

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Servant Songs, Session 3, Audio Overview Podcast

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What does it really mean to be a champion for justice? I mean, what does it actually cost? It's a big question. Huge. And it hits right at the core of what we're digging into today.

Absolutely. We're taking a deep dive into Dr. Robert Chisholm's insights on Isaiah's servant songs. Specifically, we're zoning in on this pretty surprising theme, the suffering servant of the Lord.

Yeah, the sources you shared really unpack Isaiah 50: 4, 6, and then that big section 52.1.1 through 53.1. Right. So our mission today really is to pull out the key bits of understanding from these texts. We want you to quickly get a handle on how this servant role shifts dramatically towards suffering.

And what that suffering actually achieves. It's not just suffering for its own sake. Exactly.

Now, just a quick recap before we jump in deep. Remember in those first two servant songs we looked at before, the servant was presented as, well, distinct from exiled Israel, you know, Jacob, who was often the symbol. This servant was set up as a champion of justice, not just for Israel, but for the whole earth, the nations.

Yeah. Like a covenant mediator, almost fixing the Noahic mandate, bringing in a new covenant with Israel, kind of a new Moses figure. Definitely echoes of Moses.

And while there were hints back then and, you know, suggestions of opposition, maybe some difficulty. Now it's different. Now suffering takes center stage.

It becomes incredibly intense. Really wraps up. Okay.

So let's unpack this third servant song, Isaiah chapter 50. Starting right at verse four, we hear the servant speaking. Right.

And he talks about being empowered by the sovereign Lord, given, quote, the capacity to be his spokesman, or the literal Hebrew is fascinating: the tongue of a learner. Ah, the tongue of a learner. I like that.

It implies direct teaching. It does. Learning directly from the Lord and then passing that on.

Specifically, the text says to help the weary. Which is a very specific focus, not just general teaching, but aiding those who are worn out. And he says he's awakened every morning, made alert to listen, like attentively, like a disciple.

Yeah. What's really fascinating there is how strongly the servant identifies as a prophet. He's speaking for the Lord.

And there's this absolute commitment. He says, I have not rebelled. I have not turned back.

That's not just saying I obey. No, it sounds like resolve, like steeling himself. Exactly.

It's this ironclad resolve, which really sets the stage for what comes immediately after. Yeah. Because this commitment, it's not met with applause.

Not at all. It's met with, well, profound opposition. Intense opposition.

And that brings us to verse six. This is where it gets really graphic. Probably the clearest, most visceral description of suffering we've seen yet in these songs.

The servant says, I offered my back to those who attacked my jaws, to those who tore out my beard. I did not hide my face from insults and spitting. Wow.

I mean, the pulling of the beard, the spitting, that's extreme humiliation in that culture. It really is. And for a lot of people reading this, you can't help but think of, well, the descriptions of Jesus' trials before the crucifixion.

The parallels are definitely striking. But what's just as striking, maybe even more so, is the servant's reaction to this abuse. Right.

Because despite this, you know, intense physical pain and humiliation. He expresses total confidence. He says, the sovereign Lord helps me so I am not humiliated.

Which seems like a contradiction, but it's about ultimate standing. So externally humiliated, but internally or maybe eternally not shamed. Exactly.

Yeah. For that reason, I am steadfastly resolved. I know I will not be put to shame.

He even challenges his accusers. He knows the one who vindicates me is close by. That's incredible faith in the face of that kind of attack.

It really is an astounding level of conviction. And what about the attackers, the ones doing the opposing? Well, the text has a pretty stark warning for them. It says they will wear out like clothes.

A moth will eat them. A powerful image of decay and impermanence compared to the servant's steadfastness. Precisely.

And, you know, this leads to an interesting point about how far this song extends. Most agree the servant speaks verses four through nine. But some scholars argue, and it makes sense contextually, that verses 10 and 11 are part of it too.

There, another speaker steps in asking, who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys his servant? Ah, so it connects fearing God directly to listening to the servant. Absolutely. The implication is clear.

If you fear the Lord, you have to listen to a servant. And for those who don't, those who start a fire and who equip yourselves with flaming arrows. Sounds like people stirring up trouble, relying on their own power.

Right. They're warned they will ultimately lie down in a place of pain. It's a very clear statement.

God will vindicate his servant, and judgment is coming for those who rebel. So this whole song, Isaiah 50, it's like a crucial bridge. It explains why there's this opposition, this humiliation before we get to the ultimate vindication.

Exactly. Connect the dots between the mission and the cost. Okay.

So that connection, suffering leading to vindication, sets us up perfectly. This bridge leads us right into what most people call Isaiah 53. But as our source material points out, it doesn't actually start in chapter 53.

It starts a bit earlier, right? Chapter 52, verse 13. Why is that starting point important? Oh, it's hugely important. Starting at 52.33 reveals this really neat literary structure.

It's called an inclusio, like bookends or a frame. A frame. How does that work here? The Lord himself speaks right at the beginning in 52.13-15. And then again, right at the very end of chapter 53.

So God opens and closes the whole section. Exactly. And this frame emphasizes the core message.

Yeah, the servant suffers intensely, but this is part of a divine plan that leads directly to his ultimate vindication and, well, incredible exaltation. It's like God is saying, watch this unfold. I'm in control.

Here's the beginning, and here's how it ends. Perfectly put. It brackets the whole experience.

And it starts with God grabbing our attention, right? Look, he says, my servant will succeed. And that Hebrew word for succeed implies more than just, you know, winning. Right.

It carries a sense of acting wisely, demonstrating wisdom, which, biblically speaking, is the pathway to success. Okay. And then the description of this success, this exaltation, it's just piled on, isn't it? He will be elevated, lifted high, and greatly exalted.

Yeah. Three different verbs for being lifted up, plus the intensifier, greatly. Yeah.

It's hard to imagine a stronger way to say, this guy is going to be vindicated and raised to the highest possible place. You really can't overstate it. But then, boom, right after that promise, verse 14 hits you with the shocking contrast.

It's incredibly jarring. Verse 14 says, just as many were horrified by the sight of you. So you have this promise of extreme exaltation immediately followed by extreme horror.

And why were they horrified? The text explains. Yeah. It says, the servant was so disfigured, he no longer looked like a man.

His form was so marred that he no longer looked human. This isn't talking about how he was born. No, this is clearly about the suffering he endured.

Something happened that made him almost unrecognizable as human. It's an image of just complete devastation. Right.

Utter disfigurement. And our source material makes that connection to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, particularly that incredibly brutal flogging scene. Right.

It helps you visualize just how severe the suffering described here might have been. The text essentially says he was, well, beaten to a pulp. It really drives home the physical reality of it.

What does that level of disfigurement suggest about the suffering? It's more than just pain, right? Oh, absolutely. It implies a profound debasement, a dehumanization. He's treated as less than human.

And this shocking image in verse 14, it leads straight into verse 15. Okay. And verse 15 presents this really interesting interpretive choice.

It's quite debated among scholars. What are the options? Well, the traditional translation, the one many are familiar with, says he will sprinkle many nations. Sprinkle? Like a priest performing a ritual cleansing.

Exactly. It's just a priestly role: purification, reconciliation. His suffering somehow cleanses the nations, brings them back to God.

Okay. That's one view. What's the other? Some scholars argue the Hebrew word is better translated as startle.

So he will startle many nations. Startle as in shock them. Yeah.

The idea being that those nations, those kings who initially rejected him, his humiliation, are now completely astonished, startled by his sudden, unexpected exaltation. Huh. So either cleansing them through his suffering or shocking them with his ultimate victory.

Right. But either way you read it, sprinkle or startle, the outcome is clear. His suffering and exaltation have a massive global impact on the nations.

And specifically on their leaders. It says kings will be shocked by his exaltation. The Hebrew is even more vivid, isn't it? It is.

It literally says they will close their mouths. Like they'll be utterly speechless, stunned into silence. Why? What do they see? Because as the text says, they'll witness something unannounced to them and understand something they had not heard about.

Everything they thought they knew is turned upside down. You can almost picture it like Pontius Pilate or maybe Herod meeting Jesus, dismissing him. Exactly.

And then later, the shocking realization that this dismissed figure is actually king over all. It prophesies this universal moment of stunned recognition. Wow.

OK, so that dramatic opening from God, the disfigurement, the promised exaltation, the speechless kings, it sets the stage for Chapter 53 itself. Right. And in Chapter 53, the speakers change.

Now we hear from a we group. Who do you think this we represents? Well, given the context, it seems most likely they represent God's covenant people, Israel. Looking back, maybe? That's the common understanding.

They're looking back with this dawning realization. And they start with their initial shock and disbelief. Verse one, who would have believed what we just heard? What they just heard being that report from God in Chapter 52 about the servant's exaltation.

Precisely. They're saying, we never saw that coming. And they add, when was the Lord's power revealed through him? Meaning they didn't see God's power at work in him during his life, or at least not the kind of power they expected.

Exactly. They were looking for the arm of the Lord, which usually meant, you know, military might. God flexing his muscles against the nations.

But he didn't come like a conquering general. No. So they missed it.

What they did see is what they described next in verses two and three. And it's the opposite of majestic power. Right.

He sprouted up like a twig before God, like a root out of parched soil. Doesn't sound very impressive. Not at all.

Fragile, unassuming. He had no stately form or majesty that might catch our attention. No special appearance that we should want to follow him.

He just didn't look the part. And worse than just unimpressive, he was actively rejected. Deeply rejected.

Despised and rejected by people. One who experienced pain and was acquainted with illness. That phrase, acquainted with illness, is literal sickness or something more? It could include physical suffering, but it's likely broader.

Maybe metaphorical too. Hinting at a state that was just so undesirable. So maybe ritually unclean or socially outcast.

That people would literally hide their faces from him, as the text says. Like avoiding someone with leprosy. Exactly like that.

In the ancient world, remember, severe suffering or illness wasn't just unfortunate. How was it often interpreted? Right, like we talked about with Job. People assumed it was a sign of great sin, divine punishment.

Precisely. So this we group, looking at the servant, they made that standard assumption. He must be suffering like this because God is punishing him for his own terrible sins.

They despised him and kept their distance. He was ritually suspect, socially toxic. He was.

But then comes verse four, and this is the pivot. This is the monumental shift in understanding for this we group. A big aha moment.

A massive aha moment. They confess, but that but is doing so much work here. He lifted up our illnesses.

He carried our pain. Wait, our illnesses, our pain. Even though we thought he was being punished, attacked by God, and afflicted for something he had done, they realized their fundamental mistake.

Wow. They're saying, we thought God was judging him, but actually he was carrying our stuff. Exactly.

He was suffering for them, for their sins, not his own. This is the heart of it. It points directly to this incredibly powerful concept of substitutionary atonement.

Substitutionary meaning he took their place. So when it says he lifted up their illnesses and carried their pain, that's talking about the penalty, the guilt of their sin. That's the theological interpretation.

Yes. He took the consequences, the weight, the guilt of their wrongdoing onto himself, especially Christians would argue in his passion and on the cross. The staggering transfer of liability basically is.

And verse five just drives it deeper. He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins. The cause and effect is explicit.

Our sin, his wounds. And then the result: he endured punishment that made us well, made us well. And the Hebrew word there for well is shalom.

Shalom, which means so much more than just not being sick. It's wholeness, peace, completeness, right relationship. All of that.

So in this almost unbelievable paradox, his shattered shalom, his brokenness actually results in our shalom, our restoration, our healing. Because of his wounds, healing came to us. Just incredible.

It really is. And then verse six broadens the scope even more. How so? All of us had wandered off like sheep.

This is this classic image of sheep straying, getting lost, being vulnerable. Each of us had strayed off on his own path. That sounds like humanity, basically.

Going our own way, getting into trouble. Right. Vulnerable, exposed.

But here's the astonishing part. The Lord caused the sin of all of us to attack him. Whoa.

Not just that he suffered because of our sin, but that our sin itself, like a force, like a predator. Exactly. Like a predator that was ready to destroy us.

The Lord redirected it, and it attacked him instead. He took the hit. The full force of the guilt and consequence of our sin landed on him.

And notice that phrase, all of us. Yeah, that's universal. It's not just Israel anymore.

It's everyone who has wandered. It implies a universal scope for this substitutionary act. And then finally, verse seven tells us how the servant responded to all this.

Right. After hearing about the cause and effect, now we see his demeanor. He was treated harshly and afflicted, but he did not even open his mouth.

Silent. Like Jesus before Pilate, famously. Very similar imagery.

He submitted without protest, without objection, as a lamb led to the slaughtering block, like a sheep silent before her shearers. A lamb led to slaughter. That's powerful imagery of innocence and, well, sacrifice.

It is. It highlights his quiet, unresisting submission to this terrible fate. Even if that specific word for slaughtering isn't technically sacrificial in itself, the whole image points that way.

Wow. What an absolutely incredible journey through these specific songs. We've really seen this servant figure transform, haven't we? Definitely.

From this champion of justice, empowered by God, to someone who willingly, even silently, embraces the most profound suffering imaginable. And crucially, not for anything he did wrong. No, explicitly for the rebellion, the sins, the consequences belonging to others, to all of us.

And his disfigurement, paradoxically, leads to his exaltation. His silence brings healing. It really turns everything on its head.

His submission brings wholeness, shalom, to those who completely misunderstood and rejected him at first. It does. This deep dive really unpacks a radical, maybe even subversive, idea of leadership and sacrifice.

Yeah, it totally challenges the usual ways we think about power, doesn't it? Showing that ultimate victory, ultimate exaltation, can actually come from the place you least expect, from weakness, suffering, and humility. It absolutely redefines what being a champion might truly mean. It's not about crushing enemies in the conventional sense.

So, thinking about all this, here's something for you, our listener, to maybe chew on. Yeah, a final thought. If the path to this ultimate exaltation, this supreme victory, actually involves such deep, self-giving, substitutionary suffering, what does that really tell us about the nature of true power? Right.

How does that challenge our own assumptions, maybe our cultural assumptions, about what strength looks like versus weakness, about sin and redemption? What other connections, what further implications, might you draw from the mission of this extraordinary suffering servant? Something to think about.