

Meditations on the Person of the Lord Jesus The suffering Servant

[The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

The hot sun burned down on the bleached, arid road. Dust stung the back of the travellers' throats leaving them parched. The seven miles that remained of their walk seemed like an eternity to endure on the emptiness of the Judean landscape. However, the external emptiness that met their gaze was like a verdant pasture compared to the inner emptiness they felt. The past two days had stretched like a bottomless void in their souls as they tried to reconcile themselves to a life without purpose - empty and meaningless. But then, like a mirage at first, only solid and then unmistakably real, a third traveller joined them. His words immediately sparked a glimmer of life in their innermost core, whilst simultaneously plunging them deeper into the abyss of misery they felt. How could this mystery traveller not know? Which world did he inhabit? How could he ever be of help to them when he did not share their broken dreams and shattered hopes?

Then the stranger spoke, with an authority that would quell all doubt and breathe life into death itself. The same voice that had brought the dead back to life. The same voice that had spoken to the wind and the waves and had commanded instant obedience. That same voice now spoke to these two pilgrims and commanded their attention.

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”
And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:25 – 27

You can read the full story of the two on the road to Emmaus for yourself in Luke 24. That must have been the most amazing Bible study ever. I enjoy my history and there are lots of times and events I would love to travel back to, to see first-hand what it was like. However, more than anything I would have loved to be there when the Lord of glory took up the Bible and explained to those two broken disciples what the Old Testament had to say concerning Himself. Then I would feel my heart burning within itself, along with those two, as He revealed Himself to them.

Today, we start a new series of meditations on the life of the Lord Jesus. We will start here with a look at the suffering Servant – a glimpse into the Old Testament and think about some of the Scriptures that the Lord Himself may have spoken about on that road to Emmaus. Next week we will look at the marvellous Man who walked about here on earth doing good. Then, to conclude the series, we will look at the glory of the Lord now and into the future – the Man whom the King delights to honour!

Suffering Servant

So to the suffering Servant. Time would not allow us to look at all the Scriptures that cover this theme, but we shall start with Moses, and then the Psalms and finish with the Prophets – all Scripture speaks of Him. It is good to read our Bibles to see what we should be doing. It is better to see Him, and to allow His Spirit to conform us to His image. As we think on Him, may He draw near to us and speak to us. We have all experienced something in recent times of social

distancing and isolation, broken dreams, and frustrated hopes. Like the two on the road to Emmaus, may He draw near and bring His comfort, for He need never keep 2metres away from us!

“Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.” Exodus 21:1-6

Imagine the situation we are dealing with here. A man had got into debt and been forced to sell himself as a slave to a neighbour. Whilst there, his master had given him a wife and together they had had children. Now as the Sabbath year approached when all bonds of slavery were to be broken, there was real anguish in this particular household. The man was by law to be set free, but the wife and the children still belonged to the master. The family was being torn apart and there was nothing that could be done. Except that there was! The law allowed for the man to make a plain and uncoerced declaration that he loved his master, his wife and his children and did not want to be set free. Now this was a serious statement to make. This fateful decision was to be one that would last for the rest of the man’s life. He could not wait until the next Sabbath year and change his mind. His slavery was “until death do us part!” No matter what, no turning back!

Having made that declaration, the master would take him to the town council, and before them all, pierce his ear lobe as an unmistakable mark of ownership. Imagine the pain of that for a moment. This was not fancy ear piercing but a crude statement of possession. And the words of the law were unambiguous:

“and he shall serve him forever.”

I wonder just how many times this particular law was enacted. I suspect that more often than not the man would have left and a new normal would have had to be established. After all, forever is a long time to be stuck in a situation if it doesn’t all work out.

How beautifully this law speaks about the Lord Jesus – God’s Perfect Servant. In His life, Jesus often spoke about coming to do the will of the Father, speaking His words, and revealing the Father to all who would listen. In finishing the work that the Father had given Him to do, there was the boldest declaration that this Servant loved His Master. In coming into this world, in the emptying of Himself, in the going to the cross, Jesus could not have said in plainer terms that “He loved His wife and children; He would not go out free.” As Paul could say in Ephesians 5:25 & 27:

“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

Just meditate on that today – undeserved and unlimited love has been lavished upon us. Jesus loves us because He has chosen to love us and for no other reason. This is both liberating and humbling. All my activities for Him do not make Him love me, but then neither can my failures and disobedience change His love for me.

So Christ has chosen to become a Servant forever! In His life, He modelled for us the pattern of perfect service. In the upper room he took a towel, girded Himself and washed the disciples’ feet. As a humble man that was an extraordinary enough gesture for us to comprehend. However, it

was not the end of His service. In resurrection, we read of Jesus by the sea calling to His disciples to join Him. He had cooked them breakfast. Surely One who had come back to life again ought to have been the One who was waited on hand and foot, but that was not the behaviour of the Lord of glory. Nor is His service limited to His time on earth. Hebrews 7:3 speaks about Him as:

“... the Son of God, remains a priest continually”

and verse 25 continues:

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Have you ever considered the life of a priest in the Old Testament? We sometimes mistakenly think that serving God is exciting, glamorous even. But morning and evening, day after day the sacrifices were made in exactly the same way. With repetitive frequency, Jesus makes intercession on my behalf; as soon as I sin, and the devil accuses me, up He steps, case dismissed! What comfort it is to know that He is indeed a Servant forever!

Let us now turn our thoughts to some of the Scriptures those two on the road to Emmaus may have considered from the Psalms.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed.

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” Psalm 22:1 – 8

As we consider the psalmist’s words concerning His suffering it will be with minimal comment, allowing the scriptures to speak for themselves. I would just point out that in them we really see the emotional suffering that the Lord Jesus endured. As we are forced into situations of isolation, unable to do what we usually do, unable to meet with other Christians, we perhaps have experienced something of how He might have felt. It struck me just this week just how distressed Jesus was. You see, when I cry it tends to be at night, after a hard or frustrating day when everything seems so much worse. And yet the Psalmist speaks of crying in the daytime – when full of energy we normally feel that we can do something to make a difference. His distress was both day and night, with no prospect of comfort!

“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully; though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it. ... Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut its mouth on me. Hear me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; turn to me according to the multitude of Your tender mercies. And do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in trouble; hear me speedily. Draw near to my soul, and redeem it; deliver me because of my enemies. You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonour; my adversaries are all before

You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” Psalm 69:1-4, 14-21.

Psalm 102:3-9 continues the theme:

“For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop. My enemies reproach me all day long; those who deride me swear an oath against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.”

And lastly, Psalm 142:3 – 4:

“When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul.”

Let us never be in any doubt that no matter how low we are feeling, it will not be a feeling that He does not understand or has not felt in fuller measure. Our great High Priest is fully able to empathise with our every situation for He has endured far worse. Yet He did so in a way that still brought glory to God. In that lies the rub. I know that my instinctive reaction is to try to work my way out of a situation, then to rage, then to feel bitter and lash out at friend and foe alike. Then I blame God and reckon He has lost control. These were things that never entered into the soul of the Lord Jesus. They ought not to be allowed into my soul either!

Lastly, we will look at the suffering Servant in the Prophets and for this we will read Isaiah chapter 52:13 – 53:10:

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider. Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had

done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.”

The prophet Isaiah gives us an insight into the awful suffering of the Lord Jesus – God’s Servant. The language of Scripture is reverent and under-stated. Yet when we read that His image was marred beyond human recognition, for example, we can be left in no doubt that the physical sufferings of the Lord were horrific in the extreme. When we read that we hid our faces from Him, we can be certain that He knew the pain of rejection and an aloneness beyond anything we have experienced. Though there are about 8 billion people in the world, it can still seem a pretty lonely place when you think that nobody sees things the way that you do. When He died on the cross, none could understand what He was doing there, although perhaps Mary came close, when she anointed Him in Bethany, breaking the jar of ointment and pouring it out so that all would come into the benefit of it. However, far worse than His physical or emotional suffering was the sufferings at the hands of a three times holy God, as “He was bruised for our iniquities.”

Like an atomic blast that would carry away everything in its path, the judgement of God fell upon Him. The right and perfect condemnation of my sin was taken up by Jesus as “He was made sin” for me. And all this was in the divine and settled will of God – “It pleased the LORD to bruise Him.” This suffering Servant was not what they were expecting. Undoubtedly, around the time that Jesus was born there was a generalised, vaguely undefined expectation that something was going to happen. Daniel the prophet had said as much. Yet, when Jesus appeared, He was just not what the people had been expecting. Despite the miracles and authoritative words, they failed to recognise Him as the Messiah – God’s promised deliverer. A triumphant, glorious national leader who would overthrow the Romans and set up a dominant kingdom they could go for, particularly if they could play some part in it! But not Him, not rejection, suffering and outward nothingness.

As we come to a close this morning, we need to challenge ourselves as to what we expect of Him. For some, Christianity appears to be little more than a good way to make friends and influence people, a way to find a role in life. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day would have signed up to that. In stark contrast, Jesus took a different path. First there was to be suffering – and only in a day to come glory. We shall see this in a couple of weeks’ time. Right and proper it is that God will have the final word and Jesus will take the highest place in glory. But first He followed the path of suffering – for you and for me – and in obedience to His Father. This is the example that He has set for us – this is the path that He calls us to follow Him down here.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on ‘Meditations on the Person of the Lord Jesus, the suffering Servant’, talk number T1160.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.