

Lecture Lesson 21
 God's Agent for Salvation . . . His Servant
 Isaiah 49:1-50:11

In Luke 24:13-35 we have the story of Jesus as He walked along with the two discouraged men on the road to Emmaus. In vs. 21 they said to the unrecognized fellow-traveler, "we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."

Every Jew lived in anticipation of the coming Messiah. Why? Because of the Scriptures – from Genesis to Malachi. In this very book of Isaiah we're studying, God had said in Isaiah 48:6, "From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you." And the Isaiah Scriptures go on to expand and reveal even more about the coming Servant of the Lord.

Jesus replied to the men on the road in Luke 24:25-27, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

Certainly, we can visualize Jesus opening their hearts to the truth about Himself as we've studied it in chapters 49-50 of Isaiah. In fact, as we gain momentum towards the final chapters of Isaiah, it seems the prophet leaves behind the scathing rebukes of idols; the recounting of the majesty of the Creator; the reminders of past deliverance and instead Isaiah's soul becomes occupied with the Christ (the Messiah) and His humiliation, His exaltation and His glorification. God's perfect Servant would come one day to accomplish God's will in perfect obedience. First He would suffer, then He would reign. There was a bright future and hope for both Jew and Gentile that excites us yet today.

In our study of Revelation, I shared with you that Christian bookstores have a series of "Panorama" books like this one that depict Bible history and prophecy in picture form. Sometimes it's easier for us to get "the picture" if we isolate parts of Scripture into little snapshots. As I've been reading and rereading chapters 49 and 50 of Isaiah, I've found six little "pictures," to share with you. These are the captions I'd put under the pictures if I were mounting them into an album:

- A call to servanthood – the plan of God
- A commission to bring salvation – the mind of God
- A covenant of reconciliation – the heart of God
- A challenge not to lose hope – the compassion of God
- A comfort in obedience – the wisdom of God
- A caution about light – the power of God

"Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth He has made mention of my name." (49:1)
 "He said to me, 'You are my servant . . .'" Isaiah 7:14 has already taught us that "a virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (God with us)." Mary was told by the angel to name her son Jesus. Before He was born, Jesus was named and called to the role of -- Servant, Savior, and Sovereign.

There is no limit to the examples we could recall that shows the Lord Jesus as a Servant to mankind. And perhaps, "example" is what we should key in on. This world is sadly lacking in heroes and role models. If you were to ask the average person, "Who is a role model for you?" – the answers would probably include sports or entertainment personalities, perhaps someone in the family, probably not a political figure, maybe a friend. In Christian circles, however, those who usually come to mind first

are the ones who are characterized by unselfish servanthood . . . a spirit of giving . . . a spirit of encouraging . . . a life of godliness.

When we become Christians and begin to get immersed in the Scriptures . . . our role model is Jesus Christ. We become aware that we too have been called to reflect God's light to the world, to woo the world with the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, to serve others before ourselves as He did. God's plan is to call each of us, as He did Jesus, into the abundant life of servanthood.

Isaiah 49:6 goes on to say, "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth." You know, I read that several times before it really fully struck me. It is too small a thing – God is going to color outside the lines. Wow!! This really **is** a revelation of something new – a hidden thing unknown. The Jews were looking for their Messiah . . . but God was looking to save the world through His Servant. People always say the church was a hidden mystery in the Old Testament, and it's true that the word "church" is not there, but from this side of the cross, we can certainly see that we've been in the mind of God all along.

As Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem for the last time, He wept. He'd been rejected. The restoration of Jacob and Israel would have to wait for His Second Coming. The outreach to the Gentiles would come through His disciples and the birth of the church at Pentecost. After His resurrection He left them with what we call the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Wherever you are in life today, in your breast pocket there is a commission from God that hasn't changed. If you're in the business world, in the midst of parenting, in the midst of education, maybe even in the midst of trials and suffering . . . there is a bigger picture to focus on. We have a mission from the King of Kings. He understands rejection, He understands the limitations of our physical bodies, our pressures within and without, but we're not doing it on our own. The Holy Spirit, the full armor of God, a direct line to His throne in prayer – it all empowers us walk in victory and obedience to share the Good News with a lost and dying world. Evangelism is having the mind of God.

Isaiah 49:8-9 the Lord says to His Servant, "I will keep you and make you a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"

Freedom is a precious thing that we, living in this time and this place, can so easily take for granted. We have no enemy knocking at our borders or coastlines. Unhappily, our enemy is within – quiet and subtle pecking away at our freedoms.

To the Jews, however, Assyria in the near future and Babylon in the distant future both threatened their national security. Not only that, but God had foretold through His prophets that He would help their enemies bring this about. The land would be desolated . . . captivity was in their future. Their only hope would be a reconciliation with the Lord.

This Servant of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be the instrument of that reconciliation . . . the light in the darkness . . . the freedom from the guilt of sin.

During the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus broke the bread and shared the cup of wine as a symbol of His body and blood that would be sacrificed on the cross soon for the remission of sin. A new

covenant would be established. To those held captive by the cords of sin, His death and resurrection declared, “come out and be free.”

Certainly, God had a plan to restore His people back to the land after the Babylonian captivity – that prophecy was fulfilled . . . and He has a plan to restore the land again to Israel in the millennial kingdom. That too will come to pass. But a plot of ground in the Middle East is not our inheritance. The heart of God has drawn us into His heavenly kingdom. We may be **in** this world, but we are not **of** it. We have been drawn into the new covenant by God’s heart of love, given the light of His Word, and set free from condemnation by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 49:14 continues, “But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” We can identify with that feeling when we’re in the middle of suffering, can’t we? God, where are You?

“Years ago, an S-4 submarine was rammed by a ship off the coast of Massachusetts. It sank immediately. The entire crew was trapped in a prison house of death. Every effort was made to rescue the crew, but all ultimately failed. Near the end of the ordeal, a deep-sea diver, who was doing everything in his power to find a way for the crew’s release, thought he heard a tapping on the steel wall of the sunken sub. He placed his helmeted head up against the side of the vessel and he realized it was the Morse Code. He attached himself to the side and he spelled out in his mind the message being tapped from within. It was repeating the same question. The question was, from within, . . . Is . . . there . . . any . . . hope?”

The company I work for has just announced that they plan to move out of state next year and 100 plus employees will be looking for new jobs, including me. Optimistically, we want to ask, “Is there any hope they’ll change their minds?” Today, it doesn’t look like it. We feel like those trapped in the submarine. Sunk.

But when feelings sink, and sad emotions drag like an anchor, faith and truth become the air bubble that can lift. God gave His people this truth, “Just as a mother cannot forget her baby or lose compassion for her child, I will not forget you! I have engraved you on the palms of my hands . . . Those who hope in Me will not be disappointed.”

There was a promise for His captive people and there is that same promise of hope for us, regardless of whatever situation we’re facing today that look hopeless.

I was encouraged by a story I read that tells of looking to the horizon, acting on hope and stepping out in faith. It seems . . .

“A biology professor took a small group of young biologists into the desert for intensive study. Miles from civilization, their vehicle broke down. So, the group set out on foot for an estimated three-day trek back to their campus. After two days of hard travel, they reached the summit of a huge sand dune. Thirsty and sunburned, they looked around them. Far off to their right horizon was what appeared to be a lake with small trees surrounding it. The students jumped and screamed for joy. But the teacher, who had often been in the area before, knew they were seeing a mirage. He presented the bad news to them, sharing the facts as best he could. But insisting their eyes could not deceive them, the students pleaded to go in that direction. Unable to convince them of their error, the professor permitted them to head off in the direction of the alleged ‘lake,’ while he would take another more familiar course. He made them promise that after they discovered it was a mirage, they would sit down and wait for him to return with help. Three hours later the students arrived at a plush new desert resort which had four swimming pools and six restaurants.”

I guess the moral of that story is not to let anyone talk you out of hope – there may be some good new things on the horizon.

For captive Israel, their hope was in restoration to the land. God said, “Your walls are ever before me. (49:16) Your sons hasten back and those who laid you waste depart from you. (vs. 17) Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people . . . (vs. 19)” God’s compassion had a plan that He was ever working toward. Chastisement – repentance – restoration. God is compassionate to His people. He is more than able to take care of His own.

For us, we have the challenge not to lose hope in the daily struggles of our Christian walk. We’ve only to think of the nailprints in the hands of Jesus to know that we are eternally inscribed on His hands.

Mary Ann reminded us last week that **whenever** there is a separation between us and God, it is not God who has moved. Isaiah 50:1 reminded Israel that they were in captivity because of their own sins and transgressions. He has not divorced them . . . He was not pressured from the outside with creditors. They had moved away from Him. They had not obeyed.

The coming Servant of the Lord, (the model of perfect Israel) however, would walk in obedience to the will of God. How obvious it is to see Jesus in these Scriptures:

- ◆ The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. (50:4)
- ◆ I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. (50:6)
- ◆ Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. (50:7)

Throughout His ministry the Lord Jesus, taught, healed, comforted, confronted, and encouraged. The instructed tongue does all that plus it says to the Father, “Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

To walk in obedience to God’s will sometimes means we have to face the mocking and abuse of the world like Jesus did. The world hates us because it first hated Him.

It is never too late to start doing what is right. We need to set our face -- and -- focus our eyes on things that God says are right. And we need to set our steps and focus our hearts on the path of righteousness, godliness and holiness. We may suffer shame and humiliation in this world, but our comfort comes in knowing that one day our obedience will be vindicated when we hear Him say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

Isaiah 50:10-11 . . . “Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now, all of you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: you will lie down in torment.”

In the dark days of captivity for Judah (or for the darkness of your own particular struggle today), the only way to have light is to trust in God and rely on Him.

There is no way to improve on the thoughts Bethyl gave us about what substitute lights we might try to use when darkness overtakes us. There is treasure in darkness. We go through those times with either calmness or fear. The surrendered heart waits calmly for the light God brings to our dark places.

The important warning here is that – to try to substitute your own strength, create your own solutions for life, or try to seek light in the artificial things of this world, will only bring torment. God has the power to bring us out of circumstances, or to withhold that power and let us suffer until we return to the true light of Himself.

Those men on the road to Emmaus told the traveler, “we had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” Jesus opened their eyes and said, “I am the one.” Jesus was God’s plan from the beginning. He was to be salvation to both Jew and Gentile. When He came the first time as a Suffering Servant He was rejected, but when He comes again it will be as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Only God’s compassion and mercy could continue to strive with the disobedient people of Isaiah’s day in Judah and with people like us today. But there is hope. The Blessed Hope – the Lord Jesus Himself. We may not be all that we can be today, but in Him we are not what we were yesterday. The power of the Holy Spirit within us will see to that.

Let’s pray.

We’ve closed the picture album this week, our Father, but our prayer is like our praise – Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus. In each of the coming lessons may we receive the understanding that He shared with the men going to Emmaus. Make the Scriptures alive to us and draw us closer to Your heart. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen