

## Group Notes 27<sup>th</sup> February 2011

### Isaiah #4 - Suffering

#### Welcome – Ice Breaker

What has been the biggest surprise for you ever, that has resulted in you having to do some quick thinking and nifty footwork to cope with the surprise. Only share if you feel comfortable doing so!

#### Word – Sermon Summary Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Looking at Servant Songs in Isaiah, theme Suffering

To set the context of Isaiah, scholars are still debating whether there is one writer, one Isaiah, or two, or three, but for the purpose of today's study assume one Isaiah, who wrote this book 700+ years before Christ. Lots of OT prophets, but Isaiah has been given the title of 'Gospel Prophet' by some learned writers. This piece looking at today gives a lurid and vivid account of the suffering of Christ. Some descriptions of Isaiah

- Isaiah described as the Paul of the OT, his teachings and writings based on that fact that faith in God's promises is the single most important reality for God's people see this earlier chapters of the book.
- He has been described as the Hebrews of the OT in that his proposal that faith is the sustaining strength of the Lord's people in life's dark days, this is the middle section of the book
- He has been described as the James of the OT in his insistence that faith works, proving itself in obedience – and that's the last section of the book.
- We're looking at the middle section – faith is the sustaining strength of God's people. Isaiah was a prophet of faith, the faith that trusts promises, perseveres through the darkness and obediently waits the Lord's timing.
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Last week we looked at the obedience of the servant, this weeks reading is about the sacrifice of the suffering servant, who is despised, rejected but still obeys, even to the point of death, and is exalted by God

First look at 52:13-15

- The destiny of the Servant is outlined here, although the servant is God's servant and is in a high position - he will suffer. His appearance will be spoiled and his body 'marred beyond human likeness'. Many kings and countries though will be stunned into silence because of him, they didn't expect the Servant to act as he did. The servant surprised them in many ways. The marred beyond human likeness phrase doesn't perhaps do justice to what actually happened. The servant's physical injuries were so bad that it wasn't a question of asking 'is this so and so' it was more a question of 'is this human?' The physical appearance of the servant had been altered so much by what had happened, changed out of all recognition, and this change was bought about by suffering, the physical pain of suffering. The suffering for the Servant here is manifested in a physical way

The next section to look at 53:1-3

- Not only was the physical appearance of the servant, to put it mildly a disappointment, nothing there to attract or encourage people to want to be with him, an ordinary man, no-one wanted to listen to him anyway. Anything he had to say was to be rejected and despised. The environment he lived in was hostile too, there was no encouragement for him, roots cannot grow out of dry ground. By worldly standards, things we measure against, this servant was an abject failure. The Servant himself received no encouragement at all, at every turn he was rejected and scorned. The suffering for the Servant here is manifested in an emotional way

Verses 4-6 describe the agony suffered by the Servant.

- Stricken by God
- Smitten by God
- Afflicted
- You can see from these verses how the thought that the Servant was punished for sin, it was God's judgement has come about. The agony of being apart from God, is beyond words

- The servant had been separated from God - set apart from the Lord. The suffering here is manifested in a spiritual way.

Those bits describe what was happening to the Servant, the next few verses deal with how the Servant acted while suffering.

Verses 7-9 describe the submission of the suffering Servant, how he was silent even when on trial. Because he had resigned himself to do God's will, that made him strong and able to with stand what ever was happening to him.

Verses 10-12, the last piece of the reading describe the Servant's 'reward', what happened after all that that had gone on. Because he had obeyed, God gave him a place among the great. God;s purpose had been fulfilled, to bear the sins of many, to take their burdens, to make intercessions.

We are often in similar situations many of us here are suffering physically, emotionally and spiritually and have been doing so for a long time. We are blessed at the moment, to live in an age where medical science is at its peak. Things happen to today that were unheard of 100 years ago, 50years, 20 even 10 years ago. But we still get sick, we still suffer physically, sometimes for a short time, but sometimes for what seems like forever and there appears no way out. There have probably been times in your life when your face just doesn't fit, try as you might you try and fit in with a group of people and they're just not that welcoming. The feeling isolation that brings about is sometimes unbearable. Sometimes it's just not rejection, it turns into something more sinister and cruel and for some that becomes so unbearable that they take their own lives. We read often about victims of bullying, both at school and in the workplace, were it gets just too much for them to cope with and they take their own lives.

There may have been times in your lives, when you're just not listened too, maybe your needs or wants, consideration are not being met. Perhaps you're a small voice speaking out against a much larger voice and you feel you can't be heard. Maybe involved in a legal wrangle with a company, an employer, a partner who knows, but you feel that not only are you not being heard, but what you have to say is disregarded, judged as unimportant. What about the agony of being separated from God, those times when you think He just isn't listening to you. Maybe you're ill, or someone you love is ill, perhaps they're so ill, you know that they won't physically recover, you're waiting for them to die. Sometimes life is blank blank tough, and in those moments its easy to think that God isn't there and isn't interest in our lives, he's rejected us, not listening to us. Like the first three sections of the reading, these things describe what can/does/is happening to us, so what do we do.

In the reading the Servant submitted, he was obedient, we talked a lot about this last week, but there's no getting away from it, that obedience to God's will is the only way. We may not/will not understand everything, how can we, we are human not divine, but to accept that sometimes, we are in a valley, we are in the dark place is just where it is at the moment.

But remember the last verses we looked at where the servant got his reward – God exalted him to the highest place. It'll be no surprise to you that the servant in the reading is a prophecy about Jesus Christ himself. Jesus was willing to suffer the rejection, the abuse, the not being listened too, the physical pain and humiliation as a once and for all sacrifice. His atonement, his putting right was a once and for all action, once done need never be done again. And by doing this he received the highest reward possible, to be with God, to be exalted to the highest place.

The good news of all this, is that God offers that same reward to all of us who are willing to be like Jesus, willing to be servants, servant with a mission, servant of the king, servant who are obedient and yes servants who suffer too. Now just a watch word, here, to choose to suffer is not the right way to go, to put yourself through stuff deliberately is not God's plan for us, but to choose God's will, to be obedient to God's will even though it might mean suffering is a different matter.

Suffering is not a pleasant place to be in and while we're in these situations the only way is to look to the cross, and look to the cross not with guilt, but with thanksgiving and hope. Hope for today and of course for tomorrow. Suffering – not an easy topic and not one we choose willingly. But when we are in that situation we have a model to follow, who has done it all before us, who has gone before and prepared the way, Jesus Christ himself. And that is something to hold fast too in those dark times.

**Word 2 – Discussion Questions**

- As Christ suffered physically, emotionally and spiritually which do you think would be the most painful for him, and why?
- ‘Suffering is a mark of faith’ – how much do you agree with that statement or not, discuss in the group
- How can we walk beside a brother or sister who is suffering.

**Worship Ideas**

Spend time in quiet reflection, perhaps light a candle and in your mind’s eye look to the cross. Share any thoughts or words that come to you with the group

**Works/Witness**

During the week, spend some time each day, praying for each other’s needs