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# The Servant's Obedience

## Isaiah 50:4-11

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Attention follows interest. Growing up as an unbeliever in Jesus Christ, you can imagine why I was frustrated in school and at church. "Sit up and pay attention" is a phrase I heard much in my early years. My mind was simply aroused by different things.

But seldom would I want to let on that my interests were elsewhere. I thought that if I just looked interested that would be enough. I would get what I needed. And I would keep people off my back. One of my favorite comic strips captures my old strategy well (put up on screen Calvin and Hobbes). Attention follows interest. No amount of faking or forcing can change reality.

I never knew how critical paying attention was until God caused me to be born again. In the early part of 1984 I became a Christian. God opened my eyes to see and unstopped my ears to hear the good news of great joy found in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. I saw sin for what it was – I saw the Savior for who He is and I turned from my sins and turned to and trusted in Jesus Christ. After conversion, I could not get enough of Him. You know, attention follows interest. And oh, how I attended with interest God's Word as it revealed for me the beauty and wonder; the hope and joy of Jesus Christ.

Today's message is about listening. It's about the critical nature of paying attention. If you have your Bibles please open them to Isaiah 50 where we will consider together a couple of paragraphs from the Bible.

You can see the topic of this passage by noticing 50v2. Here we see God calling out to the Israelites in the days of Isaiah. It tells us that when He called there was no man / no one to answer. They were not listening. This was the problem in ancient times. Nobody was paying attention to God's Word.

But then we come to v4 and witness another man. He's mysterious. He's wonderful. He's called the servant of the LORD. Notice how responsive He is to God's word. "The Lord God has given me a tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught".

And then we come to another group in v10. This group "listens to (obeys) the voice of the Servant".

Noticing this issue points us to this: Paying attention to God's Word is the topic for today. But this phrase needs to be developed a bit further. What does attending with interest to God's word look like? And why is that so important?

To raise the most important question human beings face and to help you answer this question is what this sermon is about. The point of this message this morning can be likened to a medical examination. I know it's awkward. I understand we don't really enjoy getting our bodies checked out. But we submit to examinations because 1) it's a good day when we get

a clean bill of health or 2) if we are not okay we want to catch it before we can do nothing about it.

The Bible says *examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith (2Corinthians 13:4)*. This is what we will do this morning.

So the leading question for us today is: are you a Christian? To put it in the language of our text this morning it would sound something like this: Are you one who pays attention to God's Word? And as we read this text we will see two things.

- 1) Paying attention to God's word is seen in the obedient Servant (v4-9)
- 2) Paying attention to God's word is seen in the obedience to the Servant (v10-11)

Let's pray asking God to help us assess our condition. Let's ask Him to help us see what paying attention to God's Word looks like.

## Paying attention to God's Word

### The obedient servant

v4-9

What paying attention to God's Word looks like is first seen in the obedient Servant. Standing in contrast to God's faithless people (cf. 48:12-19; 49:14; 50:2) we witness full submission to the will and words of Yahweh. Here, in v4-9, we see the new faithful servant. Take a listen as I read for us v4-6 out of the ESV Bible.

*The Lord God has given me  
the tongue of those who are taught,  
that I may know how to sustain with a word  
him who is weary.  
Morning by morning he awakens;  
he awakens my ear  
to hear as those who are taught.  
5 The Lord God has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious;  
I turned not backward.  
6 I gave my back to those who strike,  
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;  
I hid not my face  
from disgrace and spitting.*

**steadily pays attention to God's word and suffers for it** **v4-6**

The obedient servant is first seen as one who steadily pays attention to God's word and suffers for it. You see this in v4-6.

Whereas in 49:2 his mouth was a sharp sword, we see in v4 that the new servant is a teacher; comforting and sustaining the weary with His words. He does so because He steadily pays attention to God's Word. Morning by morning His ear is awakened by the Sovereign LORD to listen intently to the will and the wisdom and the ways of Yahweh.

V5-6 make plain that the Servant's ministry of the Word took him into danger. And not only did this obedience take him into danger, but this obedience welcomed the danger. The servant chooses the beatings of v5-6. The servant gives his back, cheeks, face; his entire body to the persecutors. His obedience is seen in His enduring the suffering. And if we were to trace this disgraceful handling of the wonderful Servant through Isaiah we would be brought to the ugly violence of beatings seen in 53:4-6. The servant's task nearly destroyed him.

With His back mangled as hamburger and His face dripping with blood and spit He sets His face like flint for the completion of the mission. His confidence comes as he trusts in God's sure vindication. This we see in v7-9. Listen in as I read v7-9.

*7 But the Lord God helps me;  
therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*

*8 He who vindicates me is near.*

*Who will contend with me?*

*Let us stand up together.*

*Who is my adversary?*

*Let him come near to me.*

*9 Behold, the Lord God helps me;*

*who will declare me guilty?*

*Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;*

*the moth will eat them up.*

**trusts God Almighty's verdict of him – innocent** **v7-9**

The obedient servant is seen secondly as we notice him who trusts God almighty's verdict of him; namely innocent. The second mark of the Obedient Servant is found in v7-9. The language is that of a courtroom. We hear the obedient servant ask three defiant questions. Each question adds to the final answer –

“no one can be found to condemn Me for the great almighty God has vindicated Me”

Listen to the cadence of the obedient servant as though he were in a court trial. “Stand anyone and come forth. Come close and charge me with a crime. Look me in the eye. Who dares contend with me, who dares accuse me, who dares find me guilty”. Anyone in this courtroom? If so, stand and come forth”.

Taunting and challenging those who would condemn him, he honors and values and esteems the Sovereign God by these questions. The servant knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that if God vindicates him he is vindicated. If God justifies him, he is justified. No fault can be found in the servant. No accusations stick. No error, no sin, no rebellion, no criminal behavior can be found anywhere in the servant. He is righteous. He is innocent. He is sinless.

Because God is his helper, the servant’s accusers will be worn out and consumed. They just go away and the servant stands forever. All his opponents fall. He withstood the test and was seen as blameless. Unlike the first servant Adam who fell from innocence, this One is the obedient One. This One is the only one who can stare down all opponents and accusers and come out fully acquitted of all charges. Behold the blameless One. Behold the guiltless One. Behold the obedient Servant.

### **The obedience to the servant**

**v10-11**

The topic for this morning’s message is: what paying attention to God’s word looks like. We saw that paying attention to His word is seen in the obedient servant (v4-9). How he listened responsively, how he spoke wisely, how he suffered gladly; and in all of this he was found spotless. This is what whole-hearted attention to God’s word looks like. This is full submission to God’s will that ended in full vindication of God’s servant.

But now the passage takes a bit of a turn. It shines its spotlight on two groups. (this is where our application comes in. this is the examination room so to speak) We could call these groups two classes of people; two ways to live. V10-11 distinguish between these two groups; one group who fears the LORD and pays attention to the voice of his servant and the other group who relies on self and trusts in its sufficiency. See if you can notice these two groups as I read for us v10-11.

*10 Who among you fears the Lord*

*and obeys the voice of his servant?*

*Let him who walks in darkness and has no light  
trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.*

*11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire,  
who equip yourselves with burning torches!*

*Walk by the light of your fire,  
and by the torches that you have kindled!*

*This you have from my hand:*

*you shall lie down in torment.*

## **What it looks like**

**v10**

In this section; v10-11, we notice what paying attention (obedience = submission to His Word) to God's word looks like. We see this in a contrast. In v10 we notice what obedience to the servant looks like. And then, in v11 we notice what obedience to the servant does not look like.

### **Fears the LORD**

The identity of those who pay attention is seen in the phrase "those who fear the LORD". Now the Old Testament describes this fear in Deuteronomy 10 (see also Psalm 147:10-11) as ones who "walks in all his ways, who love him and serve Him with all their heart" (Dt.10:12ff). This first group of people found in v10 is those who revere God, treating His power and position with utmost honor while trusting in Him. This sounds perhaps a bit strange. How would someone fear and hope in the same person? In his book *The Pleasures of God* Dr. Piper said it this way. "The kind of fear that we should have toward God is whatever is left of fear when we have a sure hope in the midst of it...hope turns fear into a trembling and peaceful wonder and fear takes everything trivial out of hope and makes it earnest and profound...the terrors of God make the pleasures of his people intense"<sup>1</sup>. These are the people who pay attention to God's Word.

### **Walks in darkness**

Notice 2 characteristics of this group. First, obedience to the servant "walks in darkness and has no light". They are not free from uncertainties and confusions. There are intimidating seasons and problems for which they have few answers. But notice – they do not walk by sight. They walk by hearing the voice of the servant (that is, they read/hear the Bible accurately and listen to the biblical application for their lives. They see themselves as in the story of the Bible and can hear the LORD speak as He speaks through what He already said in the Bible).

### **Trusts in the Name of the LORD**

And this lifestyle is further described as those who "trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon their God". They have faith in the revealed character of God. They know His name and thus they know His heart. In darkness, they trust Him...and that's enough for them.

This is the group of people who pay attention to God's Word and benefit from God's servant.

## **What it doesn't look like**

**v11**

But not all are beneficiaries of the Servant's obedience as seen in v11.

### **Walks in self-made light**

People who do not fear the LORD and obey the voice of his servant still meet darkness – confusions and difficulties in this fallen world. But instead of meeting head on their trials with trust in the Servant they equip themselves with burning torches. They rely on earthly resources to cope in this difficult world.

### **Trusts in self and not the LORD**

This verse clearly differentiates between those who trust in the LORD and those who trust in themselves. This group lives by their own wisdom. They lean on their own understanding. They say, “it’s just common sense to do such and such”. They look through their own eyes and interpret life in their own light. They long for their own pleasure that will offset the displeasure of this world. They rely on themselves.

This group characterized by self-reliance and self-sufficiency is brought to an awful place. This place is witnessed in the last 6 words of this passage.

### **Results in divine disapproval**

The end of v11 is terrifying. By God’s own power, this self-sufficient group will lie down in torment – a torment that will never decrease. “depart from Me you cursed ones into the eternal lake of fire” will echo in the minds of the self-reliant as they populate hell.

A sobering message indeed but I pray a helpful one. Here’s the application to this morning’s message. We are all in the examination room. We all are assessing our identity. There are only two groups in this world – those who pay attention to God’s Word and those who pay attention to their own words. Remember: attention follows interest. The question before each of us is: “To what/whom are you paying attention? Who do you listen to”? Upon what/whom do you rely? What do you catch yourself saying in difficulty? Are you the type of person who says, “times of trial are times to trust in the Savior” or do you say, “times of trial are times to trust in self”. The answer to these questions is found in the subject of your interest.

There is no guess work this morning. Before us is the standard. Reread v4-9. Notice the obedient servant. The New Testament reveals him as the Lord Jesus Christ – perfect obedience leading into penal substitutionary death leading to triumphal vindication through his resurrection.

When we look at Jesus as the measure of obedience we all must say “I don’t measure up. I do not listen to the Word with full submission. I need Christ’s obedience. I need His righteousness assigned to me. I need his perfect suffering on my behalf as a payment for my rebellion. I need v4-9 to be my life. I need Jesus to be my life. Turning from my unresponsiveness to His will I turn to the Servant who serves me His life and salvation; rescuing me from v11. He is my only hope”.

Oh, beloved – if upon examination you receive a clean bill of health (identity as a Christian) then rejoice and out of reverence continue relying upon Jesus for all you need. If upon examination you received a bad bill of health (identity as an unbeliever) there is still hope. You now have the clarity and urgency to call upon Christ for your salvation. He is your only obedience. He is your only remedy for sin. He is your only hope. Turn from sin and trust in Him.

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<sup>i</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991); p.204-206