:35-36, "...do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." Truly kiss the hand that smites you. Trust your God and before long Satan will flee.

Don't ever forget: God is a fourth quarter God when it comes to His deliverances (cf. Psalm 6, 13, 35, 74, 89; Isaiah 6:11). The game is never won in the first half. It almost always will come down to the last minute of the last quarter of the last play of the last game! Why? Because when we are weak, THEN are we strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

⁴ It also was the place of concealment as with the sword. As this was exhorted last week, I took the other implication of this verse: readiness. See Alexander and/or Keil-Delitzsch on this point!

⁵ Why is this so important to understand? Because so much of our lives as Christians revolve around the delusion that this world is about us: our plans, our future, or our will. In the hidden recesses of our heart we believe that Christ came to make us happy and so to fulfill us. And thus it can be heard from multiple pulpits today that, "If you'd only come to Jesus your marriage will be blessed!... your lifestyle will be improved!... your job will get better!... and your life will be easier!" Listen! All of this is a lie!

Do you know what God's word promises to all who would follow Christ? Paul said it in 2 Timothy 4:11, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Solomon wrote, "...whom the Lord loves He reproves..." (Proverbs 3:12)! Christ said in Matthew 10:34-36, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." And John 15:20 put it this way, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."

Truly from Scripture as Christians we expect a hard and difficult life on earth. But how can this be? If God is about saving me, helping me, fulfilling me, and blessing my marriage, then why does He send such difficulty? Because God is NOT about saving me, helping me, fulfilling me, or blessing me, BUT creating a people who would serve Him (Phil. 3:3)! That is why Christ came (to serve the eternal plan of the Master). That is why we have been saved (to serve the eternal plan of the Master). And that is why life in Christ is so difficult- it is NOT about being fulfilled, BUT growing in our ability to serve the Master- which is why we read in Is. 49:2 that God shapes and sharpens His servants!

⁶ He was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942-1944.

Sources Cited:

Hughes, R. K. (1993). *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

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About the Preacher

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