THE SERVANT SONGS

Isaiah 50:4-7 The Servant Songs: Morning By Morning

Sustained by God, obedient without flinching, suffering without turning back

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, November 22, 2020
PASSAGES	Isaiah 50:4-7; Mark 1:35; Luke 11:1; John 17; Matthew 26:39-40; Luke 23:34; Luke 23:46; John 14:15; Mark 15:17-20; John 10:17-18; Luke 9:51; Matthew 5:11-12; John 15:20; Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:15-16
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:59:45 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

In the third Servant Song something shocking appears: the one God upholds will be beaten, mocked and spat upon. Yet the servant is not disgraced. The sovereign God wakes him morning by morning; he obeys without rebellion; he gives his back to the strikers willingly and sets his face like a flint. Jesus lived exactly that – and for us too, obedience is the doorway into intimacy with God, and suffering takes us deeper.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The servant is both sustained by God and sustains others: God gives him "the tongue of those who are taught" to speak words that hold up the weary.
- "Morning by morning" is a mark of deep, daily intimacy – not a one-time data dump. Jesus rose before dawn to pray, and his prayer life made his disciples ask to be taught.
- The one who wakes the servant is *Adonai Yahweh*, the sovereign Lord, "not some B-string deity."
- Obedience is the entry point to intimacy. If God seems silent, ask: what was the last thing he told you to do, and did you do it?

- The servant is not a victim: "I gave my back." Jesus laid down his life of his own accord.
- The suffering inflicted on Jesus says more about those inflicting it than about him.
- Suffering deepens intimacy with God. Paul wanted to know Christ in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

▶ 0:59:45

It was a cool, wet morning – Geno's notes got wet at the outdoor service but did not stick together – and he was in the third of four talks on Isaiah's Servant Songs. He asked what separates a dinner roll from a cracker ("yeast!") and promised there was a spiritual point in it somewhere.

A surprising new element

▶ 1:01:31

In the first song the servant would not break a bruised reed; in the second he is a light to the nations, meeting opposition and overcoming it. Both show a special connection with the God of glory. But the third introduces something new: this servant will be abused, mocked and tortured. "This is the one that God upholds, the one God takes special interest in, and yet this one is going to be mocked and disgraced." It would have shaken Isaiah – a court prophet who understood kings and power – to the core. In it the Spirit was preparing him for the revelation of the last song, that the servant would suffer for the sins of the world.

▶ 1:04:23

> "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. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame."
>
> ISAIAH 50:4–7 ↗

▶ 1:05:36

Spat upon, beard torn, back beaten – and yet not disgraced. Two things are true of this servant, Geno said: he sustains, and he suffers.

1. The servant sustained, and sustaining

▶ 1:07:13

"Morning by morning" gave the talk its title. God comes to his chosen one every day and speaks to him. "This is a mark of deep intimacy... It's not that the servant hears the thunder roll and goes, I wonder if that's God." God wakes him daily, from wherever he is far off or inattentive, into his presence – to be sustained and to sustain others.

▶ 1:08:18

Notice the name, three times in a row: "the Lord God." It joins *Adonai* – not just a title of honor but "the one who is absolutely, without question, axiomatically in charge. When he shows up, he's taking over" – with *Yahweh*, the "I am who I am" of Exodus. Some translations say "Sovereign Lord." "Why is that important? Because that's the one awakening the servant every day. Not some B-string deity, but the head dude." That tells us how important this servant is.

▶ 1:11:12

"The tongue of those who are taught" is about his words: encouragement from God to sustain others in hard times. This servant is a preacher and teacher, not just someone to meet you for coffee; he is given a word for God's people and perhaps the whole world. And it comes from "a walking and talking deep intimacy with God," not a data dump.

▶ 1:13:33

It is impossible not to think of Jesus:

> "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."
>
> MARK 1:35 ↗

▶ 1:14:08

Before six, while the disciples were asking where he had gone. His prayer life was so striking that they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), and he gave them the Lord's Prayer. That relationship sustained him and let him sustain others. He prayed aloud at Lazarus's tomb so people could see his relationship with the Father; on the way to Gethsemane he prayed the great high priestly prayer for the church's unity and God's glory (John 17).

▶ 1:16:29

In the garden he prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will," sweating like drops of blood, and was disappointed in disciples who could not stay awake an

hour with him (Matthew 26:39–40). "He needed some encouragement and sustenance from his friends, and they didn't give it." But after pouring his heart out to his Father, he never raised the question again. On the cross he prayed three times: "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34); "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"; and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). "Under immense pressure, under the pain of suffering, after being tortured, he's praying. He's intimate with God, and he didn't really care who's watching."

▶ 1:18:58

And every one of us has access to the same God through Jesus. Geno urged the church to develop a day-by-day relationship with God – asking, seeking, knocking, waiting to hear. And if you are not a morning person, "my mind doesn't even work until nine o'clock and then I need three cups of coffee" – that is fine. "It's day by day. It's not necessarily morning. Every day, let's go find the Lord in prayer."

2. The servant obeys

▶ 1:20:11

"The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious." Hebrew scholars say the verse reads like "boom, boom": God opened my ear; I obeyed. "The servant's obedience was axiomatic, automatic, without question." He delighted in doing God's will.

▶ 1:20:39

Here is the critical thing, Geno said: "Obedience to God marks the entry point for intimacy with God." If you wake morning after morning and hear nothing, he offered a diagnostic: "What was the last thing God told you to do? Did you do it? Well, not really. Well, go back there and start doing what he told you to do, and I promise you, when you begin to wake up, you'll begin to hear him again."

▶ 1:21:50

Many find it hard to hear, but Jesus "was a nice guy, that's for sure – but he demanded obedience." "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "Oh, I didn't even know he had commandments. Yes, he does." Do what he says, and you will find intimacy.

3. The servant suffers – willingly

▶ 1:22:27

Why is obedience so important? Because the servant, and all his servants, meet opposition. Right after "I turned not backward" comes "I gave my back to those who strike." The servant pays an exceedingly high price for obedience, and everyone who follows Christ will be persecuted. Here, Geno said, it is

mostly put-downs for being identified with Jesus; for professionals it can mean losing a promotion, not leading a team, even losing a job. A lawyer at Hope once told him that if his firm knew what he thought about a particular Christian idea, he would be fired immediately.

▶ 1:25:08

To be spat on, probably in the face, is the ultimate humiliation in any culture. How could the one the sovereign God visits morning by morning be treated like that? You cannot read it as a Christian and not see Jesus – flogged until his back was bloody (John 19:1), and then:

> "And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him."
>
> MARK 15:17–20 ↗

▶ 1:27:24

But notice the grammar. Isaiah does not say, "They took me away and I was tortured." It is active: "I gave my back. I hid not my face." "I didn't duck. I took it. That's somebody that's in charge. That's somebody who's unafraid," who knew his suffering was God's will for the healing of the nations. "He's not a victim." Geno was careful not to say God calls us to seek suffering, "but I do think it means we should not shy away from it."

▶ 1:29:07

> "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."
>
> JOHN 10:17–18 ↗

▶ 1:29:43

After the early service a woman – a mother and grandmother – had told Geno that for the first time in her life she saw that the suffering inflicted on the servant, and on Jesus, "says more about the one inflicting than the one receiving." Jesus took blows from Rome that were really the world's opposition to the kingdom of God. He died willingly for sinners, taking the punishment due us so that we might receive the righteousness of God. Being declared righteous, Geno added, is not the same as being righteous in ourselves – "if we were, we would not need Jesus" – and so we still need to grow up and walk in obedience.

4. Suffering deepens intimacy

▶ 1:31:55

So two features of intimacy with God are hard to hear: obedience and suffering. Obedience is the entry point; suffering deepens it. On the mountaintop God is there and it feels good. "But in the valley, after we've been rejected by somebody that damaged us, and then we find Jesus there – that knowledge is intimate. He says, you're still mine, I love you."

▶ 1:32:29

"But the Lord God helps me." The same *Adonai Yahweh* who wakes him morning by morning sustains him in persecution and torture. "They intend in their mockery to disgrace me, but I know my God is for me. Let them do what they will; they are humiliating themselves." In the end it will be seen that the suffering was God's will, and in that there is no disgrace but deep honor – and the servant comes out more committed than before.

▶ 1:34:43

"I have set my face like a flint." When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). What was in Jerusalem? Trial, torture, death – and the salvation of the world, the sacrifice of the Lamb who takes away its sin. "He was no passive recipient. He's doing the Father's will, and God was sustaining him."

5. Blessed are you when they revile you

▶ 1:35:54

> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
>
> MATTHEW 5:11–12 ↗

▶ 1:37:08

"Rejoice and be glad – whoa, that's weird." Jesus warned more than once: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). "How can you tell if you're among friends? They're not hitting you." So why are we so surprised by opposition? Rather than be crushed, rejoice that people see enough of Jesus in us to reject us for it. "You sound like a crazy man, Geno. I'm trying to sound like a Jesus person, actually." Paul wanted the same: "that I may know him

and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10). Not one or the other – both.

6. Fused to the Father

▶ 1:39:36

> "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."
>
> ROMANS 8:15–16 ↗

▶ 1:40:47

The Spirit convicts of sin, gives gifts and empowers ministry, but how else are we intimate with God? The Spirit of adoption is "something intuitive in you that rises up and says, yes, I belong to God." Geno tried an analogy: once paper is laminated, you can read the words, but you can never get it apart. "Spirit of adoption – it's fused into our soul." No longer slaves to sin, but daughters and sons who cry "Abba" – a word he has heard children in the Middle East call their fathers with his own ears.

▶ 1:43:21

The servant sustained by daily communion with God is the same servant who obeyed without flinching and suffered without turning back. Next week, in the fourth song, the idea of a sacrifice that purges sin would come together. Meanwhile: do not treat opposition as strange. Respond in a different spirit – "Oh, so you don't like that I follow Jesus? Can I pray for you? You'll always catch them off guard." He prayed that the church would embrace both obedience and suffering as paths to intimacy, would know with certainty that it belongs to *Adonai Yahweh* as royal sons and daughters, not distant subjects, and would be "genuine disciples."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Isaiah 50:4–7
- Mark 1:35
- Luke 11:1
- John 17
- Matthew 26:39–40
- Luke 23:34
- Luke 23:46
- John 14:15
- John 19:1
- Mark 15:17–20
- John 10:17–18
- Luke 9:51
- Matthew 5:11–12
- John 15:20
- Philippians 3:10
- Romans 8:15–16
- Isaiah 52:13–53:12

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What does a “morning by morning” or day-by-day relationship with God look like for you right now, and what would help it grow?
2. Geno asked, “What was the last thing God told you to do, and did you do it?” How would you answer that honestly?
3. Why does it matter that the servant says “I gave my back” rather than “I was beaten,” and that Jesus laid down his life of his own accord?
4. Where have you felt opposition for being identified with Jesus, and how did it affect your sense of God’s nearness?
5. Geno suggested answering hostility with “Can I pray for you?” Who might you respond to in a different spirit this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt was introduced at this service as Hope Chapel's senior pastor. This was the third of his four November 2020 messages on Isaiah's Servant Songs, preached first at the church's outdoor service and then indoors. He mentions hearing children in the Middle East call their fathers "abba," and a conversation after the early service that sharpened his own reading of the text.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubOrMTodTgc&t=3585s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.