

St Andrew's Church, Corbridge
Exploring the Bible – 'The Servant Songs of Isaiah': Lent, 2024

The Book of Isaiah

In the Old Testament, there is a single book called Isaiah. Isaiah is designated by scholars as one of 'the four Major Prophets' along with Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. For many years, biblical scholars have divided Isaiah into 3 sections:

- 'First Isaiah', chapters 1-39
- 'Second Isaiah', chapters 40-55
- 'Third Isaiah', chapters 56-66

This is because of the historical background to the 3 sections of the Book.

- 'First Isaiah' is set in the 8th century BC during the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah (see 1.1)
- 'Second Isaiah' is set in the time of the Exile in Babylon in the 6th century BC
- 'Third Isaiah' is set after the return from Babylon to Jerusalem and Judah later in the 6th century BC.

Why, then, is there only one book of Isaiah in the OT? 'First Isaiah', sometimes called 'Isaiah of Jerusalem' was a historical Prophet, highly regarded. He probably led a 'school' or group of prophets who had the gift of discerning the word of God. This 'school' or group of disciples continued into the exile, carrying on Isaiah's work and possibly adopting his name. In the post-exilic period further prophecies were appended to this 'Isaiah' corpus of prophecy.

'Second Isaiah'

Second Isaiah begins with the famous words 'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God' (40.1). Chapter 40 proclaims the triumphant return of the exiles from Babylon to their homeland in Jerusalem and Judah.

Main emphases of Second Isaiah

- God is the God of restoration, salvation and deliverance
- there is only one God; the creator of all things
- the idols of the nations are lifeless and cannot save
- God is God of all the earth; his power is not limited
- God is the Lord of history

- The rise and fall of Empires come under God's sovereignty; the rise of the heathen King Cyrus of Persia (who would defeat Babylon) is all under God's command and sovereignty (Second Isaiah even calls Cyrus 'God's anointed'!)
- God's purposes in salvation are for the whole world not just for Israel; Israel is called to be a 'light to the nations' so that God's salvation might 'reach to the ends of the earth' (Isaiah 49.6). This is foundational for Christian theology.

A special emphasis of Second Isaiah – God's Servant

The mysterious figure of the Servant appears in various passages or 'songs' within Second Isaiah. The Servant will form the basis of these Bible studies. Who is he?

There are various possibilities:

- the prophet himself, who has experienced great suffering but through whom God would accomplish something truly wonderful
- the Servant is a symbolic figure designating the nation Israel in her trials, sufferings, and ultimate vindication
- the Servant is bound up with the King ('son of David', 'the Lord's anointed') and so the destiny of the royal line of David; but with the exile, the line of Davidic kings had come to an end, or had it?
- note the final two Kings of Judah, both tragic figures: Jehoiakim, taken prisoner to Babylon for 37 years; and Zedekiah, who was captured as he tried to escape Jerusalem, made to watch his children being murdered, blinded, and taken to Babylon until his death (Jeremiah 52. 1-11). The Babylonians would have subjected them to public mockery.
- Christians read the Servant Songs as ultimately pointing forward to Jesus, the Messiah (Christ/'anointed one'; the King of David's line, but a very different kind of king. Jesus as 'the perfect Israelite'.

In many ways, all four of the above have degrees of truth, as signs of a later and ultimate fulfilment. This is what we shall explore together.

The first reference to the 'Servant' in Second Isaiah comes in chapter 41:

Isaiah 41. 8-10. Here the Servant is unquestioningly Israel. The context here is the fear in Babylon at the rise of a new super-power, the Kingdom of Persia. God confirms that he has not abandoned his people; he is with them – note the warmth of the language. Even when the world is teetering on the brink, God's purposes will prevail, so do not fear.

Servant Song 1 Isaiah 42. 1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

²He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;

³a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,

⁷to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

⁹See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

If the Servant is Israel in Chapter 41, in chapter 42 the Servant is a person – ‘He/him’.
Note that in verses 1-4, God speaks *about* his servant; in verses 5-9 he *addresses* his Servant.

We are invited to ‘see’ or ‘behold’ God’s Servant.

Note God’s call – *chosen* (v.1) – and in whom God *delights* (v.1). The Servant has received God’s *spirit* – or life. He is called to bring God’s justice or judgment to the *nations* – note this is not just Israel.

Verse 2 – he is not loud, or a shouter; this is a gentle, unaggressive ministry – *cry out* has the sense of cry *in affliction*; the servant will not be overwhelmed; there is a sense of resoluteness and inner strength about him.

The people are compared to *a bruised or broken reed, a dimly burning wick* - i.e. bent but not snapped off; the light is very low but not extinguished. The Servant will not write them off. Hence, a promise of healing and renewal.

Verse 4 – note this promise that the Servant will prevail; if the people are crushed, he will prevail; he is resilient, able to endure. Note again the priority of justice; the Servant is also a teacher – *coastlands* may suggest nations beyond Israel.

Verse 5 - the Servant is now addressed by God, who is the Lord, the creator, the giver of life and spirit. God's call and care for the Servant are reiterated.

The Servant's mission:

- a *covenant* to the people – a new relationship with God cf. God's covenant with Abraham – 'in you (Israel) all the families of the earth will be blessed'.
- a *light* to the nations – a beacon, an attraction, simply by being who he is – 'Let your light shine.....'
- to open blind eyes – restoring sight/insight/true knowledge cf. Zedekiah's blindness
- to bring release to prisoners – freedom from exile, oppression cf. Jehoiakim
- something new is coming (verse 9).

Isaiah 42 in the New Testament

See Matthew 12. 15-21. Verses 1-4 are quoted verbatim. Note the context

- the Pharisees wish to destroy him because he heals on the Sabbath (12. 14)
- many crowds follow him; he cures the sick
- he orders them not to make him known
- this, says Matthew, fulfils Isaiah 42. 1-4.

There are allusions in the Baptism of Jesus. **See Matthew 3. 13-17.**

- 'This is/You are my Son, the beloved in whom I am well-pleased' – 'my soul delights'
- the descent of the Spirit
- John 1.34: John the Baptist – I myself have seen and have testified that this is the (textual variant) either 'the Son of God' or 'the Chosen One of God'.
- Luke 2 (Simeon): – 'to be a light to lighten the Gentiles'
- John 8.12 – 'I am the Light of the world'.

If Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of Isaiah 42. 1-9, how do we see his life, teaching, ministry reflected in this passage? If we are to be servants of Christ the Servant, how do we see our mission and life as Christians reflected in this passage?

Session 2 The Second and Third Songs

Introduction

Last week, we had an overview of Second Isaiah in the context of the exile in Babylon and the hope of restoration to Jerusalem and Judah. We also considered the rise of a new 'super-power', the Empire of Persia. We considered that Israel was called to be God's Servant, but in the First Servant Song, Isaiah 42. 1-9, the Servant has become an individual or personification, and we considered how the New Testament sees this prophecy as a witness to Christ.

Song 2 *Isaiah 49. 1-9*

Listen to me, O coastlands;
 pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The LORD called me before I was born;
 while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
²He made my mouth like a sharp sword;
 in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow;
 in his quiver he hid me away.
³And he said to me, "You are my servant,
 Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
⁴But I said, "I have laboured in vain;
 I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the LORD
 and my reward with my God."
⁵And now the LORD says,
 who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
 and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honoured in the sight of the LORD,
 and my God has become my strength—
⁶he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob
 and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

⁷ Thus says the LORD,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
“Kings shall see and stand up;
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

⁸ Thus says the LORD:
In a time of favour I have answered you;
on a day of salvation I have helped you;
I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate heritages,
⁹ saying to the prisoners, “Come out,”
to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.”

In this passage, first the Servant speaks (vv. 1-4), then God speaks (vv. 5-9).

There is something deeply paradoxical in this passage

- it begins with what looks like a personal call to be a prophet v. 1, 2
See Jeremiah 1. 4-10 as a similar example
- note the references to ‘sharp sword’ and ‘polished arrow’ – images of proclaiming God’s incisive word to the people but also suggesting that this might involve conflict, challenge and confrontation
- v. 4 – again we read that *Israel* is God’s Servant, or is that what the text means?
- note in v. 5, Israel is mentioned in the third person as if the Servant in this passage is someone else; this other ‘Servant’ is called to bring Israel back to God (note Jacob is a synonym for Israel).

So, what is going on?

It seems that

- Israel, because of her sin and faithlessness to God, cannot fulfil her God-given vocation to be God’s Servant
- so, Israel herself needs a Servant to bring Israel back to her God

So, this passage might suggest that *Second Isaiah himself* is the Servant.

So, in verse 3 – *You are my Servant, Israel, in whom I am to be glorified*. Some commentators think that ‘Israel’ is an intrusion into the text here. But others, argue strongly for its authenticity.

It seems that here God calls Isaiah ‘Israel’ i.e. ‘But you, O Israel (Isaiah) are my Servant’, perhaps in the sense that he was to be a *true* Israelite – faithful, obedient, holy, consecrated.

Isaiah as the 'representative person' – the one standing for the many.

For this passage speaks of his call to be a Prophet-Servant, and yet, verse 4, Isaiah himself feels ill-equipped to fulfil this – he has 'laboured in vain', his strength is spent for nothing; all is vanity.

Isaiah's ministry seems to have been tough, the people unresponsive; there is little fruit from his labours. He feels like a failure, at the point of despair.

This is often a reality in ministry – 'Lord, we have laboured all night and caught nothing!'

Often in ministry, we become discouraged because it is hard to quantify or measure the effects of ministry; we feel unprofitable, progress is hard won, and apathy and unresponsiveness seem to abound. What on earth are we doing? What is *God* doing?

And yet, verse 4, Isaiah still has faith that his work is grounded in God's will; that God's purposes will prevail. So, we can minister hopefully.

We need to keep a 'God's-eye' view of things: v. 5

- he trusts God's word to him – 'The Lord says'
- he trusts God's call on his life from the very first – called from the womb
- he trusts God's mission entrusted to him to bring Israel back to God - Israel re-gathered
- he trusts God's care and concern for him – 'honoured in God's sight'
- he trusts in God's strength

The Prophet has to hold these convictions even when his ministry seems unfruitful.

The dialogue between objective conviction and subjective feelings.

An amazing, mind-blowing vocation v. 6

- the will and purpose of God
- not only to be God's Servant to bring back and restore *Israel* (end of exile, home-coming, faithfulness to God)
- but also, to be *a light to the nations*
- that God's salvation may be universal – for everyone!

Note, Israel's returning to God, will of itself make her also a light to the nations and a means of salvation to all.

Verses 7-9 reiterate

- God's purposes for Israel
- that her present slavery will not go on for ever (exile)
- that Israel in time will be exalted because of God's faithfulness and election (his promise to Abraham)
- that a day of favour/salvation is dawning
- that God's covenant is secure
- that they will return to the land – end of exile, restoration of Jerusalem and Judah.

Song 3 Isaiah 50. 4-9

The Lord GOD has given me
a trained tongue,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens,
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I did not turn backward.
⁶I gave my back to those who struck me
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.
⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like 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 in court together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

The context shows that this is clearly the Servant speaking (although the word 'servant' doesn't appear – note it is stated in v. 10)

The Servant's persistence and perseverance

Once again, the Servant speaks (vv. 4-5).

- the gift of speech – a teacher taught by God how to communicate, or perhaps a disciple who has learned from God the right words to say
- paracletic words - the words of consolation/strengthening – not everything is 'challenge' or 'confrontation' cf. the ministry of Jesus
- the daily a-tuning to God's word – what is God saying today?
- the Servant first listens before he speaks
- he is obedient to what he hears.

But he faces opposition (vv. 6-9)

- a paradox: he can 'sustain the weary with a word', yet
- his message is resisted
- note Isaiah was prophesying the end of exile and the rise of Persia
 - how would the Babylonians receive that?
 - how would the exiles receive it?
 - were they worried about more suffering? more upheaval?
 - did everyone want to go home?
 - did everyone believe God's message/messenger?
 - A vocation to bear reproach and suffering
- so, part of his vocation is to bear suffering, persecution and hatred – 'blows'
- but he witnesses to God's help
- part of this is to set his face like flint
- he knows he has a vindicator/redeemer
- he will be persistent in bearing reproach and will overcome; he protests his innocence – that he is the authentic prophet of God.

The Second and Third Songs in the Light of Christ

Note Bishop Tom Wright has written extensively on his thesis that although the exile did come to an end, and Jerusalem and Judah were restored, many of the great promises in Second and Third Isaiah about the coming glory of Jerusalem were not fulfilled. Hence, he argues, in reality and spiritually, the 'exile' continued. This is borne out in subsequent Jewish history in the Inter-Testamental period. There were successive occupations by the Persians (539-332BC), the Greeks (332-141BC) and finally by Rome in 63BC.

Jesus as the 'representative' Person: 'Son of Man'; 'Second Adam'; the 'True (perfectly obedient) Israelite'. Jesus in his own person and ministry fulfils the destiny of Israel – he 're-capitulates' the story of Israel. He is 'without sin' – he never rebelled against God or gave up his vocation. So much of the New Testament takes this up: Jesus as new Moses, as *the* ultimate Son of David (Messiah-King), Jesus as the Suffering Servant, Jesus as the new Temple. His bringing of salvation to the 'poor and needy', his miracles and healings show that the messianic blessings of God's Kingdom (the new age) are being fulfilled in him. He himself inhabits the promised glory of Jerusalem.

His mission:

- first to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (but like Isaiah they still failed to recognise him, but the remnant did respond – the apostolic circle)

- to the Gentiles: Simeon: 'to be a light to lighted the Gentiles') cf. Matthew 28: the great commission; Luke's vision of Jesus as Saviour of the world; Acts 13.47 – Paul and Barnabas cite Isaiah 49 for the Gentile mission: 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the world'.

Note also the apparent failure of Jesus mission (opposition, rejection, persecution, passion, crucifixion) followed by vindication (resurrection-ascension)

Jesus' teaching – both challenge (sharp sword/polished arrow) and *paraclesis* (sustaining the weary, good news)

Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem' – Luke 9.51 cf. setting 'his face like flint'.

The Third Song introduces us to the vocation of God's Servant to suffering; this is writ large in the 4th Song to which we turn next week.

Session 3 The Fourth Song: Isaiah 52.13-53 - end

¹³ See, my servant shall prosper;

he shall be exalted and lifted up
and shall be very high.

¹⁴ Just as there were many who were astonished at him^[e]

—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals—

¹⁵ so he shall startle^f many nations;

kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

53 Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a young plant

and like a root out of dry ground;

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by others;

a man of suffering^[e] and acquainted with infirmity,
and as one from whom others hide their faces^[f]

he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities

and carried our diseases,

yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions,

crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.

⁹ They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb^{sq} with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with affliction.
When you make his life an offering for sin,^l
he shall see his offspring and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

¹¹ Out of his anguish he shall see;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out himself to death
and was numbered with the transgressors,
yet he bore the sin of many
and made intercession for the transgressors.

The Fourth Servant Song marks a significant step-change from the first three. There is something deeply mysterious and 'other' about the picture it paints. The Hebrew text is challenging to translate – perhaps that is part of the mystery of this remarkable passage.

Who is the Servant?

- in some senses, Israel (but Israel could not fulfil her vocation)
- other passages suggest an individual or personification

- perhaps the Servant represents the royal line of David, perhaps idealized; the King as the representative person; is the Servant a distillation of the calling of the King, who in himself represents the sufferings of many ages
- sometimes, the Servant seems to be the Prophet himself (but the Servant ministry goes far beyond the work of the Prophet)
- or, is the Servant as prophetic or mystical figure, pointing forward to some future reality?

Who is speaking in 52. 12-15?

- is it the Prophet or God or representatives of the nations? It is difficult to tell. Note again – *See, Behold* my Servant as in 42.1. We are invited to look on a mystery. The passage begins positively – *prosper, exalted, lifted up, very high* – a sign of glory to come? Note reference to ‘kings’ v. 15 - restored Davidic line? Sense of almost transfiguration. But then note the stark contrast v. 14 – this is someone who seems emaciated, barely human or dehumanised cf. the treatment of Jehoiachim, Zedekiah; the glorious Lord’s Anointed as a thing of horror; did this personify what had become of Israel? Note the universal theme – startle *many* nations v. 15; the Hebrew could mean ‘sprinkle’ or cleanse, purify, many nations; the Servant’s ministry for the many, not the few; the world, not simply Israel.

The Suffering Servant: 53.1-9

In Chapter 53, the crowd or choir, speaks or sings:

v. 1 – note the question – Who would have believed this? This is a *revelation*; a divine secret that is being made known to humans. This reveals the ‘arm of the Lord’ – i.e. God’s saving action, but only faith can understand and perceive it.

v. 2 – the Servant grew (‘shot up’) like a *young plant* – vulnerable; *as a root in dry land* – sense of becoming shrivelled, emaciated

- he has no beauty and *majesty* cf. the King; the early Kings of Judah – Saul, David are described as tall, handsome, impressive.

- nothing attractive or desirable in the Servant’s appearance.

v. 3 – he is despised – a thing of hatred and rejected, one who suffers grievously and is sick.

What was he suffering?

Text suggests grievous sickness (leprosy has been suggested) but also persecution.

It was difficult to look at him; a thing of horror from which we look away; note the repetition of *despised* in v. 3. He is essentially worthless.

v. 4. But note the remarkable statement – ‘Surely **he** has borne **our** sorrows and carried our diseases’ (the stress in Hebrew falls on the words in bold).

Note the strand in the OT that understands sickness and affliction as God’s judgment on sinners. This is stressed some OT passages and theology (e.g. as in the Book of Deuteronomy) where obedience to God means blessing and abundance and disobedience means judgment and things going badly. Note the Book of Job, among other passages, challenges this dualism.

So, at one level, we can regard him as ‘struck down by God’ – i.e. under God’s judgment.

But there is something *vicarious* about the Servant’s suffering. He is the representative person who suffers on behalf of ‘us’. It is *our* infirmities he bears; *our* diseases he carries.

v. 5 extends this to include our *sins* and *iniquities*. Note the strength of the verbs – ‘wounded’ or lacerated, i.e. his flesh was broken, hence some translations choose *pierced*. He is ‘crushed’.

Note the sense that the servant was *punished*. Note this is not the idea of a legal punishment, but rather chastisement in the sense that it is ‘remedial as distinct from retributive’ (C. R. North). The image is of disciplining a child or ‘correcting’ a student to change them for the better.

Yet it is clear that he is suffering not because of his *own sins*, but because of what *we have done*. The sense is that the people deserve their judgment (i.e. the exile) but he does *not* deserve what he suffered.

And note that the people have been transformed by the Servant’s work – they have been *made whole* (*shalom* – restored to peace, well-being) by his chastisement and they are *healed* by his wounds (‘stripes’, ‘open wounds’).

The people acknowledge their waywardness (‘erred and strayed like lost sheep’; going their own way) but the Lord ‘laid on him’, brought down upon him, the corporate iniquity of the people.

v. 7 – how the Servant bears his suffering – silence; he offers no defence.

‘Like a lamb to be slaughtered’ cf. the sacrificial system of the Temple. While some sacrifices were simply ‘gifts’ offered to God as part of regular worship, other sacrifices were to offer atonement for sin. He meekly accepts that it is his vocation to suffer for the many.

v. 8 – there is something unjust about his suffering; he did not deserve it; he is innocent yet silently gives himself for the guilty.

This verse makes it clear that the Servant's fate is death ('cut off from the land of the living'), but it reiterates that he died because of the wrongdoing of the people.

9. The Servant's burial – the NRSV has a contradiction – 'grave with the wicked/'tomb with the rich' - note some translations render the word 'rich' as worthless or 'lowest of rank' – i.e. the common grave of criminals, though again the Servant's innocence is stressed; he did no violence yet suffered violence; he was unjustly, deceitfully killed though no deceit was found in his mouth.

The Vindication of the Servant: 53: 10-12

v. 10 – it was the Lord's will to crush him. The Servant's suffering and death are somehow part of a greater salvific purpose.

'Offering for sin' is literally, a **guilt offering**. In Leviticus, there are two types of sacrifice of atonement, the sin offering and the guilt offering.

The sin offering covered unintentional, accidental sin (Leviticus 4.2).

The guilt offering also covered unintentional sin but also certain other sins (Leviticus 6. 1-6) where the sinner must make restitution for sin.

The Day of Atonement ritual included the confessing of the people's sins over a goat which was then driven into the wilderness – the idea of 'taking away' sin.

Fascinatingly, there doesn't seem to be an 'all-encompassing sacrifice' that covers all sin; there is simply the conviction that God is just and merciful.

Isaiah 53 seems to suggest that the sacrifice of the Servant is such an all-encompassing sacrifice. Note the suggestion that this is the Servant's *self*-sacrifice

v. 10b – the restoration of the Servant

- the gift of offspring – literal children? Metaphorical children?
- prolonging of days – note the sense that the Servant died v. 8 but is somehow restored
- God's will is accomplished
- the Servant sees his work is not in vain – light, satisfaction
- his work has moral benefit – making many righteous
- his reward – counted among the great, the strong cf. spoil – the trophies of battle.

Final reprise of the Servant's work (v. 12b)

- he poured out himself – i.e. his self-sacrifice
- he was counted among the sinners by bearing the sins of many

- his ministry of intercession – he is the Vicarious one in sacrifice and prayer; this is the sense in which he ‘speaks’ of his silence in v. 7.

Conclusion – the Fourth Song in the light of the New Testament

The Four Servant Songs point forward to the NT more clearly than any other OT text.

But Isaiah 53 is clearly a central text in New Testament imagination and in how the suffering and death of Jesus is set forth. This is in the context of Christ as the light to the nations that God’s salvation might reach to the ends of the earth cf. the universalism of Second Isaiah.

Many of the themes in Isaiah 53 are echoed in the Passion Narratives:

- Jesus is unjustly tried and condemned
- he offers himself to the divine will, even to death (Gethsemane)
- he is silent (cf. his trial before the High Priest and Pilate, cf. Acts 8. 32-33)
- he is abused – scourged and beaten, pierced, disfigured and dehumanised
- he was treated like a common criminal
- he was buried in the tomb of a rich man
- he interceded for his persecutors
- he was vindicated and restored to life
- he has many descendants – i.e. those who follow him.

His bearing of our sicknesses – Matthew 8.17.

His vicarious death for sin: **See 1 Peter 2. 21-25.**

His fulfilment of sacrifice – cf. our study of Hebrews in 2023 and St Paul’s stress on Christ’s death as his atoning sacrifice for sin (Romans 5)

His humility and exaltation: Philippians 2. 5-11, Christ as exalted slave/servant.

The mystery of human suffering (sickness, pain, mortality) taken up into the life of God through Christ the Servant and hence the promise of redemption cf. healing as seeking *shalom*.

The vicarious calling of the Church? How is the Church called to pattern the way of Christ? The baptismal vocation to be servants of the Servant.