

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 19

Isaiah 54

F. The Results of the Work of the Suffering Servant (Isa. 54:1-56:8)

Let's get back to Isaiah. We were discussing in the last class hour Isaiah 53, which was the final passage in that sequence of passages dealing with the servant. Isaiah 53 is the climax of those servant passages. If you look at your outline you'll see that under Isaiah 40-66 there's one further sub-point. Sub-point D. was "The Servant of the Lord Theme," and that's what we've been discussing. We've concluded D. So we move on to E., which is: "The Results of the Work of the Suffering Servant." And that's Isaiah 54:1-56:8. I don't think 54:1-56:8 can really be understood apart from its relation to what precedes, and specifically its relation to that climax of the servant passages in Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 describes the humiliation and the suffering of the Servant of the Lord that results in the redemption and justification of those whose iniquities he bore. That becomes clear in Isaiah 53.

Outline: Isaiah 54-56

When you move on then beyond 53, you find more details about the results of the work of the servant. I think the section divides into three sub-sections: 54:1-17, which is chapter 54 as a unit. Chapter 54:1-17 assures God's people of future extension and blessing as a result of the work of the servant. Then 55:1-56:2. I think the chapter division falls better at 56:2 than it does between 55:13 and 56:1. Isaiah 55:1-56:2 gives an invitation to individuals to avail themselves of the free offer of salvation. Finally 56:3-8 emphasizes that the gospel invitation is not limited to any race or nation but is open to all.

General Comment on Isaiah 54-56

Now, before looking at this first section, Isaiah 54:1-17, let me just make a general comment about this section as a whole. Isaiah is addressing the people of

God here. The people of God at that time formed a part of the nation of Israel. The nation as a whole had turned away from the Lord, but there was a godly remnant. He's addressing the people of God who at that time formed a part of the nation of Israel, but I don't think these chapters are primarily concerned with Israel as a nation. It's broader than that. It's concerned with the people of God, the true people of God. That's regardless of national background. Those people, the true people of God, are designated as "the servants," plural, "the servants of the Lord."

So far we've been tracing the servant theme where "servant" has been used of a specific individual who comes out of Israel and represents Israel. He, through his humiliation and suffering, provides atonement for the sins of those who trust in him. But the people that are spoken of in these chapters are termed "the servants of the Lord"; that is, the followers of God's true servant. These are the ones who enjoy the benefits of what he accomplished, and these are the ones that yield themselves to do his will. So I think, in general, this material is addressed to God's true people, the servants of the Lord.

Isaiah 54:1-17 Their Righteousness is from the Lord

Let's look at the first section there, Isaiah 54. When we look at Isaiah 54:1-17, I think the last half of the last verse is helpful to look at right at the beginning because it's important for understanding all that precedes in the chapter. It could well be a separate verse. The last clause of Isaiah 54:17b is, "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from me," says the Lord." The promises that are in the chapter belong to the servants of the Lord; that is, to those who follow the Servant of the Lord. These people have no righteousness of their own. It says, "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from me." They have no righteousness of their own. They are like the ones in Isaiah 53 who went astray. They've gone their own way, but the Lord has laid on the servant their iniquity, and so through the work of the servant they are justified and sanctified by God's grace. So, "Their righteousness is from me,"

saith the Lord.” That sums up all that’s in chapter 54. “This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, their righteousness is from me.”

Outline of Isaiah 54:1-17

That last verse, I think, is helpful before looking at the rest of the chapter. When we get to the rest of the chapter, it divides into three sections. Verses 1-3: “The servants of the Lord are to rejoice because great increase is to come to them.” Verses 4-10: “The blessing that God has in store for Israel in the future. Now here’s an exception, I think, to that general principle that I said that, for the most part, these chapters are not concerned specifically with the nation of Israel. But I think in verses 4-10 you do have a focus specifically on the nation of Israel. Then verses 11-17: “The stability of God’s people.”

Isaiah 54:1-3 The Servants of the Lord are to Rejoice Because Great Increase is to Come to Them

So with those headings, let’s look at the text. First, verses 1-3: “The servants of the Lord are to rejoice because great increase is to come to them.” We read, “‘Sing, O barren one, thou who didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou who didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife,’ saith the LORD. ‘Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.’”

An initial question is raised in verse one: “Sing, O barren one, thou who didst not bear.” And the last phrase, “More are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife.” Who is the barren woman? Who is the married wife? Some have suggested the barren woman is Israel, or Jerusalem, in exile--that’s the barren woman, and that the married wife is Israel before the exile--Israel

in the time of David when God seemed to be truly married to his people and blessed them. In that case, those who seemed doomed to ineffectiveness, those who were barren, those who seemed to have failed, are assured that ultimately God will use them to accomplish the greater work. A work greater even than was possible in the better days of the past.

However, I think it's better to take "the barren" as Gentile nations and the married woman as Israel. In Galatians 4:26 and 27 you have a reference to this passage by Paul when he says, "But Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: 'Rejoice, thou barren one that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she who hath a husband.'" Isaiah 54:1 is quoted as referring to the Jerusalem that is above. In the context of what Paul is saying to the church, the true people of God includes Gentiles. Those born of promise are contrasted with the Jerusalem that now is, that is those seeking salvation by legalistic observances in their own works and so forth. So it seems better to understand the barren there and the desolate, as representative of Gentile nations, and that the married wife is Israel. What is said is, "Sing O barren one, you who did not travail with child, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife." This refers to the results of the work of the servant as the gospel spreads to the Gentiles. There will be more that will come to Christ among Gentiles than there are of Israel.

In verses 2 and 3 you have the extension of the people of God as distant nations and desolate cities become centers of the true people of God. "Enlarge the place of thy tent, let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, strengthen thy stakes; thou shalt break out on the right hand and on the left; thy seed shall inherit the nations and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."

William Carey used verse 2 as his text when he called for sending the gospel to the people of India. "Enlarge the place of thy tent, stretch forth the

curtains of thine habitations,” and so forth. In light of the context, he was justified in doing that; he wasn't simply lifting a verse out of context, unrelated to the rest of the chapter. But he was urging the very thing that this verse speaks of be done-- that the gospel message be spread abroad. So in verses 1-3 servants of the Lord are to rejoice because great increase is to come to them.

Isaiah 54:4-10 The Blessing which God has in Store for Israel in the Future

Verses 4-10 is “The blessing which God has in store for Israel in the future.” I think in the beginning of verse 4 Isaiah addresses the married woman, that is Israel, who for a time was rejected because they had turned away from the Lord, but ultimately would be restored. So the reproach of the time when they seemed to be forsaken and widowed will be forgotten in the glory of what is ahead for them. So you read in verse 4, “‘Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither shalt be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shall not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused,’ saith thy God. ‘For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is like the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be angry with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed,’ saith the LORD who hath mercy on thee.”

Now it seems to me that what's in view there is Israel who has been rejected from a time, for a time, ultimately will be restored and that the reproach

of that time, of widowhood, will be forgotten when that happens. Verse 10, the last verse there, is a strong statement of the permanence of God's mercy toward his people: "My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." Even though it may seem that he has forsaken Israel, ultimately they will be restored.

It seems to me that there's a movement in redemptive history, and you move from the ordinates of the old covenant to those of the new. You move from Passover to the Lord's Supper, for example, and yet some of these Messianic congregations go back to ordinates of the old covenant. It seems to me that doesn't take sufficient recognition of the progress of God's plan of redemption and the different periods and stages in which it moves forward. I don't think you need to revert back to the old. I think their motivation is to find a means of relating to the Jewish community that it is not offensive and that makes them feel comfortable. It's probably an outreach technique, but theologically I wonder about some of that. I think, when you read Galatians, that that middle wall partition has been broken down, and now they are one in Christ--both Jews and Gentiles. It seems to me Galatians is painting a different picture. Not that the Jewish person has to totally lose his identity as a Jewish person, but yet he's one in the body of Christ.

Isaiah 54:11-17 The Stability of God's People

Let's go on. Chapter 54, verses 11-17, is: "The stability of God's people." In verse 11 we read, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphires. I will make thy windows of agates, thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." In verse 2, we had the extension of God's people presented under the figure of a tent: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, lengthen the cords, strengthen the stakes," that's the extension of God's people. In verses 11 and 12 you had the stability of God's people portrayed by another figure—that of a temple, built with strength and beauty out of different kinds of precious stones. It's very similar to

the figure Paul uses in Ephesians 2:19 and following, where Paul says, “You are no more strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together, for inhabitation of God through the Spirit.” So repeated here is Isaiah’s symbol of God’s people being a building built together from precious stone. It pictures the stability of the people of God.

On to verse 13: “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children.” The privilege of succeeding generations of God’s people is that they will be taught of the Lord. His Spirit will dwell in them to illumine their minds. John 16:13 and 14 says, “Nevertheless when he, the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth for he will not speak of himself, but whatever he shall hear that shall he speak, so he will show you things to come. He will glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you.” Now certainly that promise of the coming of the Spirit is found at various places in the Old Testament itself. But here we read, “Thy children shall be taught of the Lord, great shall be the peace of thy children; in righteousness shalt thou be established.”

Isaiah 54:14-17 God Will Protect His People

Verses 14-17 speak of the protection of God for his people. “In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and [far] from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.”

In verses 14-17 the theme is: “God will protect his people.” If you compare the situation that Isaiah had been addressing with respect to the exile, the exile was

sent by the Lord; it was part of his purpose for his people; it was a judgment on his people. But I think what Isaiah's saying here is that attacks against God's people that are stirred up by Satan will be defeated. God will deliver his people. And in verse 16 what he stresses is that wicked forces can do nothing apart from the Lord's permission. "I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy." Even the enemies of God are part of his creation and can only go so far as he permits; they are under his sovereign control. So God will protect his people.

And then that final statement in verse 17: "No weapon that is formed against thee will prosper; every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." It's part of that same idea, but then that final statement, which sums up the whole of the chapter, "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord"--these promises about the increase of God's people, the blessing for Israel, the stability and protection of God's people. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord," those who follow the true Servant of the Lord. God will protect his people. Ok it's five of nine, let's take a ten minute break.

Transcribed by Mandie Wilson
Rough edited by Carly Geiman
Edited by Ted Hildebrandt
Final edit by Dr. Perry Phillips
Renarrated by Dr. Perry Phillips