



ADVENT: SERVANT SONGS DISCUSSION GUIDES

DECEMBER 3-30, 2017

SERIES INTRO

The story of the incarnation is clothed in mystery. Jesus laid aside his deity to come as a human child yet remained both fully God and fully man. The Gospel-writer John describes this as the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14), yet Luke recounts a story in his Gospel of a young Jesus sitting in the Temple of Jerusalem learning about God from his word (Luke 2:46). The Word-become-flesh was learning the word of God. How can this be?

Jesus lived the story that had been written for him in God's word. In Luke 4:16-30 he journeyed back to his hometown and read aloud a prophecy, after which he told those listening, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He knew the prophecies in God's word and he lived their fulfillment.

The book of Isaiah includes four passages commonly called the Servant Songs: Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-13, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. These poems speak of the suffering servant of God, the Messiah, who would be punished, yet through his punishment would bring about peace. They were written some 750 years before Jesus' birth, and they describe the servant of God being spit upon, struck, and pierced. Jesus grew up learning these passages about him and throughout his ministry he knew where his story was heading.

We can experience a similar duality now because we also know where the story is heading. We can look past the Christmas manger towards the Mount of Crucifixion. As we come to Christmas to celebrate the story of Jesus' birth, we should remember where this is all going. By studying the four Servant Songs through Advent we can keep in mind the story beyond Christmas: "upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace." (Isaiah 53:5)



1. Justice – Isaiah 42:1-4

December 3

This passage, the first of the four Servant Songs, introduces the servant of the Lord on whom Isaiah will elaborate throughout the four songs. The meaning for Israel in Isaiah's time was clear: these are prophecies indicating the nature of the coming Messiah. The meaning for us now is found in Jesus' fulfilling of God's promises. In celebrating Jesus' birth at Christmas we get to celebrate the first glimpses of Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

This song talks about bringing justice to the ends of the earth. The Hebrew word for justice there is more than just deciding legal cases; it indicates the restoration of God's plan for a just and righteous order in the world. This song points towards the cross, where God's justice was executed on Jesus in order for us to receive mercy. Similarly it points us towards the redemptive work of the gospel in the world, and towards Jesus' ultimate return, when he'll establish a perfectly just reign on earth. Here and now we get to participate in bring God's justice to the ends of the earth through the proclamation of the good news.

Discussion

- **Let's look at Isaiah 42:1-4.** (*ask someone to read this for the group*)
- What are some of the ways this passage describes the "servant"?
- What mission did God give this servant?
- What can we glean from the passage about God's character?
- What could it look like for God to bring "justice to the nations"?
- How does this passage encourage you towards hope?



2. Redemption – Isaiah 49:5-6

December 10

This second Servant Song starts with an aside; the servant first addresses God and his glory in verse 5 before going on in verse 6 to say what God has said. You see the thought pick up from "the Lord says..." in verse 5 to "he says" in verse 6.

In verse 6 God says that it's too little of a thing to just save Israel. Instead, he's going to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth. This is like a body builder at the gym turning down a puny little 5 lb. weight; saving just Israel wasn't a good enough proof of God's strength. Instead he chose to make his servant (Jesus) a light to all the nations. In this passage we begin to see parallels with the story of Jesus' birth. When Simeon rejoices over Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:22-32) he uses incredibly similar language, which helps us see this connection. At Christmas we can rejoice that God has shone the light of his revelation through Jesus, and that in him we have the hope of salvation to the ends of the earth.

Discussion

- **Let's look at Isaiah 49:5-6.** (*ask someone to read this for the group*)
- What images come to mind when you read "light for the nations"?
- **Let's read Luke 2:22-32.** (*ask someone to read this for the group*)
- What are the parallels between this passage and Isaiah 49?
- What are some of the things Luke 2 tells us about Jesus?
- **Let's turn back to Isaiah 49:5-6.**
- When you read about salvation reaching to the ends of the earth, what do you imagine that could be like?
- How can we celebrate the promises of this passage at Christmas?



3. Suffering – Isaiah 50:5-7, 10-11

December 17

This passage, the third of four Servant Songs, is split into two parts for us: verses 5-7 and verses 10-11. We'll spend our discussion looking at verses 5-7. In it we see the servant of the Lord being beaten and disgraced. This and the final Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) address the suffering of the Servant far more than the first two.

While it might feel off-putting to look at the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus this time of year, without Jesus' death and resurrection we have nothing to celebrate at Christmas. We see in these passages that the Servant was intended to suffer, that this was the work; of a world that had spurned its Creator and his messenger. While he was facing down torment he trusted that God would not let him be put to shame. Our inclination is to do the opposite; in the face of trial we tend to lose hope in the Lord. At Christmas we can be thankful that God sent his son to suffer what we couldn't endure to give us mercy we could never earn.

Discussion

- **Let's look at Isaiah 50:5-7.** *(ask someone to read this for the group)*
- What does the "servant" say about himself in this passage?
- **Let's look at Mark 15:16-20.** *(ask someone to read this for the group)*
- What parallels do you see between these two passages?
- **Let's look back at Isaiah 50:5-7.**
- Looking at verse 7, what are some ways this verse describes Jesus' mindset while being beaten?
- Why do you think this prophecy from Isaiah needed to happen to Jesus?
- How does this passage call us to hope?



4. Peace – Isaiah 53:1-6

December 24

You'll see "peace on earth" in window displays and department stores through the end of this week. But what peace are they marketing? What is the peace that comes through Christmas?

This last Servant Song includes one of the most striking phrases about the suffering servant: "upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace." (Isaiah 53:5) This peace isn't just warm feelings or marketing fluff. It's peace between God and man where there had previously been enmity. This week we'll look at Luke 2 in which the heavenly host announces Jesus' birth and declares, "Peace on Earth!" We see in Isaiah 53 that this peace was more costly than we could ever imagine.

Discussion

- **Let's look at Isaiah 53:1-6.** (*ask someone to read this for the group*)
- What's your first reaction to this passage?
- What are some of the ways this passage describes the "servant"?
- **Let's turn to Luke 2:8-14.** (*ask someone to read this for the group*)
- What images comes to mind when you read this?
- **Let's look back at Isaiah 53**
- How does Isaiah 53:5 help us understand the angel's announcement in Luke 2?
- How does this passage help us celebrate Christmas this week?

