

“The Glory of the Submissive Servant”

Isaiah 50:1-9

Series: *The Glory of Christmas*

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 50.

As we come closer on the calendar to Christmas Day, we have been preparing our hearts by looking to the prophecies found in Isaiah. Isaiah the prophet wrote 700 years before Jesus' birth and his prophetic words about the coming Messiah are so clearly fulfilled in this Jesus of Nazareth. We have limited our study to the four servant songs which are found in the second half of Isaiah's prophecy. These servant songs are written in the context of God's people, the nation of Israel, going into Exile because of their disobedience to the Lord and their lack of faithfulness to His covenant. And against that dark backdrop of sin and idolatry, we see the next installment of this glorious servant of the Lord. Each song adds another part to the portrait. We saw in the first song that this servant would be Spirit-filled and in the second song we saw that he would be the Savior for His people and a light for all the nations. And now in the 3rd song we will see him as a submissive servant, and in this we will gaze upon another shade of His manifold glory.

One of the hardest aspects of life is that of submissive obedience. It is built deep within our hearts and souls to want our own way and to not have to answer to anyone else. We also live in a society which has idolized the individual to the extent that no one can be wrong unless they are telling you that what you are doing is wrong for you. From our earliest days as children we have bucked against the saddle of our parent's authority. And as we grow into adulthood, we have continued to chaff against the demands of those we answer to. This struggle of submissive obedience strikes at the core of our being and it exposes the ugly root of our sinful rebellion. In fact, you might say that this struggle against authority has come to define us as a human race. Are we really anything if we are not those who are rebellious against being told what to do? With that reality in mind then, it is stunning to come to a text where we will learn of the complete and perfect submissive obedience of this servant of the Lord. We see in him the complete opposite of what we see in ourselves, and because of this we place our hope in Him as the only One who can save us.

We're going to read all of chapter 50 this morning, though the servant song is technically only found in verses 4-9. To give you a lay of the land before we read it, let me explain to you what is happening here. Isaiah is writing prophetically to the nation of Judah that will find itself in captivity under the Babylonian Empire in about 150 years after he writes. His prophecy anticipates their anguish of soul and their wondering about the sovereign care of God. In fact, back in 49:14 he says that they will say, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." His prophecy is all about proving that point wrong. God has not forgotten them. But in verses 1-3 he reminds them of why they are in captivity and why they need a Savior. Then in verses 4-9 he gives them the answer of the Lord to their great neediness in captivity. In other words, he

presents them with their Savior. And then in verses 10-11 he concludes with a Gospel exhortation. If this is true – this song about this submissive servant – then you must fear the Lord and submit to Him in faith and walk according to the light of His truth.

Let's read Isaiah 50.

In the midst of Israel's captivity and exile, they need the assurance of God's work to save them. Why hasn't he saved them yet? Is his hand too short that he cannot save? No, he reminds them that he is the one who miraculously brought them out of Egypt across the dried-up Red Sea. He is the One who brought blackness as a garment over the heavens so that no one could see. He is not powerless to save. He has not divorced them. He has not sold them to pay off other debts. So, after verse 3, what you would expect next as the reader is a promise of grand and glorious salvation from this mighty and powerful arm of God. But that is not what you find. Instead we have a statement from this coming Servant of the Lord about his submissive obedience which will lead him to great suffering. This doesn't feel like a promise of salvation or a great display of the mighty arm of Jehovah to redeem and save, but that is exactly what is promised here. But the promise is given in the mighty display of the Lord's Servant and his complete submission to God's plan to save God's people. Did you notice the title "Lord GOD" in the text? It is used 4 times in verses 4-9 and it is the combination of Adonai and Yahweh in the Hebrew. It is the title for the Lord which communicates his complete and total sovereignty and ownership over all things. This is the title used by the submissive servant to communicate his complete subjection to the will and ways and authority of the Lord GOD. When we combine this reality with the truth that the Servant of the Lord is none other than the second person of the Trinity himself – we simply stand back in complete awe and adoration. The baby in the manger in Bethlehem is the beginning of this earthly journey on this road of submission for our Savior and Lord. Let's consider the glory of this servant in this text by seeing different aspects of his submission.

I. The Necessity of His Submission – vs. 1-3

- a. In verses 1-3 we see first of all the necessity of his submission. Why must this servant come and submit himself completely to the will of the Lord? Well, he must because God's chosen people did not submit to Him. The questions the Lord asks in verse 1 are to draw Israel to that same conclusion. So, he asks them, where is your mother's certificate of divorce, with which I sent her away? In these prophetic texts, mother is referring to the nation of Israel as a whole and her children are the individual Israelites. So, God is saying, did I give her a certificate of divorce to send her away? Or, did I sell her to one of my creditors? In other words, are you still in captivity and exile because of divorce or because of debt being paid off in slavery?
- b. No, the real reason for their exile is their own iniquity and transgressions. In essence they have sold themselves into slavery through their repeated departure from obedience to their Lord. In their iniquity they polluted the will of God by twisting his clear revelation to fit their current desire. And in transgressions they completely violated his law and rebelled against him. They refused to listen and to submit to His ways. Therefore, they had sold themselves into the slavery to other nations that was promised to them if they went their own way. So, here

they are in their exile and in great need of a Savior. They need one who will do what they did not do – one who will completely submit to the will of the Lord God where they so miserably failed.

- c. And we are right there with them, aren't we? We too have found ourselves enslaved to sin and all of its consequences because we have refused to submit to our Creator God. We too have found ourselves captured in the prison which our own lusts have created with no way out. We need a Savior just like God's people of old needed one.

II. The Humility of His Submission – vs. 4

- a. And the answer to our great need is found in this submissive servant of Jehovah. In verse 4 this servant speaks, and he tells us of the nature and character of his relationship to the Lord God who sent him. We see in verse 4 the humility of his submission. This humility is seen in the servant's submission to hear the Lord and to speak as the Lord instructs him to speak. He says that he has been given the one who is a disciple, or of one who is taught. This tongue of the disciple is directly connected to the ear of the disciple at the end of the verse. In fact, that is the point of the verse. He knows what to say that will sustain the weary because he has been instructed day after day by the Lord God. His ear is tuned into the Lord and his tongue follows in submissive obedience. In other words, the control of the tongue begins with the inclining of the ear to the truth of the Lord God.
- b. This statement by the servant is obviously fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. As the submissive servant he found himself in his humanity seeking the Father for words and direction. He can truly know everything that is in man and he can truly not know the day or the hour of his Second Coming. He is truly God and truly man, and as truly man he learned obedience by inclining his ear to the Father.
- c. There is obviously great mystery here in the hypostatic union of our Lord's human and divine nature. How is it that the Son of God had anything to learn? How is it that he needed to be taught? I don't know for sure. Other than to say that behind the veil of his humanity there was a need for regular conference with the Father to learn and grow. Is this not why Jesus was often reported as being often in prayer – getting up early and going to a desolate place to communicate with the Father? Is this not why he was constantly quoting the Old Testament Scriptures – because his heart was in tune with the voice of His Father and He was the truest of disciples? Isn't that why he could say in John 5:36 that the Father has specific works for him to accomplish, and it is this work alone that he is doing? How did he know that work? In part, because morning by morning the Lord God awakened his ear and told him what to do and to say.
- d. Do you remember in John 7 when Jesus is in Jerusalem at the Feast of Booths? Remember, this is the one that he said he wasn't going to go to, and then halfway through he showed up and started teaching in the Temple. And the Jews marveled at him in verse 15 and said, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" In other words – he didn't study with us; we don't know who his teacher was – so how can he teach so clearly and so authoritatively? Jesus answered and said – "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."

- e. That is not a statement which drives a wedge between the members of the Trinity, but rather a statement which communicates the humble submission of the Son to the Father. He came on a mission from the Father and he was listening all along the way for how he should act and what he should say.
- f. And notice that this humble submission was not just good practice for the servant, but it was good for those whom the servant was sent to serve. Because he was a humble servant, he was given words of comfort and of life. He was sent to release prisoners and to heal the blind and to calm the waves and to set the prisoner free and to encourage the weary – all with his words. Words he learned from the one who sent him because his ear was attuned in humble submission.

III. The Obedience of His Submission – vs. 5

- a. This leads very naturally then to the obedience of his submission described in verse 5. The humility which listened is a submission that obeys in all things. He says in verse 5 that God opened his ear and he was not rebellious and did not turn back. There was no mystery for the Servant about what his mission was. His ear was opened, and he came in with the full picture. Though he had to learn day by day about the course of obedience, he knew before the foundation of the world what it would look like to come to save humanity out of love for them. He saw the opposition and the suffering that awaited him. He knew of the hatred and the false accusations. He knew of the rejection and the reviling that would land him on the cross. He knew of all this – his ear was opened wide. And yet he came.
- b. He was not rebellious. This is a word used most often in the Old Testament to describe that generation in the wilderness who were told exactly what to do and they refused to do it. God told them to go into the Land. He gave them a confident leader and clear evidence of his power to give them victory, but based on the report of the 10 spies they wouldn't obey. They rebelled and refused and turned back. Like so many servants of the Lord in the Scriptures. That wilderness generation might be the most prolific and obvious, but they have a lot of company, don't they? There is Jonah the prophet who simply didn't like what God was about to do in showing compassion to the Ninevites, so he turned and went the other direction. There is David in the incident with Bathsheba who was distracted and derailed from obedience and holiness. There is Peter in the New Testament who couldn't comprehend a Messiah and who denied knowing Jesus. There is John Mark who couldn't take the toll of following the Lord in the work of Missions and so he turned back and returned to Jerusalem. There is Demas who was in love with this present world and so he deserted obedience to the Lord. And this is evident in each of our lives. As it says in Romans 3:10-12 – “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”
- c. But while we stand condemned as rebellious traitors, there is this glorious servant of the Lord. He was not rebellious and he never turned from the work the Lord gave him to do. He proclaimed in John 6:38 that he came to do the will of the One who sent him. And in John 7:28-29 he tells his doubters that he has not come

of his own accord, but he has come from the one who sent him to do His will. His open ear to the Lord God produced an unrelenting and unending obedience to the one who sent him.

IV. The Cost of His Submission – vs. 6

- a. And this obedience of submission led him down the dark and sacrificial path described in verse 6. That is where we see the cost of this submission. In giving his ear to the Lord God and his life in total submission to the plan, he was also giving his back to those who strike. He was giving his cheeks to those who would pull out his beard. And he was giving his face to the disgrace and spitting of his enemies. Every part of him was given over to every part of God's plan. He was all in. Nothing was held back. And this cost him everything because that is what this saving task he was sent to accomplish required.
- b. This is an obvious foreshadowing to the suffering of Jesus around the Cross of Calvary. The disgrace mentioned here is the undeserved and unearned public humiliation and reproach of false accusations. This is the unjust charge of blasphemy against God and of insurrection against Rome. There was no base to the charges, but they were effective in bringing disgrace and dishonor upon our Lord.
- c. Let's look in the New Testament to see how this cost of the Servant's submission was fulfilled by Jesus.
 - i. Matthew 26:67-68 – before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest on the night of his arrest Jesus is wrongly charged with blasphemy and condemned. And look at their response after condemning him in verses 67-68. Truly, he did not hide his face from disgrace and spitting.
 - ii. Matthew 27:26 – after the crowd demands from Pilate that Jesus be crucified and that Barabbas, a true criminal be released, we read this . . .
 1. Scourging was the horrific practice of whipping the condemned with a multi-lashed whip which had shards of metal and bone embedded into it so as to completely tear open the back. The scourging was so awful that many did not live through it. Truly Jesus gave his back to those who strike.
 - iii. Matthew 27:30 – This mockery of our Lord continued and just a few verses later we read that the soldiers put a crown of thorns on his head and a reed in his hand and a scarlet robe on his beaten and bleeding body, and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"
 1. And then look at verse 30.
 2. Micah 5:1 predicts this moment when it says they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek with a rod. Truly Jesus did not hide his face from disgrace.
- d. But why? Why must the path of obedience lead to such horrific cost? Turn with me to Philippians 2. This classic text explaining the humble submission of our Lord Jesus says that he emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself. So, just think of this through the lens of the manger in Bethlehem. Jesus empties

himself through the addition of humanity. He doesn't lose anything in the incarnation, but in glorious mystery he empties himself of the full and free expression of His deity so that he could take on humanity. Why? Why did he do this?

- e. Verse 8 tells us – he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He took on humanity so that he could give his life as a ransom for many in death upon an execution stake.
 - f. Now turn with me to Hebrews 5. This wonderful letter to the Jews to show them the exalted Jesus Christ – there is none greater and none better and none more glorious than Jesus. He is higher than all. At the end of chapter 4 and into chapter 5 the writer of Hebrews is explaining how Jesus is our great High Priest. In 5:5 we learn that this was not by his exalting himself to the position, but rather it was by him being appointed to this task by the Father. That sounds familiar doesn't it? This Jesus is the submissive servant of Isaiah 50.
 - g. *Read Hebrews 10:5-10*
 - h. In the days of his flesh the Son walked in perfect reverence and obedience and through his suffering he learned obedience. And then in verse 9, he was made perfect – meaning he completed his mission of obedient submission and substitutionary sacrifice – and look at the result! He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. Beloved, he was given a body in the incarnation so that he could lay that body down in humble submission through a lifetime of obedience to the Father. This led him to the Cross upon which he took this perfect, sinless life and offered it under the condemnation of guilt for all who would believe upon His name. As Hebrews 10:10 says – “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
- V. **The Steadfastness of His Submission – vs. 7**
- a. Back in Isaiah 50 – this cost of the servant's submission was great – it required his life. And this was accomplished by the servant because of the steadfastness of his submission. That is what is described in verse 7.
 - b. This submissive servant is so settled on obedience that his face is set like a flint – meaning he had a steadfast commitment that was evident in his face. Where Israel had turned back and where the servants of the Lord throughout Scripture had broken in their commitment – this Servant would not bend or break. He was a rock of steadfast submission.
 - c. And this is not because he was ignorant about the mission. In Luke's Gospel we come to the pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry in chapter 9. He tells his disciples on 2 different occasions in that one chapter that he must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And instead of that reality leading Jesus away from the place he knew it would all happen, it rather pushed him to steadfastly head toward Jerusalem. So Luke, borrowing language from our verse in Isaiah says in 9:51 – “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Like a bullet train with a marble front, Jesus put the throttle down and would not be stopped. Unlike other servants who have turned back on much

lesser missions, this servant of the Lord would not be deterred from even the costliest of tasks. He set his face like a flint.

- d. He could do that because he had set his hope in God and God was his helper. This was the Lord God's plan. This was the servant's ultimate purpose. His first breath in humanity had set him on this course. He was not about to swerve from it now when it mattered most. Notice how a lifelong submission to the Lord God had produced in Jesus a steadfastness of obedience. The resolve to obey built up a stronger resistance to opposition with each passing day. Every decision which was made out of submissive obedience built up his immunity to the temptation of abandoning ship and going his own way. He didn't just jump right from the cradle to the cross, but rather he grew in this lifetime of humble submission to this greatest act of sacrifice.
- e. This is instructive for us beloved. Our resolve to follow our Lord in submission is built one decision at a time. You can stir your emotions and you can make grand statements of conquering the world for Jesus, but in reality, your submissive obedience to our Lord is slowly and steadily increased by every small decision made to lovingly obey your God. What our Lord did perfectly we do imperfectly, but the pattern is set. Obey in the small things and be consistent in that submissive heart, and your resolve to obey will only increase.

VI. The Vindication of His Submission – vs. 8-9

- a. This steadfast submission of the servant is fueled by his knowledge of God's vindication. We see that in verses 8-9 – the vindication of his submission. The servant not only knows what awaits him if he obeys – as far as suffering and opposition goes – but he also knows the outcome of the whole thing. He knows that if he casts his lot with the Lord God and goes His way, then he will be on the right side of history. He will be justified by God himself and his opponents will have no lasting voice.
- b. In fact, the servant in verses 8-9 is so confident in the outcome that he actually welcomes his opponents to bring a charge against him. Let us stand up together, he says. They had no legal ground to accuse Jesus and convict him as worthy of death. They had no religious ground. They had no factual ground. They had no ground at all as the basis of their charges against him. In fact, the gospels even say that Pilate – the Roman governor – a totally unregenerate man – saw through their sham. He knew it was all about the religious leader's envy of this Jesus. That was why they wanted him dead. But Jesus knew that he would be ultimately vindicated of their charges. Though they proclaimed that he was a blasphemer of God and a usurper of Rome's authority and therefore needed to die – he knew that in the long run the truth would be exposed.
- c. And this would happen ultimately by the resurrection of his body from the grave. He would indeed die, but his death would not vindicate their case against him because he would not stay dead. Rather, the Lord God who had sent him, and the Spirit of God who had sustained him would raise him from the grave and completely vindicate him. That is why Peter says in his first sermon in Acts 2 – “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,

you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

- d. It was not possible because he was not deserving of death. His death was substitutionary and therefore temporary. The debt was paid, the ransom complete, the wrath assuaged – and God raised him from the dead!
- e. And there is coming a glorious day when in Heaven a holy hush will capture the throng before the throne of the Almighty God. A scroll with 7 seals will be in his right hand and the angel will proclaim, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? And no one will be found in heaven or on earth or under the earth. But then, the lion of the tribe of Judah will emerge. Revelation 5:5 says, he “has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” And this scroll with its seven seals is the unfolding of the righteous wrath of God against a rebellious world. Who is worthy to open it but the one who put himself under the Lord God in complete submissive obedience? This completely righteous Son stands at the end of God’s timeline as the completely righteous Judge over all. He who bore God’s wrath for the elect now brings God’s wrath upon the unregenerate and unrepentant. And so, the song in Heaven shall be – Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

VII. The Necessity of Our Submission – vs. 10-11

- a. This leads to the Gospel exhortation in verses 10-11. This submission of the servant stands as our only hope for salvation. His submission leads to the necessity of our submission. His vindication demands our submission. So, verse 10 says – let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. That is the Old Testament equivalent to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.”
- b. The alternative is to continue in the darkness of your disobedience trying to light your own torch and walk according to your own light. That is what is described in verse 11. And what is the outcome of going your own way according to your own light? This you shall have from the Lord’s hand – you will lie down in torment. You will lie condemned under the full weight of your rebellion and sin. You will be forever condemned by the righteous Judge. Therefore, fear the Lord today – hear the voice of his servant calling to you – trust in his name and be saved!

Conclusion: What we have described this morning is known by theologians as the active obedience of Jesus Christ. Meaning that he actively, consciously, and completely obeyed the plan of the Godhead to come into the world as the Savior of his people. By this active obedience, Christ Jesus has accomplished three major and eternally significant things. He has carried out the full plan of God for our salvation. His active obedience carried out that plan in every way. Second, his active obedience made him the perfect substitute for us so that he might be the sacrifice for our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He had no unrighteousness of his own, therefore, he could stand in our place and be the perfect substitute – the spotless lamb of God. And the third thing he accomplished is our justification. Because of his complete

submission to the Father and his active obedience he is the perfect ground for our justification – or for our being declared right before God. We can be declared eternally righteous because we can be clothed with the true and earned righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

J. Gresham Machen is one of the heroes of the faith from the Modernist/Fundamentalist controversy in the early 1900's. He split off of Princeton Seminary and founded Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and the Orthodox Presbyterian Conference. At the age of 55 he traveled to Bismarck, North Dakota for some speaking engagements. While there he contracted pneumonia and was hospitalized shortly after Christmas of that year. He knew he was dying, and he telegraphed a message to his colleague and good friend, John Murray. The contents of the telegram display the core of his life's hope and trust. The telegram said, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Is that our hope in life and in death? Let's pray!