

4. A new kind of politics - The rule of the Servant: He demands obedience

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Father, we thank you for the everlasting gospel. The gospel that throughout all the long centuries of time has been the revelation that you have given to us.

That revelation that came through the prophets and finally came in the word made flesh, your servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. That message will continue to be proclaimed until he comes again. And this gives us security in a changing world. We come to you at many stages, morning, noonday, evening, and so many of the situations which surround these stages in life and these stages in our own Christian life.

And we pray, Father, that we will, in these moments, as we have come aside from the busyness of our lives, that we will hear your voice speaking to us in our very, very different circumstances. Some of us may have come with strong faith. We pray that that faith will be strengthened and to it will be added the grace of humility. Some of us may have come with a faith that once burned strongly but now has sunk to embers.

[1 : 19] And we pray that by your Spirit that faith and love will once again be fanned into a flame. Some of us have come searching. Perhaps we do not know the way.

Perhaps circumstances of life have sidetracked us. Perhaps difficulties and problems and tragedies have come into our lives that make it difficult for us to trust you.

We pray that you who are not only great but tender, that you will indeed speak into those hearts as well. We would not forget about the world around us.

This is an uncertain world. We live in a world where there is great perplexity. Many nations suffer from violence, from turbulence. In our own nation, there is continuing financial uncertainty.

And the many, many challenges that face those in power. And we pray that they will be given wisdom, given insight. They will be given strength and guidance.

[2 : 24] That they may rule justly and in the fear of God. And so we come to you now, eager to hear your word. Eager to open our hearts and our minds to what you have to say.

And we pray indeed that your Spirit will guide us and throw a flood of light upon the word you have given. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Now, if you would turn in our Bibles, please, to page 602. This afternoon we are coming to the last of the four sections.

In this verse is 18 to 25. But in order to get the flow and see where 18 to 25 fits in, I want to read the whole chapter. This chapter about God's servant.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold. My chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations.

[3 : 24] He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break. And a faintly burning wick he will not quench.

He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law.

Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it. I am the Lord. I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord. That is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare.

[4 : 31] Before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth. You who go down to the sea and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants.

Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Selah sing for joy. Let them shout from the top of the mountains.

Let them give glory to the Lord and declare his praise in the coastlands. The Lord goes out like a mighty man. Like a man of war, he stirs up his zeal.

He cries out. He shouts aloud. He shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time I have held my peace. I have kept still and restrained myself.

Now I will cry out like a woman in labor. I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation. I will turn the rivers into islands and dry up the pools.

[5 : 34] And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know. In paths that they have not known, I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.

These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. They are turned back and utterly put to shame who trust in card idols who say to metal images, You are our gods.

Hear you, death, and look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but my servant or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one or blind as the servant of the Lord?

He sees many things but does not observe them. His eyes are open but he does not hear. The Lord was pleased for his righteousness' sake to magnify his law and make it glorious.

But this is a people plundered and looted. They are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons. They become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, restore.

[6 : 40] Who among you will give ear to this? Who will attend and listen for the time to come? Who gave up Jacob to the luter and Israel to the plunderers?

Was it not the Lord against whom we have sinned in whose ways they would not walk and whose law they would not obey? So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle.

It set him on fire all around but he did not understand. It burned him up but he did not take it to heart. And that is the word of the Lord to us.

I think one of the most common human characteristics is what we might call wishful thinking, unreasonable optimism. Everything will work out fine in the end.

And sometimes this grips whole nations, whole peoples at one time. If you go back 150 years to the 19th century, you'll find that the thought of the time was dominated by optimists who told people that everything was getting better and better and better.

[7 : 53] Civilization was improving, technology was improving, the British Empire on which the sun never sets was expanding wider still and wider. Its bounds were being set.

In fact, what they did was they took the theories of Darwin about the evolution of species and applied that to everything, what was sometimes called social Darwinism. People are getting better and better and better.

And this, of course, is seen in the liberal theology of the time and some of the hymns of the time. Hymns that begin something like this. These things will be a loftier race than they are the world has known shall rise.

The light of wisdom in their hearts and passion and passion removed from their eyes. Something like that. Now, no one sings hymns like that, do it is. Partly because no one believes that anymore. Because sadly, all that talk about progress, all that wonderful, all this wonderful advance, led not to the kingdom of God but to the First World War where many of those hopes vanished because it was the unreasonable hopes, empire building and so on among the great nations of Europe which led to that terrible conflict that caused the death of a whole generation.

[9 : 09] Building the kingdom of God by our own efforts. That was the feature of liberal theology of the time as it is reflected in many of the hymns that were sung by that time where the city of God was not something that comes down from heaven as the Apostle John says but something we build on earth by our own efforts.

So why are we going to believe Isaiah 42 when he tells us that such a kingdom is going to come? Because all human systems, even good ones, eventually fail, don't they?

There are unexpected events. There are things that no one anticipated. There's complexity of the task. There's the sheer weariness that comes on people after they've been in power. And Isaiah is very well aware of this. That's why I've called this a new kind of politics, a new world order dominated by the servant. In other words, something that will not come about through efforts by politicians, scientists, and others, but will come by God sending his servant, whom he has already sent, who died and rose again, and who one day will establish his kingdom. That servant who will rule justly and fairly as we saw a few weeks ago. That servant who is the Lord of creation, that servant we saw last week, who deserves praise.

[10:34] Now the reason I read the whole passage was to emphasize the abrupt change in verse 18. Why is it after all this wonderful talk about the coming servant and the coming kingdom, suddenly we have an abrupt change and a rebuke from the Lord through the prophets?

blind and deaf. And indeed, why is it that the servant now is called blind and deaf? Now those of you who were here a few weeks ago remember that I said the servant, the first servant of God was Israel.

Israel sent into the world to be an object lesson of his glory and of his love and a foretaste of the coming of his kingdom, but Israel totally failed.

Israel blew it and therefore we need still the coming of this servant. You see, the blessings of the reign of God's servant don't come automatically. They are established by the cross and the resurrection.

And they don't come into our hearts and lives automatically. We need to make them our own by repentance and faith and obedience. That's why I've called this section He Demands Obedience.

[11:44] And in Israel's failure, we see the failure of God's people throughout all the generations, mirrored, and a call to the kind of obedience which Israel failed in, which the church often failed in, but which the servant perfectly demonstrated.

So as we look at these verses for a few moments, there are two particular failures. Israel, God's first servant, had been given revelation, but they failed, first of all, in verses 18 to 21, to act on that revelation.

It's not enough to receive the revelation. It's not enough to have Bibles on our shelves, or even Bibles in our hands. It's not even enough to listen to preaching about the Bible, or to read books about it, or even to read the Bible ourselves, unless we actually do something about it.

Because revelation is given, after all, to open ears, so that people will hear the truth. And it is given to open eyes, so that people will see reality.

He says, hear you, dear, and look, you blind, that you may see. Israel, the servant, coming to the blind and deaf of the world, is even more blind and deaf.

[13:01] Because, first of all, they fail to show the clarity of the gospel. God has sent a message which is clear. And Israel has failed to show this to the world.

And the reason Israel has failed is because Israel has not listened. and Israel's eyes have not been opened. The messengers are more deaf and more blind than those to whom they bring the message.

Notice verse 20, he sees many things, but does not observe them. Now, one of the things that Isaiah particularly emphasizes in these later chapters, from chapter 40 onwards, is that God not only sees human life and human history, but God rules it and God explains it.

And if we listen to the words of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, then we will see what God is doing in human history.

You see, these teachers, like many teachers in the church today, think everything is to be explained purely by human considerations. The world is the product of evolutionary chance.

[14:11] the history is, history just goes on and on. Remember, Peter says this in his second letter, people look at history and say everything continues the way it was.

Nothing changes. Where is the coming that he promised? In other words, they see all the evidence, they listen to it, but they do not understand.

And then their ears are open, listening to other voices, listening to the voices of the media, listening to voices of pundits, listening to voices of politicians, but not listening to the word of God.

And this explains the disastrous decline of the church in the last century, into this century. What has been called prophetic, if you hear the media praising somebody for prophetic preaching, you can be pretty certain they've been saying something about nuclear war or something about human rights.

They've certainly not been warning people to flee from the wrath to come, or telling people that they need holiness in order to see the Lord. In other words, the church has so often proclaimed a purely human message, and therefore has not opened deaf ears, and has not opened blind eyes, managed the decline instead of praying to the Lord of the harvest, shutting down instead of building up.

[15:37] So, the failure to show the clarity of the word of God, which Israel displayed, because there's a multitude of false prophets around in ancient Israel, but also failure to show the attractiveness of the gospel.

Verse 21, the Lord was pleased for his righteousness' sake to magnify his law and make it glorious. See, God's purpose for Israel was not simply that they would hear the law, but that they would show the attractiveness of the law.

And by the law, I don't simply mean the law in the sense of legal requirements, but especially the words of Moses, the Torah, Genesis to Deuteronomy, in which the rest of the Old Testament builds. But Israel failed in this respect as well. Instead of showing the beauty of obedience to the word of God, when they came into the land, they followed all kinds of bogus religions, which they found more attractive.

Read many of the great Psalms. Read Psalm 19 and 119, for example, where the law is not only praised for its truth, but for its beauty. Oh, how I love your law, says the psalmist.

[16:54] In our own day, there has never been a time when we've had more Bibles available, attractively produced for all age groups, all interest groups, and yet we have to admit that biblical ignorance continues, that deafness and blindness continues, as it did in ancient Israel, because ancient Israel failed to declare the law of the Lord.

But the second failure is linked to this, verses 22 and 25. They failed to model the revelation. They failed to be object-less, and they failed to act on it.

Secondly, they failed to model it. First, this is a people plundered and looted. Instead of believing the promises of God, God had told them way back in the Torah, in the book of Deuteronomy, that if they obeyed his law, if they lived according to his commandments, one of them would chase a thousand.

He would deliver them from all their enemies. Instead of this, they behaved in a way that ached and imitated their enemies, and of course simply became easy meat.

The world conquered Israel instead of Israel conquering the world. And this, there are two things the prophet has to say here, or the Lord says through the prophet.

[18:17] First of all, when God's people behave in this way, they are despised by the world. Verse 22 again, they have become plundered with none to rescue, spoiled with none to see.

So who among you will give ear to this? Who will attend and listen for the time to come? If God's people fail to model the word of God, in other words, if their lifestyle is simply like the lifestyle of the unbelieving world, instead of the world admiring this, the world despises it.

If we are, if we regard the word of the Lord as something which we are simply interested in intellectually, but not something to model, why should the world bother?

See, if the church denies the truths of the gospel, why should anyone change? If the church is simply proclaiming a watered-down version of worldliness, why bother?

I mean, if I thought that, I would just have a lie-in on Sunday morning. Read the papers, wash the car, go for a walk. That's what most people do. And one of the reasons most people do that is because they see absolutely no need to come and hear the word of God.

[19:32] And one of the reasons they see no need to hear the word of God is because so often as God's people, we don't model the word of God. We don't make it attractive. The Bible talks about, in the New Testament, adorning the doctrine.

Now, adorning the doctrine doesn't mean making it relevant. It is relevant. What it means is showing its relevance and showing its attractiveness. And this is what's been happening here. Israel, the servant, failed totally. Israel, the servant, failed to proclaim and failed to practice. But the second thing the Lord has to say through the prophet is that this is a result of the judgment of God. verses 24 and 25. You notice he's not asking why does this happen. He's asking a more important question. That is, who caused this to happen?

If you read through the Old Testament prophets, you'll find when God's people are taken away to exile in Babylon, it's always the Lord. I mean, in the beginning of the book of Daniel, the Lord gave

the king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon's hand.

[20 : 42] And so it is here. The prophet wants Israel to see the reason for their failure is in fact God's judgment. That's not denying second causes, but it's emphasizing the first.

The first cause. Was it not the Lord? And this word Lord is the covenant Lord. All the way through Scripture, when God's people go away from him, it's because the relationship with him goes bad. Before they start disobeying, before they start walking their own ways, the relationship is broken, and therefore the other things follow. The fire of judgment poured on them the heat of his anger, verse 25, the might of battle.

It set him on fire all around, but he did not understand it, burned him up. He did not take it to heart. Isaiah is giving the people a wake-up call.

This is what God does when people turn away from him. It's not just the case that bad things happen. It's the case that the Lord sends judgment. It is an urgent call to God's people.

[21 : 52] And it's an urgent call to God's people, first of all, to proclaim the word, and secondly, to practice the word. One of the greatest problems about doing this is that people, on the whole, don't feel the urgency of the word of God.

It tends to wash over people. In particular, people think this is something I might give my attention to at some later stage. There's a story told about how the devil in council with the demons wanted to launch another attack on humanity.

And one of them said, I know what I'll do. I'll go down, I'll go to the world, and I'll cause great persecution to spring up among God's people. And Satan said, no, that won't work.

We've tried this before. And instead of destroying the church, it flourishes. People are impressed by the perseverance of people under persecution.

No, that won't do. Second one, the second one volunteer says, I'll go and I'll teach, I'll fill the place with false teachers.

[23 : 09] Skepticism, unbelief, and so on. The devil says, that doesn't work either. Because we've tried this before. And when we try, the enemy, of course that's God himself, raises up true teachers.

And we do ourselves more harm in the long run. And one demon got up and says, I know. And he said, I'm going to go into the world, I'm going to tell people that God is the creator.

I'm going to tell them that he loves them and sent his son to die for them and rise again for them, so that he could be with him forever. Of course, there's hoots of laughter. And the devil said, wait a minute though, he may have the answer.

And he said, go on. And this third demon says, I'll tell them all that. And I'll tell them they don't need to do anything about it. And that is what, that's the problem when the word of God is not listened to, the problem when the word of God is not obeyed, and the problem when the word of God is not modeled in the lives of God's people.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we pray that we not only be hearers of the word, but doers of the word.

[24 : 24] We not only read and listen and even enjoy, but that we may amend our lives and open our lives to your grace and to your cleansing fire of judgment.

that in the, that even in this world, your people may be a model of the glory of the Lord. And serve him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Amen. Amen. Amen.