

September 12, 2021 – Isaiah 50:4-10

The Book of Isaiah has a special nickname among theologians. It's called “the Fifth Gospel.” You have the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John... and you have the Gospel according to Isaiah.

Which should seem odd. Isaiah is, after all, in the Old Testament. The book was written around 700 B.C... before Christ. How can he possibly be counted among the evangelists who wrote after Christ?

Well, I think the church father St Jerome said it best: “[Isaiah] should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the church so clearly that you would think he is composing a history of what has already happened rather than prophesying about what is to come.”

To say that Isaiah points to Christ is an understatement. He writes a near biography of Jesus' life. And he does so prophetically, 700 years before Christ was born.

And there are three key passages where he does so. They're called the Songs of the Servant. Among Jewish scholars, the Songs of the Servant have always been a source of debate, almost since the prophecies were first made. We even hear that debate in the New Testament.

When Philip encounters the Ethiopian official, the man is reading one of the Songs of the Servant and he asks Philip, *“About whom... does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”* That same question is asked among Jews to this day.

For Christians, the answer is a little more obvious. He's talking about Christ. Of course, he's talking about Christ! How can you not see that he's talking about Christ? It's as plain as day!

I bring all this up because we have one of these songs as our Old Testament text this morning. And as we read this song there are a couple important details we have to keep in mind. First, as I said, the servant that Isaiah is describing is Jesus. He is not speaking of himself.

Which can be a little confusing because of the way that Isaiah writes. Specifically, in this passage, he doesn't write in the third person. He writes in the first person.

Third person is what we would expect. Looking upon the Servant – looking upon Jesus – from the outside. Describing what he looks like.

He does that exact thing in chapter 53. In that passage, he writes of the Servant: *“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”*

You see what I mean? Isaiah writes as someone who is looking upon the crucifixion from the outside. As if he were standing right next to Mary and John at the foot of the cross. And he describes Jesus from a third person perspective.

But in Isaiah 50, our passage today, he doesn't do that. He writes from a first person perspective. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he writes with the voice of Jesus himself. So this is not Isaiah speaking. This is Jesus speaking.

And who is Jesus speaking to? Well, it would be easy to assume he's speaking only to Isaiah or to Isaiah's Israelite audience. But Jesus indicates that he's speaking to a far broader audience.

He says, *“The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”* Jesus isn't just speaking to Isaiah or the Israelites. He is speaking with the wisdom of God to anyone who is weary.

Anyone who looks at the world and doesn't understand why it is the way it is. Anyone who sees this sinful world and wonders why God feels so absent. Anyone who is weary with sin and confusion and suffering. *“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* This word from the Lord is for you.

Morning by morning, we wake up and we turn to Jesus. We turn to the one who listened to his Father in a way that we never could. Who was taught by his Father the things that we don't want to hear.

And what was Jesus taught? Well, he was taught obedience and he was taught suffering. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* He prayed and then he listened. He opened his ear to his Father. And, his Father said... nothing. Because there was nothing to say. The cup of suffering that the Father had given to Jesus was the cup of suffering that he must drink.

And so that's what he did. He wasn't rebellious. He didn't turn backward. He was obedient to his Father's will in a way that, frankly, boggles our minds.

When the soldiers arrived to arrest him, gave his back to those who strike. He gave his cheeks to those who ripped out his beard. When they mocked him and spit on him, he didn't hide his face.

Because this was the wisdom of the Father. This was the wisdom of the cross. As Paul put it, *"we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."* That's what Paul preached. What we preach. And what Isaiah preached.

How can this be wisdom? Well, that goes back to what Isaiah said at the beginning: this is a word to sustain those who are weary. And it does sustain us.

Because even though Jesus died a disgraceful death on the cross, he was not disgraced. Even though he took all our shameful sin on himself, he was not put to shame. He contended with the power of death and with the Adversary, Satan himself. He withstood every temptation that the devil could throw at him and every lie that the Pharisees and Chief Priests could tell. But in the end, there was no one who could declare him guilty.

And so he was vindicated by the Lord God. Raised from the dead. Seated at the right hand of the Father and given the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And so now we wait for this world to wear out like a garment. We wait for the power of sin, death, and the devil to grow old and be eaten by moths. We wait for something permanent and eternal. A treasure that does not rust or fade away. We wait for the wisdom of God to come to us.

Which means the same thing that it meant for Jesus. It means listening to God's Word to us. Opening our ears to what he has to say. It means obedience. Obedience even when the will of God is not our will. And when the silence of God means he's giving us an answer that we don't want to hear.

And sometimes it means suffering. It means giving our back to those who strike. Our cheeks to those who rip out our beards. Our faces to those who mock us and spit upon us.

Yet through all this, we set our face like flint and we endure. Because the Lord God helps us. Because our vindicator is near. And though death contends with us, we will not be afraid. Though our Adversary accuse us, we will not be ashamed.

For we fear the Lord alone. We obey the voice of his servant alone. And his servant tells us, *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

We walk in a dark world without light or hope. We walk in weariness and despair. But we are not alone. For we trust in the name of the Lord. We trust in the name of Jesus. We rely on our God and on his Son, crucified for us. Resurrected for us. Glorified for us. That we may be his own.

700 years before Christ was even born, Isaiah put his hope in this servant of the Lord who would come to save his people. 2000 years after Christ was born, we put our hope in this same servant. And we sing his song as those who have been vindicated by his blood. As those who know that there is no one who can declare us guilty if Christ has washed away our sin. Amen.