

Christmas from Isaiah - Isaiah 50:4-11 - Suffering and Darkness.

December 15, 2013

Have you ever felt like God isn't there? You pray asking God to come to the rescue, but nothing happens. No miraculous checks show up in the mail to help with your financial need. No unexplained cure to your sickness comes before you head to the doctor. "God, if you are there, why are you allowing me to go through this? If you love me, why don't you answer my prayers?"

If you are in a time of suffering and it feels like God isn't there, this morning's study is for you.

My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at Faith Church. This Christmas we are in a small study called *Christmas from the Book of Isaiah*. The second half of Isaiah has four passages called, "The Servant Songs." These are snippets where a mysterious individual called the Servant of the Lord breaks into the book of Isaiah. Even though these passages in the book of Isaiah were written hundreds of years before he came, they are a detailed description of the life and mission of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is clear that this mysterious servant is Jesus Christ before the manger.

The first Servant Song is in Isaiah 42. It is an overview of why Christ came. He came to restore things broken because of sin. Christ came to restore our broken vertical relationship with God and the broken horizontal relationships with one another. The only hope for marriages, friendships and sick bodies broken because of sin is Jesus. He is the one who restores all the damage sin creates.

Last week, we studied the second servant song, which is in Isaiah 49. This song gave us a quick flyover of Christ's life. We learned about his miraculous birth, his amazing teaching and his perfect life. We saw that when Christ was at the apex of his popularity, everything would crumble. Jesus' world would fall apart as he went from being called king at the triumphal entry to crowds shouting for his crucifixion less than a week later.

In a situation that looked hopeless, he trusted everything into his heavenly father's hands. With God the Father was the one place Christ could place his life that he knew he could trust. Since God the Father proved reliable to save Jesus, his own son, in the face of death, we know God the Father will also prove reliable for us when we trust our broken and crumbling lives into his hands.

This morning, we are at the third Servant Song, which is Isaiah 50:4-11. These verses dig into the emotional turmoil Christ felt as he faced his suffering. They are incredibly instructive for each of us on how to make it through the tough times in life when we are suffering and feel alone.

As we put our fingers in the text, it is not obvious who is speaking. There is a definite change of speakers between verse 3 and verse 4 but we don't learn that the new speaker is the Servant of the Lord until verse 10, which we learned in previous weeks is Jesus.

Jesus learned he would suffer.

Jesus was a guy who studied his Bible.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught... Isaiah 50:4a (ESV)

Jesus tells us about himself. God the Father gave him a tongue of those who are taught. This means Jesus was a wise and learned guy. Jesus was educated. Jesus knew his Bible. He could quote Bible verses all day long. This *doesn't* mean Jesus was born with a brain full of knowledge. While in one sense Jesus, as God, knows everything. As a man just like us, he had to learn everything. While God the Father was the one behind all his learning, as a man he still had to do all the learning. Jesus had to study his Bible to learn things about God, just like we do.

What did Jesus do with his Bible learning?

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.* Isaiah 50:4b (ESV)

This is huge. Bible learning is not to win Bible trivia games. Bible learning is not just for information but it helps us sustain and encourage others, especially those who are weary, and facing difficult times.

In the western church, we are very narcissistic as we follow Christ. We think everything is about us and for us. We think our personal Bible studies are just for our lives. We listen to a sermon so we can go home edified with more Bible learning for our lives. That is not the way Jesus viewed his Bible learning. It was not so he could walk around looking like a lollipop, a big brain on a stick. His Bible knowledge was to encourage others who are weary and help them through times of suffering.

That is what we are to do with our Bible learning. We are to be like bees. We are to take what God gives us on Sunday mornings and what God gives us in

our own personal Bible studies and we are to carry it with us and give to to people who in need of being encouraged, like a bee pollinates flowers.

Do you have a strategy for helping others with what God teaches you? Let me tell you my strategy. I have an electronic journal application on my computer called Day One.¹ I used to just highlight verses I liked in my Bible but when brought those verses back to mind in a conversations I had later in the week with a friend, I had no way of getting ahold of them. My Bible was at home. I changed the way I studied the Bible and I began writing down the verses that meant a lot to me in my journal and then writing below them what I liked about them. I began practicing this way an application on my computer called Day One. It is an electronic journal that gives me a page to write on each day. The best part is Day One syncs with my iPhone and iPad. When I am with somebody and I find our conversation connecting with a Bible verse I wrote in my journal earlier in the week, I take out my phone and there are my verses and my notes. I encourage you to be like Jesus. Study God's Word not just to encourage yourself but put something in a notebook you can bring with you so you can encourage others in need.

When did Jesus do his Bible study?

Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. Isaiah 50:4 (ESV)

Jesus tells us that he got up each morning to study God's Word. Jesus had an early morning quiet time. This was not easy. Jesus worked with Joseph his father as a carpenter. I am sure they were at work early in the morning like

¹ <http://dayoneapp.com>

most construction workers. If Joseph died when Jesus was a young man, that meant Jesus, as the oldest, worked to provide for his mother, brothers and sisters in his father's place. That meant a lot of pressure on a young man.

A copy of the Torah was not readily available to study. The Gideon's were not around to put a pocket Torah in every hotel room. Copies of the Old Testament scrolls were kept at the local synagogue. Morning after morning Jesus got up extra early, walked to the local synagogue to read, study and pray over the Old Testament before dawn. When the sun came up, he would head off to work like everybody else. Jesus was up very early to do this, I am guessing 4:30 a.m..

Let's go back to talking about Jesus learning. Jesus was not born preprogrammed with the sum of all biblical knowledge. He had to study. While he knew everything as God the Son, as a man, he had to grow and experience the hard work of learning, just like us. Just as studying is not easy for us, it was not easy for him.

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God... Hebrews 2:17 (ESV)

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. Luke 2:52 (ESV)

Morning after morning Jesus grew to know God just as we grow to know God by reading the Bible.

Just as Jesus had to study his Bible to know God, we need to study our Bible to know God. When was the last time you read your Bible on your own? I talk to many people attending Faith Church that do not read their Bibles on their

own. God's Word is like food. We need fresh bread from God each day to survive. I can guarantee that if you want to live a life pleasing to God, the only way to do it is to study the Bible on your own. You cannot survive only on what you hear in church. You need to let God feed you from his Word each week. Take a chapter a day. Pray, study and think about it. Write down what you learn. Keep it with you, and like Jesus, use God's words to encourage the weary.

We even have biblical encouragement for the best time to have Bible study: In the morning. There are scores of verses that talk about studying the Bible in the morning.

O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch. Psalm 5:3 (ESV)

But I, O Lord, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Psalm 88:13 (ESV)

It was during his Bible study that God the Father revealed to Jesus that he would suffer.

The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. 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. Isaiah 50:5–6 (ESV)

Jesus was having his time of morning Bible study when God opened his ear, that means God opened his mind to realize he would suffer. As Jesus grew, he came to understand the path God the Father called him to would include incredible amounts of suffering.

Can you imagine the quiet time when God the Father taught him this? Can you imagine the moment when he realized he would be struck? His beard would be pulled out. He would be disgraced. He would be spit upon. Imagine this. How did Jesus respond to understanding his father's will involved

unprecedented levels of suffering that he did not deserve? He was not rebellious. He didn't run. He said, "If being in the center of my father's will involves suffering, that is where I want to be. I would rather be in the center of God's will for my life and suffer than be out of God's will for my life and escape suffering." I want to be fully submitted to God's will for me.

This doesn't say Jesus enjoyed suffering. It doesn't say it wasn't horrifying and painful. Jesus simply said that if God the Father's will for his life involved suffering, he would not be rebellious and try to escape it. He would accept it from the hand of God.

This morning, if God has you in a period of suffering, I don't pretend to understand why. There are many things in this life we can't and won't understand until we get to heaven. What I do know is that just like Jesus, if God calls us to honor him through suffering, we are not to be rebellious in it. We are not to turn to sin for cheap thrills in the middle of suffering. We are not to cuss our way through suffering. We are to suffer like Jesus. We are to accept our suffering and trust our lives into God's hands.

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)

How do you make it through times of suffering?

The next verses tell us how Jesus made it through his suffering and what we need to know to make it through. This is amazing to me because I know that when I suffer, I quickly fall into sin. I tend to slip into despondency and frustration. What does Jesus tell us about making it through those times of

suffering? Jesus doesn't talk about what we are do to as much as what we need to know when we are in the middle of suffering.

Know God will help you.

But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced... Isaiah 50:7a (ESV)

Know that in the middle of your suffering, God will help you. You may not always see it. You may not always know how God will help you or when God will help you, but you need to know he will help you. At the end of the day people are not going to be mocking you because you trusted in God and he did not come through. At the end of the day, you will see how God carried you through your suffering. You will look back and see how he snatched your life from the edge of disaster again and again.

Know you will not be put to shame when following God's will is hard.

...therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. Isaiah 50:7 (ESV)

Sometimes doing the God-honoring thing brings about suffering. Sometimes it doesn't look wise to do God's will because you don't see how it will work out. You don't see why it is wise but you do God's will anyway knowing you might suffer on the front end, but God will not be mocked. He will come to your rescue in the end.

This is Jesus knowing that his heavenly father plans for him to suffer. The father planned for him to be whipped, for him to be crucified and for everything about his two-plus years of ministry to be completely destroyed. Jesus knew that it didn't matter how foolish it looked, in the end obeying his heavenly father and

living in the center of his will, Jesus would be vindicated. God the Father would come to his rescue.

This is a husband staying faithful to his wife when home life is draining because she is sick. He knows that in the plan of God it is part of God's will right now for him to suffer because home life isn't easy. He is doing all the giving and receiving none of the joy in the marriage. He does not know why God the Father has chosen for him to suffer at this time but he does know that if he stays faithful to his wife and faithful to his family, just like Jesus, his faithfulness will not be put to shame. He won't regret it even though it is hard right now.

This is losing your job and not knowing why you are suffering or where life is going but you accept that period of suffering in unemployment as part of God's plan for your life and setting your face like flint to honor God the Father. It is seeking God the Father in the face of it and knowing that faithfulness to God in suffering will not be put to shame in the end.

Know God is near, even when he feels far.

He who vindicates me is near. Isaiah 50:8a (ESV)

When you are suffering, God feels distant. It feels like God is not there. What we feel when we are suffering and what is true in suffering is very different. While we feel God is not there, he is very near and hasn't left.

I think of David after King Saul turned against him in the Old Testament. David was constantly on the run for his life. At one time David was with the Philistines pretending to be insane so he wouldn't be killed by his enemies or by Saul. David was sleeping outside. He was rummaging for food. "God, where

are you? I am the new anointed king and I am the No. 1 guy on King Saul's hit list. I am wanted dead or alive. God, did you forget me?"

God did not forget him. He was with him the whole time. The suffering he faced was the suffering God intended for him. It is the suffering David faced as a young man that helped seal him from pride and arrogance as an old man, the very sin that destroyed King Saul, his predecessor.

When you feel God is far, know he is nearer than you think. He is not allowing more suffering to come our way than he deems necessary to accomplish his will for our lives.

Know all that matters is what God thinks of you, not what people think of you.

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. 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. Isaiah 50:8–9 (ESV)

The picture is suffering and people around the sufferer accusing and mocking him. "It is all your fault." "You deserve what you get." Each of us have heard those lines.

Can you picture this with Jesus? The crowds were laughing at him as he was whipped and chunks of flesh torn off his back. He carried his cross through the city to the mocking and spitting of the crowds around him. He was nailed to the cross as his enemies laughed at him. He saved others, but he didn't save himself.

There are times in life where people and their mocking, sarcastic and vicious words cut like razor blades across our hearts. Jesus said, "You need to

know the only thing that matters at the end of the day is what God the Father thinks of us.” God will help you. God is the one before whom we must stand. All of our accusers will wear out like an old T-shirt and be thrown away. They will not stand. Remember that we have an audience of one. He is the only we have to please.

Know God will help you; you are not alone in your suffering. Know that when you determine to do what is right, no matter the cost, you will not regret it. While God may feel far from you, but he is right next to you. Know that no matter what people say about you, all that matters at the end of the day is what God says. Everybody else will be discarded like a dirty rag.

Suffering shows what you believe about who is in control of your life.

After giving us a window into Christ’s sufferings, Jesus gives us a challenge on how to face our sufferings. Every one of us will suffer. We will face times of darkness we did not ask for. It might be a job loss. It might be the unexpected diagnosis of cancer you didn’t see coming. It might be a season-ending injury or an unexpected loss of your varsity sports position. It might be financial devastation with an unexpected car repair. It might be an unexplainable disease that the doctors can’t diagnose. It might be a divorce you didn’t see coming. The list can go on and on.

Every one of us will suffer. When we suffer, we have a choice of where we will turn. What we turn to in our suffering reveals what we truly believe about God.

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. Isaiah 50:10 (ESV)

I love this picture. Times of darkness are times of suffering when we are so broken, so hopeless, so distressed that we do not know which way to turn. We feel like we are in a pitch black room that is filling with smoke. We are choking and panicking to find a way out but we don't know which way to turn. Where do you turn when the chips are down and all hope is gone?

Those who love God and obey Christ will run to the Lord and rely on God even when it doesn't seem like he is there. Turn to him. Run to him. Call to him. Give him your pain and frustration. Ask him to come to the rescue. Do you really believe in him? Do you believe he can be trusted to save the day? Do you believe that if it is his will the suffering continues he is still good, he still loves you and he is worthy of your trust?

There is another way to handle our suffering. It is so easy to go this direction. When we are in darkness, instead of calling out to God and relying on him to lead us and come to the rescue, it is easy to try to light our own torches. That is a figure of speech that means we try to figure our own way out of our suffering rather than relying on God to take us through the suffering to the other side.

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. Isaiah 50:11 (ESV)

This is someone that is single and lonely, but rather than waiting for the right person who loves Jesus knowing God will provide that person in the right

time, he or she lowers his or her standards. That person is going to provide his or her own relationship his or her own way because he or she believes God will not come through.

This is someone who is in a marriage that is not comfortable. Rather than coming home to a happy spouse, family life is draining. It is hard. Rather than prayerfully asking God for the strength to make it through and to heal the broken marriage, he or she considers divorce. This is considering an affair. This is escaping to other sinful ways of expressing your passion.

That is called lighting your own fires to navigate your own way out of the darkness and escape suffering rather than honoring God and trusting him to come to the rescue.

This is facing job loss, and rather than getting on your knees and pouring your heart out in prayer, it is going to the help wanted adds to solve your problems rather than seeking Christ to solve your problems. I am not saying you shouldn't look at the help wanted adds. The question is where you turn first. Are you self-reliant or God-reliant?

This is facing sickness and believing the doctor is the cure rather than God is the divine physician who may choose to use the doctor for your cure.

If this morning you are suffering according to God's will, accept it as part of God's will for this time in your life, trust in God, rely on God, honor God. Don't try to escape it by being self-reliant, become God-reliant.

Those who refuse to relying on God in times of darkness and suffering but rely on themselves and their own plans will not find themselves blessed by God. God promises that living by your own plans will only lead to torment.

Applications

- **If God's will is for you to suffer, submit to it, don't rebel and find sinful ways to escape it.** When we rebel against God-ordained suffering, we are rebelling against God's will for those times in our lives. We are also short-circuiting what God wants to do in us and through us with the suffering. Rebelling against God in suffering leads to torment, not rescue.
- **When obedience to Christ is hard, we will never be put to shame.** God will always honor our honoring of him, even when it seems like the foolish thing to do.
- **Those who choose to follow Christ will experienced suffering like Christ.** Suffering does not mean we missed the will of God. Suffering may be part of the will of God. Just as Christ suffered, we must expect to suffer. It comes with our identities in Jesus.



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