

Isaiah 50

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[0 : 0 0] Turn to Isaiah chapter 50. Isaiah chapter 50. There are no rugby illustrations this morning. ! And there is a company called Red Tapebusters. I don't know whether you know them. Red tapebusters, they go into bats for people who are battling bureaucracy to do away with red tape. So perhaps you've got a parking ticket and you know that the traffic warden was wrong, but who's going to believe it as low as you? Perhaps you've got a query with your bill and you spend the whole week being passed from one automated voice to another. Well now you can ring or email Red Tapebusters and they will sort it out for you. It's a great ministry, isn't it? We should support that ministry as a church in a way. It's great to have someone who will go into bat with you. It's great to have someone on your side when the odds against you are insurmountable. When you're fighting a losing battle. And that is pretty much where Israel is here in Isaiah. Or at least Isaiah can see that coming. And of course, when something like that happens, when something terrible and devastating happens, well who do you blame? Who do you blame when life goes wrong? If you go back to chapter 49 and verse 14, you'll see they blame God. And it's often, isn't it, a knee-jerk reaction. Where was God on dot dot dot? You point the finger at the finger at God and you blame God. In a sense, I want to say to you, I don't think that's unreasonable. Four times from verses 4 to 11, God is called the sovereign Lord. He is the sovereign Lord, the Lord God. And yet his people are in a lot of trouble. And if God really is the Lord God, the sovereign God, and he's in control, why is all this happening to his people? Why are his people about to be booted out of the land to exile in Babylon? If God is in control, well it either must be his fault, or he's forgotten about it. He's forsaken us in the words of 49 verse 14. That's what they were thinking. And the Lord's response in Isaiah chapter 50, you'll notice, is, this is what he says to people who are murmuring or complaining about him. Verse 1, where's your mother's certificate of divorce? With which I sent her away. God says to the people of Israel, go through the papers, go rifling through the papers, and see if you can find a divorce certificate. You won't, because it's not there. I have not divorced you. I am a covenant keeping God. I have not divorced you. What has happened is you have divorced me. And that is what God is saying. I didn't sell you into slavery. You sold yourself. You've actually got only yourself to blame. Very occasionally you hear of children divorcing their parents. It's bizarre. It's so odd that it makes the press. You can imagine kind of in extreme circumstances where that might be necessary. But it's bizarre.

[3 : 3 1] It's unnatural. And yet here is God's people, and they have divorced themselves from God, their loving Heavenly Father, by their rebellion and their sin and their idolatry. They've divorced themselves from their loving Heavenly Father, and they will not listen. They will not hear when he speaks. They will reply to his emails. They won't answer his calls. And when he sends his prophets, they don't want to hear what he says. And you see, that is the explanation for why the world is in the state it is. It's because we have divorced ourselves from the living God. Not only that, we don't listen when he calls us. Like Adam in the garden.

Do you remember, immediately after the rebellion in the garden, God comes looking for Adam in the garden and says, where are you? And Adam is hiding. He's run away. And so what is God's answer to the problem? Well, it's not a philosophy, it's not a program. It's a person. And we've seen that person introduced to us in these servant songs. Isaiah doesn't give him a name.

He just calls him a servant of the Lord. And for Isaiah, and for Israel, this figure is mysterious. Who is the servant of the Lord if it's not Israel itself? Because the servant's job was to restore Israel. It's not Cyrus, the pagan Persian king, who God will raise up to deliver his people from Babylon. Because all Cyrus can do is return them to the land.

But there's something more needed, isn't there? We know that the problem is not just their situation. Their problem is their sin. Their longing for repatriation. But God is looking for repentance. And they want to come back to the land. But their need actually is to come back to the Lord. And who's going to do that? And so Isaiah is shown 700 years before the time. Before Christ. And so in Isaiah, you have a tracing of the one who is the king.

Isaiah looks down through the centuries. And he's shown what the servant looks like. So that when the servant comes, you and I will be able to recognise him. And in this song, the servant speaks and he tells us five things about himself. And then in verse 11, God speaks to you and I about the servant. And he calls on us to follow him. So let's see what does the servant say about himself. And I think chapter 50 is really sacred ground. We are taken in Isaiah 50 into the inner consciousness of the Sermon of the Lord. We are given a glimpse of the kind of relationship that exists between the Sovereign Lord God and his servant. Five things. Number one, the servant speaks. The servant speaks. Can you see that in verse 4?

[6 : 43] 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. The servant's task is to minister to people. People who are hurting, people who are weighed down with burdens that are too heavy to carry. And he speaks. And he gives them hope and strength to sustain them. He doesn't lecture them. He doesn't belittle them. He doesn't crush them. He doesn't demolish them. Can you see it? Verse 4, The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to speak the words that sustain the weary.

The servant is supremely concerned with the glory of God. But he is also concerned with your struggles and my struggles. And so Jesus says, come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am humble in heart and you will find rest for yourselves. So the servant this morning knows what you need to hear. And that's why it's so important to be here this morning. That's why it's so important to be under the life-giving ministry of the word of God. That if you're burdened in your Christian life and you are carrying some load, the last thing that you should do is distance yourself from God's people, isn't it? It's very often the very thing that people do when life gets tough, when there's lots of struggles, they stop coming to church. They pull away from God's people. And we're not there as often as we used to be. And we're not listening to the other words. But that is the very last thing that we should do because the servant of the

Lord has been given an instructed tongue to speak the very word that you need to hear this morning. And it may be, isn't it, that the very thing that you need to hear in your life this morning, you'll hear this morning. As the Bible is opened. Because what happens on a Sunday morning is that it is not the preacher who is speaking to you. It is God's servant, Jesus, through his ministers, who speaks when they open the Bible and preach the word of God.

How important it is to be under the healthy, life-giving preaching of the word of God. I want to say, I want to kind of start a new policy this morning. That very often I get asked, can I meet with you? Can we talk? And very often, those are my people who are hardly ever here. As I want to say for the next little while, partly because I'm so busy, but I want to say, come to church for four weeks, morning and evening, hear the word and then I'm happy to meet with you. And I think that is, I think that is, is actually biblical. Because it's as the word of God is ministered that you will find your problems addressed, and mine. Because the servant of the Lord knows what you need to hear this morning. The servant of the Lord has got a perfect understanding of your heart. He knows what you're thinking, he knows your heartaches and your doubts and your fears. He's got just the right word to sustain you. Now we know that, don't we? We know that from the Gospels. You look at John chapter 3. And Nicodemus, the kind of archbishop of Jerusalem, all the weight of religion comes to see Jesus. What a weight to carry. John chapter 4, you've got the woman at the well. No one wants to know her. She's the woman with no name. She's lived an empty, sordid lifestyle. She's been through broken relationships. And the sermon of the Lord knows exactly which words to speak to her. To the religious teacher. He says, what an ugly, horrible thing religion is. If all you've got is religion, you've not got Christ. And you need to be rescued from that. And so Jesus has got your right words. He says, Nicodemus, you're trying to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. But actually what you need is you need something from outside of you. You need the life of God and the soul of man. To the woman of the world who's so ostracized by her own community, who is lonely and unhappy.

[11 : 18] Jesus has got just the right words. And so every time you read the Gospels, you find, don't you, that beggars, rich men, tax collectors, the opposite ends of the spectrum, lawyers, criminals, mothers, prostitutes, political zealots, the establishment, the poor. And the Sermon of the Lord has got an instructive tongue. And so he knows the right words to speak into people's lives. Think about it. It's an amazing thing. He's a guy in his early thirties.

He's never been trained in psychology. He's not a qualified counselor. And he speaks to everyone, doesn't he? Old and young, married and single. And he invites them all and he says, come, come unto me. Come unto me, all of you who are burden heavy laden. I've got the words that you need to hear. It's remarkable. What did they say when they came here? Do you know what they said? They said, nobody ever spoke like this man. We've got our counselors and our pundits and our preachers and they caught this man and that authority that nobody ever spoke like this man. What did the woman at the well when she went into that Samaritan village in John 4 and she said, come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did. Come and meet a man whose word penetrated my defenses. Isn't that why we invite people to church?

Isn't that why we want to happen? Now of course that is true, isn't it, of Jesus in a way that it's not true of anyone else. But if you and I are followers of Jesus, if you and I want to be servants of a servant of the Lord, surely we must learn to talk to people with the same compassion and understanding. People with empty lives and people with broken relationships and people with heavy burdens, they gather to Jesus, but they don't gather to us. That's a great challenge. A group of Christians that can only really have a conversation with another Christian and they don't need them to argue about it. There's that quote, isn't it, by the comedian, isn't it?

Why do people who've made a friend in Jesus find it so hard to make a friend with anyone else? And I think there's something in that, isn't there?

But they clamour to Jesus. The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to speak the words that will sustain the weary. Now how do you do that? So notice the second thing. Can we see what the Sermon of the Lord, what he just tries to find himself?

[14 : 14] He says morning by morning, he awakens me, he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. Not only does the Sermon of the Lord have an instructed tongue, he's got a listening ear.

And that goes together, isn't it? The servant can speak to others only because he's the greatest God. And that gives us a great insight into the secret life of the Lord Jesus.

The private life of the Lord Jesus. According to verse 4, he hasn't gone on the alarm clock to wake him, God wakes him. And every morning he wakes up. He says, what does God want me to do today? What lesson will God teach me today?

He is my Lord, I am his willing servant. What are my instructions for today? He's a listening servant. And in verse 4, he's listening as one who wants to be taught.

God has hidden. He has hidden these things from the wise and the learned.

[15 : 16] There are things that you can't learn with your IQ and from a textbook. God has hidden these things from the Pharisees and the scribes, but he reveals them to little children. And morning by morning, the servant wakes up like a little child and he's eager to learn from his father.

And every day he keeps that appointment with his sovereign Lord. And so you remember at the start of Mark's Gospel where Jesus is absolute box office and they're clamouring for him.

And he's Simon's mother-in-law and the sick are coming banging down the door and he doesn't have a moment to himself. And we're told very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place to pray.

And the disciples are looking for him everywhere. And they say when they find him, everyone is looking for you. But Jesus had an appointment to keep to me. With God.

And before he speaks to anyone else, he speaks to his father and he listens and he learns from him. And I want you to see that the way that it happened for Jesus is not very different from the way that it happens to us.

[16 : 23] When he's in the wilderness being tempted and the devil comes to him and tries to get him to do that huge PR stunt, to get on TV. What did Jesus say? Jesus, what did he say? Hang on a minute, I'm having my quiet time.

No, what does he say? No, he doesn't. He says, as it is written. And he quotes Deuteronomy 8 verses 6-8. Whether he was reading it that morning, I don't know. But the point is this.

Jesus knew Deuteronomy. He was listening to the voice of his father through Deuteronomy. And when he says the Son of Man must go up to Jerusalem and be handed over to the Gentiles and suffer many things.

And he must die and he must be raised from the dead. How did he know that? How did Jesus know that? Where did he get it from? Did he kind of just have some kind of theological implant put into his head that he knew this?

No, of course not. God speaks to him morning by morning through the word that he's written. And even when the Father speaks to him directly, do you notice that when the Father speaks to the Son directly, at his baptism, at his transfiguration, with a voice from heaven, what does God speak to his Son?

[17 : 33] He speaks to the Bible. This is my Son, Psalm 2. This is my beloved Son, Abraham and Isaac, who has to be bound to the altar and be sacrificed.

This is him in whom I delight, Isaiah 42. Morning by morning, day after day, he searches the scripture as one who wants to be taught. And that's why he can say, I do nothing of my own. I speak what the Father has told me. These words you hear me say, they are not my own, they belong to the Father. The one who has sent me is with me.

I always do what pleases him. It's the language of the servant, isn't it? It's the attitude of the servant. The servant speaks, and the servant listens. And that is why he can speak, couldn't he, with such extraordinary power and accuracy.

His words were born out of his daily communion with God. With his Father. And he needed that. So let me ask, if the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless Son of God, needed the discipline of daily listening to God, how can any of us say, I'm actually just too busy for us?

[18 : 51] There's no room in my life for that. If the incarnate Word of God cannot talk to others without first listening to the Father, can you? The sermon's job, first of all, is to listen.

You cannot speak to people about God unless you're first speaking to God about people. Maybe the apostolic priorities, when they act six, when they learn from Jesus, we will give ourselves first, to prayer, and then to the ministry of the Word.

In our circles, we pride ourselves that we are Word-centered. That's what we stand for. And yet, let's be honest, we see very few conversions.

And our words don't pierce the defenses. And why is there so, so much preaching in this country that has so little power?

Yes, it's accurate. Yes, it's accurate. Yes, it's not powerful. And I wonder, maybe it's because we're not listening. And so again, let me plead with you.

[20 : 17] Let me plead with you to make the prayer gather at a time when we seek the Lord. And if you're part of this church, you should be there. The sermon speaks, the sermon listens.

Certainly the sermon obeys, verse 5. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious. I turned not backwards. Do you think he wanted to obey?

Do you? Think of him in the wilderness. He's been there six weeks without food. A strong man can just about survive without food for six weeks. But only just. He's crying out to the Father to save his life because he's at the point of death.

The devil's whispering in his ear, it doesn't have to be like this, Jesus. You don't have to go through all the pain and the suffering. I can give you what you want. Did God promise you the nations of the earth?

Look, here they are. I can give you that. Just bow down and worship me. You don't need to go through all the suffering and the pain. It even cost you all that. Don't you think that was a real temptation for Jesus?

[21 : 23] Don't you think that everything in his humanity would have wanted that? It is written, get behind me, Satan. You shall worship the Lord God only.

It's not just some trite answer from a textbook. It is wrung out of him. Or in the garden of Gethsemane, on the ground, shaking with fear. View him prostrate in the garden.

On the ground, you'll make alive. There he is shaking with a black horror, drops of blood. Father, Father, please. Please, I don't want to go through with this.

If there is any other way, please. Nevertheless, I've not drawn back. I've not been rebellious. Not my will, but thine be done.

The obedience of Christ. I've not drawn back. I've not been rebellious to say that. It's a hymn of saying when we walk with the Lord in the light of his word.

[22 : 27] In lots of ways, there's a good chorus. But the chorus goes like this. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. Do you think Jesus was happy in the garden?

Was he happy in the garden? People say to me this kind of madness. You always know it's God's will in your life because you get this sense of peace about it.

The Bible might say that but actually, I've got a real sense of peace about what I'm doing. It doesn't feel wrong. Do you think Jesus had a sense of peace in the garden, that's how many? Do you think it felt right?

The servant speaks, the servant listens, the servant obeys, and the servant suffers. Verse 6. I gave my back to those who strike, my cheeks to those who pull out the ear.

I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. That's where the obedience of the servant led him. It's hinted at in 42 and 49.

[23 : 37] It's made explicit in 53. But what we see here is that the servant's great task was to suffer for his people. And just notice how he suffers. Do you see the punishment?

I offered my back to those who beat me. It isn't just somebody getting a kick in in the street. He's being judicially sentenced and flogged. He's stretched out on a rack like a common criminal. It's a judicial, horrible sentence. He is literally taking a beating. For you. And not only is there punishment, there's torture, isn't there?

My cheeks to those who pull out the beard. It's beyond a Jewish, a judicial sentence. It shows the depth of human depravity. That human beings took the most beautiful human life that's ever lived and they smashed it on a cross.

And they treat it with such disrespect and there's humiliation at the end of verse 6, isn't it? This is a man who's humiliated. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. Has anyone ever spat in your face?

[24 : 45] It's happened once to me during an open air. It's absolutely humiliating. Can you see the contrast?

In chapter 42, God the Father says, look, my servant in whom I delight. Behold, my servant. And the world says, he is a joke.

Let's throw him on the slag heap of history. He's an irrelevance. Here he is a convicted criminal. God's servant, the one who will save the world, the one who will save his people from their sins, the one who will restore them into a right relationship with God.

Beaten up. Spat upon. Crowds laughing. And he does it willingly. Look at verse 6. You see, I gave my back. This isn't just some innocent bystander who's been forced into the situation against his will.

Do you remember John 10? This is why the Father loves me. Because I laid down my life. No one takes it from me. I have the authority to lay it down and take it up again.

[25 : 51] This is why the Father loves me. I lay down my life. There's no virtue in suffering for suffering's sake.

But suffering accepted willingly out of obedience to God is infinitely precious. Paul says, let this mind give you, let this be the model.

Let this be the Christian mind. Let him be your role model. That he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

That's the Christian life. ministers have pity parties. We go to our conferences and you see you want to see how hard my church is.

You want to see how hard this is. People can let you down, can't they? You can be disappointed.

[27 : 03] Your family can suffer. You can be misrepresented as a Christian. You can be humiliated. But what did you expect? Paul says, I want to know him and the power of his resurrection.

Well, we can all do without that power. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection. But why? Why does Paul say we should know the power of the resurrection so that we can share in his sufferings and be like him in his death?

And that's why we need this supernatural power of God so that we can be like him in his suffering and his death. Jesus said, if you come after me, take up your cross and follow me.

The servant speaks, the servant listens, the servant obeys and the servant suffers. He's not just the humble listener and the gentle teacher, but he's also the innocent sufferer.

bearing shame and scoffing rude. In my place condemned, he stood. Behold, the man upon a cross, my sin upon his shoulder, ashamed, I hear my mocking verse.

[28 : 13] The crowd muster scoffers. He speaks, he listens, he obeys, he suffers, he trusts, he trusts.

Verse 7. He sees beyond the suffering, doesn't he, in verse 7. And he says, he who vindicated me is near. He is near.

Therefore, I've not been disgraced. But the Lord helps me. Therefore, I've not been disgraced. The sovereign Lord will see to it that I am not disgraced. Luke 9 tells us what time Jesus was walking towards Jerusalem, he sees the city, and there's a real look of determination in his eyes, and the disciples are astonished.

It's as if they think he's really going to do it. He's going to go to Jerusalem. He's going to walk straight into trouble. He knows it. It's not just spin.

He knows what's going to happen. Now, why would anyone do that? Why would anyone walk deliberately to their own death? well, because he says, the Lord helps me, therefore I have not been disgraced.

[29 : 26] Verse 8, he who vindicates me is near. Yes, he will be condemned in the courts of men, but he will be vindicated in the courts of heaven.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand here. 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. It's like when Indiana Jones in the films, he goes into a tomb, and there's a little shroud, and you touch it, and it's like a puff of smoke. Who are those who accuse me?

Who are those who sit in his palace like Pilate? Herod, and Rome, what are they like? They are like, verse 9, moth-eaten garments. You blow on them and they disappear.

People go to Rome to visit the ruins. People call their dogs Nero, and their sons Paul.

[30 : 27] Who are those who stand against Jesus? Who is going to accuse him? Who will stand against him? Islam will not stand before him. Buddha bow his chubby knees to you.

And every tongue will confess. And so I don't know if you're being slandered or persecuted or written off by society, but you need to know this, all of that will disintegrate like a moth on the day of judgment.

And every knee will bow. And so what happened? God reversed the verdict, didn't it? They thought we'll crucify him with wicked hands and crucify him.

You thought we're finished with him. We'll remember Jesus of Nazareth in ten years' time. But this same Jesus, the preaching of Acts tells us, you took and crucified God, raised him from the dead, and made him to be the Lord and Christ.

And by doing that he served notice that one day, on that final day, every knee will bow to him and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now look with me again at verses eight and nine.

[31 : 36] Where have you seen them before? Where have you seen them before? They should ring a bow, shouldn't they? Just look at them again.

Who will contend with me? who is my adversary? It's Romans eight. Who will bring any charge against God's elect?

If God is for us, who can be against us? In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not only is he vindicated, but because we are united to Christ, we are vindicated in him. He was delivered for our offenses.

He didn't die for any crime he committed. He was delivered for our offenses, and raised for our justification. As we close, there are only two responses you can make to this.

Verses 10 and 11, you can go the servant's way, and you can follow him, or you can make a path for yourself. Who, verses 10 and 11?

[32 : 41] George VI was the present queen's father. A genuine Christian man, he's the guy from the king's speech. And he made a very famous speech, you may know it, on Christmas day, 1939, three months after Britain declared war.

And he said this, I believe from my heart that the cause which binds together our people and our gallant and faithful allies is the cause of Christian civilization.

On no other basis can a true civilization be built. Let us remember that through the dark times ahead of us, and when we are making the peace for which all men pray. A new year is at hand, we cannot tell what it will bring.

If it brings peace, how thankful we should all be. If it brings continued struggle, we shall be undaunted. In the meantime, I feel that we shall all find courage with the words with which I close. I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown. And he replied, go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God, and that shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.

[33 : 53] Isn't that what Isaiah is saying in verse 10? Isaiah is saying to the exiles, and he says to you and I, put your hand into the hand of God, and it will be to you better than light, safer than a known way.

And when you do that, when you repent of your autonomy, and when you say, Lord, I am no longer going to run my life, I'm going to allow you, by your word and spirit to run my life, the lights don't suddenly switch on, do they?

And as a Christian, we have to say, a lot of the time, you're still in the dark, and there are still many dark experiences. They were in exile in Babylon, but there is bereavement, and there is despair, and there is depression, and there is loneliness in the Christian life.

But this promise to the exiles is a promise for you and I, that as life is difficult, like it was for them, immersed in alien culture, fumbling around the corner, they didn't know what was going to happen next, but if you put your hand into the hand of God, it will be better to you than a known way, better than light.

church. And if you've never done that, will you do it this morning? Will you trust in God to follow his sermon? We have the benefit of hindsight. Isaiah saw palely, didn't he?

[35 : 30] But we see in fulfillment that Jesus is God's servant, who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. So won't you put your hand into his? Because there is an alternative if you will not do that.

Can you see that in verse 11? that if you won't trust him, the only person you can trust is yourself. That, yeah, feel free, kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches, walk by the light of your fire and by the torches that you've kindled.

This you have from my hand, that you shall lie down in torment. That's the alternative. To live life. By your own way. To light your own torch. To refuse to put your hand in his hand, to say we can't trust the servant.

To not trust the one who's got the words to sustain you. The one who laid down his life for you. And you can't trust yourself to him. And so you will lie down in torment.

[36 : 40] And torment means torment. to light your own torch. There are only two ways to go. And whichever way you choose, God will give you exactly what you ask for.

You can either rely on him, and he will take you through the darkness of this life safely, or, verse 10, you choose to ignore him, live by your own light, and he will leave you on your own now and forever and ever and ever.

That's what the Bible means by tell. And it is out of darkness, and it is out of torment. And so I plead with you this morning. You will have no one to blame but yourself.

We receive from the Lord exactly what we ask for. Trust in him, and you will lie down in safety. Trust in yourself, and you will lie down in torment.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.