

Service and Servanthood of the Lord - Part 5 of 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Lord Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy brings a new context and significance to the words of the prophet Isaiah, offering a message of good news, liberty, and transformation to all people.

Duration: 42:24

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-3, Matthew 5:3, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 23:37, Luke 4:18-19

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the ministry of eye-opening and revelation within the church. They highlight that while Jesus performed miracles and opened people's eyes during his time on earth, this ministry has now been transferred to the church. However, the speaker acknowledges that the church has not fully embraced this ministry and calls for a transformation in the church's approach. They explain that the servant, referring to Jesus, brings transformation by offering a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The sermon concludes with a call for both non-believers and believers to embrace the good news and become servants of this transformative message.

Transcript

After the ponderous load that has been precipitated onto you through these past four meetings, you will no doubt be relieved when I say my message this evening is a very simple one. I trust not less important and vital, but quite simple. And it is from these chapters which we have read, Isaiah 61 and Luke 4. Before we can really come to the point to derive the real value and meaning of these chapters put together, we have to take note of this, and the significance of this, that the Lord Jesus did lift out of the prophecies of Isaiah this section and apply it to himself.

That is far more significant than it looks to be at a glance because of the historic setting of the words in the Old Testament in the prophecies of Isaiah. Because undoubtedly these words in Isaiah's prophecies had a bearing upon or took their force from the situation which obtained at that time. It was what existed then that gave rise to and point to these words.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because this and that, so and so. And that the Lord Jesus should have taken those words right out of that context, applied them to himself, implies, I mean, that he gave them

another context. I don't mean the context of himself, although that was true, but another, shall we say, historic context.

You may not grasp what I'm getting at, but you will, I think, in a few minutes. These words of the prophet Isaiah, which, in his own mind, perhaps did not exclusively relate to the coming Messiah, may have done in a secondary way, but he was himself in this. The prophet, the Lord's servant at that time, he was proclaiming to the people these things, saying as to them at that time in their condition, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor and so on.

It's probable that, as I have said, in a secondary way, behind, he knew another was coming, he had the messianic idea, but for him, at the moment, it was contemporary. It was for that time. It was because Israel was in, actually in, all these conditions to which he was speaking.

Now, while that was true in the case of the Lord Jesus and in the time of the Lord Jesus, that was quite true, there is this extra factor. The Lord Jesus was not making this a prophecy of something in the future. The Lord Jesus was saying, today is this fulfilled.

Today is this fulfilled. And it was not literally fulfilled for Israel that day, nor has it been ever since. Not literally.

Israel has never come into the good of this prophecy in any earthly sense. They're still outside, and yet Jesus said about it, this prophecy, today it's fulfilled. And he was constantly talking like that, about today, about now.

He said to the woman of Samaria, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, and now is, when neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father. And now is. Now is.

This is strange. Well, I wonder if you grasp the import of that. If this prophecy, with all its terms, is now in fulfillment, you cannot make a literal thing of it.

You've got to make a spiritual thing of it. It is fulfilled today, but it's fulfilled in a spiritual way, and not in a temporal way. That's the setting of being, and it's very impressive, and very important to recognize that as you come to what the prophecy holds.

Jesus took it to himself and said, Today. How, today. How, today.

And that, of course, is the present interpretation of this. Now, there he was, standing in the synagogue in Nazareth, in the personal fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning becoming servant of Jehovah. All these prophecies were in course of fulfillment in himself, and he stood there as the servant of the Lord, prefigured by Isaiah.

And what we have then here, simply, is the manifold ministry of the servant of the Lord. How manifold, or many-sided, is this servanthood, is this service to God and to man. When you have said that, you're ready to look at at least some of the aspects of this manifold servant ministry of the Lord Jesus.

And then remember that it is transferred to the church to be his ministry in and through the church, that what is true of him in these respects is intended by the same anointing spirit to be true of the church, whether that be universal or local, the whole or the part. This is the manifold ministry which the anointing spirit gives, or desires to give and fulfill, not only in the Christ, but in and through the church. Now that may

have sounded not so simple, but the rest is quite simple.

The servant then is here presented to us in various ways. First of all, the servant as a preacher, Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach. The word really is herald.

The Lord hath anointed me to herald, to make a proclamation. Full force of what is here is that, to make a proclamation. And when you go on to see what it is, what is contained in the proclamation, you find that there are three things.

First of all, a proclamation of good news to the poor. Good news, the word gospel in the New Testament is just that as you know, to herald, proclaim, preach, tell forth, announce good news to the poor. What does that mean? Well, you remember when he did come and he gathered his disciples, the nucleus of the new nation and the new kingdom, took them apart, he opened his mouth and taught them saying, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now we are back for our setting in Isaiah, where historically Israel had lost the kingdom. This is the book, as you know, that sees them driven out, carried away from Jerusalem and their land into far off Babylon with their kingdom lost. A people without a kingdom.

All that that meant to Israel on this earth, for it was everything to them, what they were raised up for, that in which all their interests and their possessions and their hopes were centered. The kings have been slain or taken captive, their kingdom is gone. Jesus steps in to that situation and says to these poor, strict, bereft people, blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is not even the recovery or restoration of an earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of heaven.

So much greater kingdom, so much more glorious kingdom, so much more enduring kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens. That's good news, to help proclaim that there's another kingdom to be given to those who have the strict stock of everything here on this earth, in which their life and their hopes were centered. There's another kingdom.

Spirit has anointed me to say that. To say that. That's the good news of the herald.

It is the good news of a kingdom offered far transcending the highest glory and the fullest wealth of the old earthly kingdom of Israel. You probably know how much these gospels in the New Testament have about the kingdom of heaven. You might say that in one sense they are mainly about the kingdom of heaven.

It's offered to those who have lost everything here, of this world's kingdom. Second thing that the herald announces or proclaims is the year of jubilee. That is not stated in those words exactly, but to anyone who cares to look into it, they will find that that is what is in the thought and what lies behind the words here.

It's the year of grace here translated, the acceptable year of the Lord. It's the year of grace of the Lord. And that particular year in the Jewish history, the 70th year was the year of jubilee.

Most of you know, but for the sake of those who don't, let me say what the year of jubilee was. During all that period up to the 70th year, if anybody got into debt, for instance, well, their house could be taken in lieu of payment, or their property, or their sons, or themselves. Anything that they had and even themselves could legally be taken, put against their debt.

Then there were all those who were in bondage, even in slavery, in servitude, over against the indebtedness of either a family, or a business, or anything else. That there was a law made by God in Israel, that the 70th year, the 50th year, the 50th year was the year when all debts had to be cancelled, all such confiscated properties, all people had to be released, and all that had been during that time taken in lieu of payment was to be given back. And early, early, with the dawn of the first day of the 50th year, the trumpet was sounded, the trumpet of jubilee sounded forth over the land, and every slave left free, and everyone who was holding anything on any body had to return it or them.

The year of jubilee, the year of grace over against law. That was the historic side of things. Now Jesus takes that up, and he says, in this new dispensation, not one year, but the whole dispensation is the dispensation of grace.

With me is the trumpet of jubilee, which will run right on to the end of the age. With me is the heralding, the announcement, I am the one who sounds the trumpet of jubilee. All the slaves must be released.

All that is in bondage must be let go. All that has been forfeited must be restored. Your inheritance, your rights, are returned in the year of grace.

Now you see, that is capable of a lot of time being taken. But I think it's quite simple and quite clear, no doubt about it, that what was true in Israel historically and literally is quite true of the race, mankind. There is no doubt about it that you and I by nature are all in bondage.

We are all slaves. We have all, as Paul puts it, been sold under sin, and we have lost our inheritance. Adam forfeited our inheritance, and we lost everything that God meant us to have by Adam's sin.

We've lost it all. Wonderful liberty, the wonderful inheritance, it's all gone. You don't doubt that.

And we are in a state of lost good and spiritual bondage. The great herald has come to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of grace. That is the year of release and of restoration, the year of jubilee.

That is what this servant does. And dear friends, that is the herald ministry that is committed to us here tonight as servants of the Lord, as heralds by the Holy Spirit. We can proclaim this.

All that you have lost in Adam is restored in Christ. All the bondage in which you are serving and laboring in sin and to Satan is canceled out in Christ, and your liberty is offered. The year of jubilee, all restored.

That has been lost. But notice here in Isaiah, the herald proclaims the day of vengeance, the day of vengeance of our God. Of course, you don't need to have it point out that Jesus didn't go on to that.

He stopped short of that. He stopped short with the acceptable year, the year of grace. He didn't go further and say, and the day of vengeance of our God.

When he reached that point, without saying that, he closed the book. Give it back to the attendants. And said, this day and this scripture, as far as I have read, as far as I have read, the point at which I have stopped is fulfilled, you'll hear.

And he didn't say, the day of vengeance. But, when he finished his ministry on this earth, he proclaimed the day of vengeance. Oh, how, when his message had been given, his life had been lived, his service fulfilled, and they rejected, he said, woe unto you, woe unto you, woe unto you.

He then did proclaim the day of vengeance. But you see the point. There is a day of grace in which everything is offered.

In him, an opportunity is given for receiving all that he offers, your liberty and your inheritance. But there is a terminal point for that day when having refused and rejected another solemn note comes in, the day of vengeance of our God. Day of vengeance is not the day of grace.

It's the day of grace refused, grace despised. It's true that the people in Christ's own day sinned beyond the day of grace into rejecting him and entered upon the day of vengeance of God. For us here tonight, the day of grace still obtains.

You can have all that the herald offers, but make no mistake about it, comes a day when you, with persistent refusal of grace, will find that you are confronted with the day of vengeance. These are the three things that the herald proclaim. That is the first aspect of the servant's ministry.

The second, to comfort all that mourns in Zion. To comfort all that mourns in Zion. Now, it's quite easy to see what Isaiah meant by that.

You take what he meant as illustrative of what Jesus meant in saving us. What did Isaiah mean by those that mourn in Zion? Well, why do you mourn? Why do you put on mourning? Mourning relates to a funeral, doesn't it? To death. To a funeral.

The people of Zion in Isaiah's day, the people of Zion were mourning the loss of what Zion meant. The funeral of the meaning of Zion. Now, Zion was always a typical or symbolic term for the highest glories and blessings of Israel.

Theirs were the songs of Zion. Theirs were the journeys to Zion. They held Zion as the symbolic embodiment of all the divine blessing and all the divine presence.

Oh, Zion, in its days, its great days, was the place of the glory. The glory was there. Now, the glory is gone from Zion.

All that Zion meant of ascendancy and victory is gone because you know Zion came in with a victory. Came in with a victory. When it was considered to be so impregnable that the original holders just manned it with their lame and their blinds and said, why, our poorest stuff can beat anybody who tries to take this.

Then the David challenged his warriors and said, the one who takes the stronghold of Zion shall be made my field marshal. Joab did it. Took it.

From that time it became the city of the great king. Became the center of the nation. Symbolic of the great victory over the impregnable place.

All that made Zion a very glorious thing for Israel. We can say very much about it. But it's all gone.

The victory is gone. The glory is gone. And they are mourning over its loss and over its condition.

Its condition. What could the Lord Jesus mean? So many centuries afterwards taking up these words and saying, today, today is this fulfilled. Zion is restored today.

Zion's glory is restored to you today. All that is offered to you back again. Today.

Mysterious. Well, of course, our letter to the Hebrews gives us the answer. Ye are not come to Mount Zion, but ye are come to Zion, city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

There is a Zion, a heavenly Zion, a heavenly city and a heavenly citizenship which is glorious above all the glory of any earthly city of Zion, which is mighty and impregnable beyond the strength of anything that is round you, that is an enduring city which will never pass. You are offered the citizenship of a heavenly Zion. You are offered that today.

You are offered that today. Now you know, some of you, how much scripture we could draw in from the New Testament on that. Our citizenship, says Paul, our citizenship is above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Our citizenship is in heaven from whence we look for a Savior, Jesus Christ. Our citizenship. Today is this fulfilled by new birth from above, birth from heaven by this same Holy Spirit there is given to you not only the citizenship but the franchise of heaven.

All the rights of heaven are offered to you today in the good news of the gospel to comfort all that mourn in Zion. Is that a comfort to you? Well, I think some of us at least do rejoice that our names are written in heaven, that they are in the Lamb's book of life, that we are born from above. Whatever we have or do not have here in this world we've got an eternal and we belong to the New Jerusalem.

It means a lot to us to have our citizenship in heaven and our names written there. Well, I said it's simple. It's a simple message of the gospel.

Thirdly, the servant is presented in the capacity of a liberator. A herald, a comforter, a liberator to proclaim liberty to the captives. And now you notice the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

And the words of the prison are in italics meaning that they are not in the original text. And there is a marginal note if you have a marginal reference Bible which says the opening of the eyes of them that are bound. And Luke quotes it like that.

It's not clear and apparent in this translation but in the original languages both the Hebrew and the Greek it is quite clear that this relates to eyes. This kind of captivity is a different one from that of the slave of whom we've been speaking. This kind of captivity is a different one from that of the slave of whom we've been speaking.

What is here being referred to and spoken about is a captivity of blindness. Captivity of blindness. Now we this afternoon were back in chapter six and the prophet's commission was close their eyes.

Close their eyes. That's a judgment. Lest see they perceive.

This judgment of blindness has come. Paul says the God of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving. This is a captivity.

A captivity of darkness. A captivity of blindness. A captivity of the closed eyes.

It is a captivity where they cannot see. They cannot see. You remember in John Bunyan's Holy War that the great enemy in his siege of Mansoul gave instructions that the burgomaster of the city, Mr. Understanding should be put in a dark dungeon where he could not see what was going on.

Having the understanding darkened is the script. If you have no sight, no understanding, you're not able to see the Lord. It's a terrible prison to be in.

The commission to the apostle Paul and his conversion was to whom I send thee to open their eyes that they may come from darkness to light from the power of Satan unto God. The two things go together. From darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive an inheritance.

The inheritance is the inheritance of people who have had their eyes opened and who have escaped the toils of the one who blinds the understanding. Well, this ministry of the servant is a liberation from this blindness and darkness. And in another part of Isaiah's prophecies about the coming of the Lord Jesus, he puts it this way, the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light.

People that sat in darkness have seen a great light. How true that was of the Lord Jesus. And here we are tonight in the good of that.

We've seen the light. We've seen a great light. He has opened our blind eyes and what a new world we've come into and to possess.

Like that. Dear friends, the Lord Jesus as the servant truly did this. And he said, Today, today, is this scripture fulfilled.

And there were those who got their eyes opened when he was here and he's been doing it ever since. But this ministry is transferred to his church. Oh, sadly, sadly, we have to say that the church has not done it too well.

That there is not the ministry of eye-opening and revelation that there could be or should be. One of the effects of an anointed people is that other people come into the light and see. They see.

They leap out of their imprisonment of darkness and are able to see. I see. Well, let us come to the end.

The servant is the great transformer. Here it is. To give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

What a change in situation, condition and outlook. Why we could stay long on these things. But there it is.

We simply sum it all up in this one word. The transformation. The word itself carries its own meaning.

Passing from one form to another. Transform. Here is the one form.

Mourning. Heaviness. And no song.

No joy. That is one condition. Here is the other.

The oil of joy for mourning. The garment of praise, a song for the spirit of heaviness changed over. Well, it is true of the gospel.

It is true of what the Lord Jesus has done and is doing. Making this great transformation in lives. Taking men and women from this one sad and sorry state of things and putting them into another where it is the oil of joy in the place of mourning.

Garment of praise for the spirit, the transforming ministry of the servant. And that is committed to us. Well, that is the message.

Again, behold my servant. You want to know what servanthood is? And what real service is? Well, that is it. Look at him.

And that is it. May the Lord do two things. Amongst us, bring those who are not in the good of this good news into it.

Bring you into the values of this great servanthood of the Lord Jesus. And then for those of us who know it, who are in the good of it, may he make us servants of it much more fruitfully and effectively.

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