

God's Servant—Sent for the Weary

Isaiah 50:1-11

Halifax: 21 November 2010

Introduction

Do you ever grow weary in serving the Lord?

- Are there times when it seems like you are getting nowhere?
 - You want to be sanctified.
 - You fight hard against your sin but you keep on falling.
 - You get up again and you start to move forward, but then down you go again!
 - It becomes very frustrating!
 - Your temper or your lust or your greed or your pride or your slackness—
 - It seems to just keep coming back on you and you wonder if things will ever change.

- And in your calling—you are trying to love others and to serve them...
 - Maybe you are mother who is trying to be faithful in serving your husband and your children.
 - You rise up with fresh resolve, and you start moving forward!
 - You have a new schedule, you are going pray and read the word and you have you have time for school and chores.
 - But then trouble comes!
 - You get sick.
 - The children get sick.
 - And one of the kids seems to be struggling with a really bad attitude and you are getting nowhere with him.
 - And another kid seems to be plagued with unreasonable fears and you are trying to help her...
 - And the car won't start.
 - And your neighbour is criticising you-- something about your garbage cans.
 - And things just keep coming at you until you don't think you can take it any more!
 - You are weary and discouraged.

 - Or maybe you are a husband and you are out working to provide for your family...
 - And you are freshly motivated, but then something goes wrong in your work to set you back...
 - and you have to work late...

- and your boss is angry with you...
- and you have a cold and you are tired...
- And you keep pressing on and trying to be a good father...
 - You are trying to spend time with your wife and your children...
 - And your wife is unhappy with you and you can't much blame her.
 - And you are trying to lead family worship but it keeps getting interrupted by things outside your control...
 - And the roof of your house starts leaking and there is not enough money to fix it...
 - And your mother is wondering why you have not been by to see her,
 - And the pastor at your church is wondering why you have been missing the Bible Study and neglecting to help out that widow he told you about.
- And oh yes,
 - You were trying to witness to your neighbour and he is threatening to turn you in because you offended him when you told him his way of life was sinful before God.
 - And it seems like it never did any good to witness to people anyway because none of them have trusted the Lord...

My brothers and sisters, we live in a fallen world!

- And God has called us to serve Him right here, right now, in this fallen world!
 - Someday, we will serve Him in a world that is not fallen if we belong to Jesus,
 - but right now we are called to serve Him right here...
 - And to keep on serving Him even when we are weary.
 - We have to learn to love people when we are frazzled and there is nothing left in us.
 - We have to love people when they don't love us back.
 - We have to keep on loving them when they don't appreciate us and even when they hate us.
 - We have to keep on serving even when everything seems to be going wrong for us.
 - God knows what He is doing.
 - It is in this fallen world that we learn to love—we learn what love is really all about—what it means to love when love involves sacrifice.
 - We are to grow in this world.
 - And the trials and the temptations are there to help us grow stronger.
 - You know that even Jesus learned obedience through suffering.
 - We know how great His love is because His love was tested...

- And we can see from His trials that nothing could stop Him.
- He just kept on serving until His work was finished.

This week in Isaiah we are going to see how He serves us in our weariness from the context of His own weariness.

- He is a high priest who can sympathise with our sufferings.
- It is really encouraging!
 - Two weeks ago we saw how the Father encouraged Him in His weariness when we looked at Isaiah 49:1-13.
 - Then last week in Isaiah 49:14-26 we saw how the Father encourages His church when we are weary.
 - And today, in Isaiah 50, we will see how Jesus encourages us as one weary servant ministering to another.

I. The passage opens by showing us how we fail when we grow weary in our service to God.

- This is not so encouraging, but we need to see it and face it if we are going to be in a position to receive encouragement.
 - You know what they say about a drinking problem—the first step to dealing with it is to admit that you have a problem.
 - When it comes to the bad responses we have to weariness,
 - We certainly don't like to admit that we have a problem.
 - We don't mind saying that everything is going wrong for us!
 - If anything we want to exaggerate all that has gone wrong!
 - We want to exaggerate our problems so that we can justify the way we are responding to our weariness!
 - We want people to say, "Oh you poor thing—you had every reason to lose your temper—or to give up—or whatever..."
 - But you see here that the Lord is going to cut through all that and go straight to our wrong response when we are weary.

A. It's really very much what we saw last week... we want to blame God for abandoning us.

1. Everything has gone wrong—it must be that God has abandoned us!
 - Remember last week?
 - He told us that He never abandons His people.
 - A woman would sooner forget the babe she is nursing than He would ever forget us.

- But you see, we don't feel like serving God anymore because we are peeved with Him about our circumstances...
 - But instead of admitting our bad attitude and repenting,
 - We try to say that we can't serve Him because He has abandoned us and has not been there for us to help us.
 - It is sort of like the guy in the parable of the talents who buries his talent and then blames God for being such a hard master that he could not serve him.
 - Perhaps we have had trials and difficulties—
 - And God has sent those trials and difficulties according to His purposes...
 - But we cannot blame Him if we have quit and say that He has left us.
 - We are like Israel complaining in the wilderness.
 - God is testing us for our God and His glory.
 - It is time for us to serve, not to try to blame Him of unfaithfulness.
2. He comes to us when we are in this state of mind and He says:
- a. "When did I divorce you? Where is your mother's certificate of divorce?"
 - 1) This needs a little background... what is a certificate of divorce?
 - In Deuteronomy, Moses had given permission to the Jewish men to divorce their wives because of the hardness of their hearts...
 - even when they did not have great reasons for doing so.
 - But when they did this, they were required to write a certificate of divorce showing that their wife had not been unfaithful to them.
 - The husband had to show that he was not accusing her of adultery, but divorcing her anyway.
 - It was really an admission of the husband's own weakness to keep His vows.
 - 2) The people were acting like the LORD had been unfaithful to keep his covenant with them...
 - They were acting like He had divorced them and would not let them live with Him anymore...
 - So the LORD says,
 - Show me the certificate of divorce!
 - "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce?"
 - As is often the case, the church is called a mother and she is also called the children at the same time...
 - Really, the church is only one, but God speaks to her like this so as to say,

- When did I divorce you? I don't remember doing this?

b. And then He asked a second question...

- "Of which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?"
- This is something that a father had to do if he could not pay his debts...
 - He had to sell his children into slavery to pay his bills.
- The people, in saying that God had abandoned them were acting as if had been forced to sell them.
 - They could not serve Him any more because He had sold them.

TRANS> That is the way we act when we get weary with serving God—as if God has done something to make it so that we can no longer serve Him.

- That is where we often go wrong when we become weary in our service to God.
 - We accuse Him of abandoning us!

B. But the Lord sets the record straight!

1. He tells us what the true cause of separation has been!

- He says (at the end of verse 1)
 - "For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, And for your transgressions your mother has been put away."
- As is often the case in the Hebrew language, He reverses the order...
 - They spoke about divorce and then slavery...
 - He responds by speaking of slavery and then of divorce.
- And He tells us that *our* sin is what has separated us.
 - It is not Him at all.
 - He is more than willing to have us back if we will come to Him.
 - But we have rebelled in our weariness because we got tired of serving Him in this fallen world!
 - We started grumbling against Him and then we stopped serving Him—
 - And then we have the audacity to say that He has abandoned us!

2. Rather than selling us or putting us away, the LORD has been coming to us to restore us!

a. He gives us one of those searching *why* questions—asking why it is that we do not respond to His gracious overtures.

1) The query is given in verse 2:

- Isa 50:2: Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer?
- All through the years, the Lord had been sending His prophets to plead with His people to return to Him...
 - His grace was continually held out to them with many promises and encouragements.
 - But instead of welcoming Him and responding to His love, they hardened their hearts and resisted.
- What an arrogant way to respond to our Creator!
 - We don't like the way He has done things, so we ignore His gracious offers.
 - And this is the way we all are if left to ourselves!
 - No one responds to His call!
 - No one comes to Him.
 - There is none that seeks after God, no not one...
 - They have all turned away.
 - Why would we ever do such a thing!
 - He is God!
 - We ought to be the ones pleading with Him to take us back, but instead, He is coming to us and pleading with us!

2) Is it because we think He is unable to deliver us?

- That is utterly ridiculous!
- a) It's not that He is unable to help us in our trials...
 - The problem is that we don't want His help *in our trials*.
 - We want an immediate end *to our trials*.
 - If we were looking for His grace to help us *in our trials*, we would find that He is always there for us.
 - But we want the trials to go away—now!
 - And if they don't, we charge Him with weakness or inattention or something.
 - But it is His will for us to serve Him *in our trials—in this fallen world*.
 - You can't go off saying that He has forsaken you just because you have trials!

- b) He completely dispenses with the ridiculous idea that He is not able to help us...
 - He asks a series of questions to show how absurd it is to say so.
 - (i) He says,
 - “Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?”
 - A short hand is a way of saying that the solution is out of reach for God—that He is unable to redeem us!
 - We charge God with this because we say, “I had this problem and I prayed and God did not take it away.”
 - We are saying, “He must not be able to take it away or perhaps He does not care about me or notice me.”
 - And the truth is, we might well ask Him to take away the difficulty,
 - But we also should have asked Him to give us grace to continue to serve Him in the difficulty.
 - Then we would have experienced His help.
 - But because He did not take away the trouble, we charge Him with having a short hand that cannot help.
 - (ii) But the LORD reminds us that He is the One who rebukes the sea and it dries up...
 - He is the one who dries up rivers by the voice of his command so that their fish die
 - He has done such things for His people—have they forgotten?
 - Certainly He who made the heaven and earth has power to deliver if He wishes.

TRANS> The problem is not with God.

- He is both willing and able to redeem them.
 - He continually calls them to come to Him in their weariness.
 - But they will not accept His help unless it comes on their terms.
 - They continue to refuse His grace and to make silly excuses.
 - See that you do not do such a thing!
 - You young people who grow up in the church...
 - Do not grow weary of your God and say that He is far from you.
 - His grace is held to you in all the promises of the gospel...
 - Do not harden your heart—
 - Come to Him and He will give you rest.

- b. You see that He is grieved by our rebellion...
 - In verse 3, He says that He has clothed the heavens with blackness and with sackcloth.
 - This is the clothing that was worn when one was lamenting.
 - Just as heaven rejoices when one sinner repents,
 - so heaven laments because of His peoples' rebellion and refusal to respond to His grace.

TRANS> How God's people have failed in their weariness!

- Instead of serving Him in their trials, they blame Him for abandoning them!

II. But look—there is One who responds to God's call!

- It is the Servant of the Lord! Even our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - There is none righteous but Him!
 - He alone has pleased the Father and done His will.
 - He alone fits the description given in the lines that follow!
- A. You see that He is diligently attuned to the Father's instructions about how He might comfort His people!
1. Morning by morning He wakes up to learn, to hear the Father's voice, so that He will know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary!
 - He sees His people, ruined and broken by sin, and His heart goes out to them!
 - He has compassion on them even though they are where they are by their own fault!
 - He sees them cut off from God, with no one to care for them.
 - He sees them, as we saw in Matthew, as being like sheep without a shepherd.
 2. He declares that the Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh* which means Sovereign LORD) has given Him the tongue of the learned that He might know how to speak a word to the weary.
 - a. Isn't this wonderful?
 - He studies diligently so that He will know how to comfort us!
 - He studies so that He will know what to say to us when we are weary.
 - His great interest is to have the right thing to say to us—something that will really minister to our need!
 - b. And of course it is the gospel of grace that He is given.
 - It is the good news of sins forgiven.

- It is the good news that the Father has accepted His sacrifice for all of His people's sins and that there is complete pardon for us.
- That there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus.

- It is the good news that though we feel the effects of the curse in this fallen world and must go through much tribulation,
 - The full weight of God's curse will not fall upon us if we trust in Him.
 - The trials of this world that are only a tiny foretaste of the wrath to come will be the extent of what we must bear...
 - He has taken the curse for us in His own body and we are free!
 - What a friend He is!

- How He loves to declare the good news of this marvellous salvation!
 - He has commanded His servants to go into all the world to proclaim it to all the nations!
 - He has the tongue of the learned, and He speaks through the servants He has sent all over the world...
 - How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of them which bring good news—tidings of peace—words of comfort for the weary!
 - Have you heard His voice?

TRANS> But look further...

B. The message of comfort that He longs to give has a huge price tag attached to it—a price that He must pay!

1. If He is to have any words of comfort for us weary sinners, He must suffer.
 - It is a price from which any other would recoil... and refuse to pay...
 - They would say, "Why should *I* pay that for them—they are the transgressors!"

 - But look at how He responds in verse 5:
 - Isa 50:5: "The Lord GOD has opened my ear..."
 - In other words, He told Him plainly what He must do if He is to have a gospel to comfort us weary sinners.

 - The verse continues "And I was not rebellious, not did I turn away!"
 - This is a remarkable statement!
 - He knew what He would have to do for us and He did not rebel!

 - Imagine, being in His place and knowing what you would have to bear and having the power to refuse it, but going on with it!

- Everything in Him despised the cross and the shame that He had to bear...
 - But He only says, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.”
 - And when it was not possible—not if there was to be a message of comfort for us—
 - He goes through with it.
2. In verse 6 He tells us that He did just what Adonai Yahweh called Him to do.
- Isaiah 50:6: I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.
 - a. Notice the majestic way in which He speaks...
 - He doesn't say,
 - “They took Me and they struck Me and pulled out my beard.”
 - Instead He says,
 - “I **gave** My back to those who struck Me.”
 - He **let** them do it when He might have called down legions of angels from heaven to consume them in flames of fire!
 - Despite all their mocking, He gave Himself to be battered by them.
 - What man is there that would not stop them in the middle of the torture if He had the power to do it?
 - But He endured it all for our sake!
 - b. And look at the shame He endured—
 - They plucked out His beard and spit upon Him.
 - 1) This speaks of shame—
 - In the oriental culture, the beard was a sign of honour and freedom and dignity.
 - To have it pulled out was a matter of deep shame as was that vilest of acts, to be spit upon!
 - This represents all the shame that He bore when He was accounted by His accusers to be cursed by God.
 - And indeed, upon the cross He was cursed by Him because our sins were laid on Him and the Father forsook Him.
 - Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree!
 - 2) The shame was the thing that He despised most of all!
 - Of all people, He alone truly hates sin—absolutely abhors it...

- And yet, in His sufferings, He stood in the place of guilty sinners and allowed Himself to be charged with their sins!
 - He who knew no sin became sin for us!
 - Before the Father's holy eyes whom He loved with all his heart,
 - He became the chief of sinners—
 - the vile adulterer, the wicked slanderer, the selfish thief, the filthy blasphemer!
 - We who so easily slide into sin cannot begin to imagine what it was for Him to bear all this before the Father...
 - We know what it is like, perhaps, to be accused of wrongs that we have not done—and even of wrongs that we recoil from doing...
 - But we who daily traffic in sin have no idea what His abhorrence of sin was really like and how difficult it was for Him to bear all this.
 - Yet He did it—He gave Himself to it—for our sakes—
 - That He might have words of comfort to speak to us, even words of salvation when the work was all done.
 - How this Saviour loves us! How rich and full His compassion!

TRANS> You can see further that...

C. He did it because He knew that Adonai Yahweh would make good His promise!

1. If He had not believed this, He never would have gone through with it all.
 - a. But Adonai Yahweh had told Him what He had to do—if there was to be any comfort for us—any salvation for us sinners...
 - And He believed that Adonai Yahweh would help Him—
 - that He would work with Him to achieve the objective.
 - that He would not lead Him down a pathway of deception.
 - b. He kept going through all the difficulties because He was sure that He would not be ashamed in the end—
 - He would not fail to emerge from all the suffering with a gospel for His beloved people!
 - Do you see His words of this assurance in verse 7?
 - Isa 50:7 "For the Lord GOD will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced; Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

- In the gospels we are told how Jesus set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem...
 - That means that He was determined in His purpose.
 - He was resolved to do the Father's will and nothing would stop Him, no matter how hard it got, no matter how weary He got.
 - He would not stop until He had finished His work for His people.
 - He would go through the greatest difficulties knowing that His sufferings would not be in vain.
2. He throws out a challenge to all His accusers.
- a. All along the way, He had those who said that He was a wicked man.
 - They had their day when He was at last suspended upon the cross—
 - with mocking jeers from heaven...
 - with terrified disciples that ran away...
 - with heaven shut up in darkness, rejected by God and man...
 - All of this endured from them even though He is the LORD of Glory!
 - b. And so He says to them...
 - Verse 8: He is near who justifies Me; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me.
 - He says that because knows that the final verdict is yet to be spoken.
 - He knows that after He has finished His work, He will be justified!
 - He is willing to bear the shame because He knows that He will be vindicated by Adonai Yahweh at last!
 - He knows that He will be declared to be LORD and Christ with salvation for all that the Father has given Him!
 - c. Because He is sure of Adonai Yahweh's help, He is sure that His enemies with all their accusations will grow old like a garment and be consumed by moths...
 - He says—Surely... it is a certain thing...
 - Isaiah 50:9: Surely the Lord GOD will help Me; Who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; The moth will eat them up.
 - Without this confidence He would never have been able to endure the cross.
 - For this reason, in Hebrews 12 He is set forth as an example of faith...
 - Heb 12:2: Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and had sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- And you see from these words that He did indeed achieve what He had set out to do!
 - He has now been exalted to sit on God’s right hand as Lord and Christ.
 - He has finished the work that the Father gave Him to do...
 - And now He has a gospel for all who are weary and heavy laden!
 - He has words of comfort for the weary who have despaired of their own selves.
 - For all of you who have come to see that you will never be all that God has called you to be if left to your own resources.
 - You will die complaining in the wilderness rather than rising to serve God with faithfulness if left to yourself.

III. And let me ask each of you—Have you (you personally) become weary enough that you have come to Jesus for your only hope of comfort?

- The last two verses present to us a great contrast between those who have come to Christ in their weariness and those who continue to look for comfort from within.
 - I tell you, there is no true comfort to be found from your own resources!
 - None at all!
 - But you are doing one or the other...
 - Either you are looking to Jesus...
 - Or you are left to your own devices.
 - This difference will define you for all eternity...
 - If you trust in the LORD, you will have complete salvation in the Servant who bore all your sins in His own body on the tree.
 - If you continue without Him, you will lie down in torment forever.
- Let’s look at each of these verses in more detail...
 - You need to know which of these verses describes you.

A. Verse 10 shows us the one who is weary and trusts the LORD.

1. It comes to us all as question—
 - The question is addressed to the entire church...
 - And it asks,
 - v. 10: “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of His servant?”
 - There is this great mass of people in the church and only some of them are doing this...
 - “Who among you?”

- “Which ones are you that fear the LORD and obey the voice of His servant?”
2. Fearing the LORD and obeying His servant always go together.
- When you fear the LORD,
 - you recognise His true majesty and understand that when you appear before Him all your excuses will melt away...
 - When you fear Him, you realise that you cannot trifle with Him or argue with Him or resist Him because He is holy and complete and perfect...
 - And if that fear is real, you will also obey the voice of His Servant.
 - You will obey Him when He comes to you with the words of comfort He has learned to speak to the weary...
 - Remember verse 4?
 - He will come with the words of the gospel that declare to you the complete pardon for sin that comes to those who trust in His sacrifice.
 - You can see how the fear of the Lord goes hand in hand with obeying the voice of His Servant.
 - When you fear the LORD, you become poor in Spirit.
 - You see that you are a sinner—a desperate sinner before a holy God and that you have nothing that will commend you to Him.
 - You are spiritually bankrupt, unfit for communion with Him.
 - You are weary and heavy laden under the burden of your sin and guilt.
 - But then that voice of servant comes to you in your weariness and He says,
 - Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."
 - And you are delighted to come!
 - You are among the sheep of Jesus who hear His voice and come to Him.
 - You obey His voice!
3. And you say, I have come to Him, but I am still weary in this world...
- I fear God and I have obeyed the voice of the servant and come to Him...
 - But I still get weary and I even seem to despair at times!
 - What hope is there for me?
 - Take comfort child of God!

- You must continue in this weary world a little longer.
- You must continue in times of darkness even as your Saviour did when He set His face like a flint and endured all the shame and spitting.
- Continue as He did with trust in the LORD who promises that He will help you and that you will not be disgraced.
 - Jesus has gone before you—He has borne the brunt of the curse.
 - His yoke is easy and His burden is light—comparatively speaking—but it is still a yoke and a burden...
- And Lord addresses you even when you are in times of darkness.
 - At the end of vs. 10 and He tells you to do just what your Saviour did.
 - Isa 50:10: “Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon His God.”
 - Remember the joy that is set down before you!
 - Remember what Your Saviour has done for you!
 - If you will rely on Him, you may be weary, but you will not fail to obtain the blessing.
 - His grace is for you—it is held out to you even in the darkness.
 - Trust and you will not be ashamed at last.

B. But there is the wretched alternative in verse 11.

1. Here is one who lives in this same fallen world and who knows something of the weariness of it.
 - But instead of trusting in the Lord and hearing the voice of the Servant who calls,
 - This one tries to obtain light by his own devices.
 - This is you who, as it says, “kindle a fire and encircle yourself with sparks.”
 - In desperation you try to live apart from God’s truth—
 - Instead of listening to Him, you make your own fire—
 - You have your excuses and your justifications and your evasions.
 - You have your complaints and your logic and your ideas...
 - You have our reason and your fears and your pride...
 - And I don’t know what else you might have...
 - But it is all yours and you try to surround yourself with the light of it to make yourself feel better and to get you through this weary world.
2. The LORD says, Go ahead,
 - “Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled!”

- Oh the futility of it!
 - What folly it is when there is a crucified Saviour who calls the weary to come to Him!
 - Have you no fear of God?
 - Don't you realise who it is that you are dealing with?
 - The Holy One of Israel who inhabits eternity!
 - The One who is purer eyes than to behold evil!
 - The One who is a consuming fire that caused godly men to tremble and fall on their faces when He appeared to them in mere visions!
 - And there you are...
 - taking refuge in sparks!
 - Refuge in sparks when there is a Saviour who has borne the curse!
 - A Saviour so full of compassion that He bore our sins so that He might have words of comfort to speak to us!
3. What will become of you if you neglect so great a salvation that has been openly revealed in the sight of the nations?
- God tells you what will become of you—He wants you to know...
 - He wants you to know so you will turn before it's too late...
 - He says,
 - Isa 50:11: "This you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment!"
 - He says that it will come from His hand.
 - It will come from Him as a righteous judge!
 - Torment!
 - You will lie down in it never to get up!
 - And all because you chose to walk in your own sparks instead of fearing God and obeying the voice of His servant!
 - Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of His Servant?
 - And who is walking in the light of your own sparks?