

Christ the Faithful Bond Servant

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Bible Text: Isaiah 50:1-9

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If you will, look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 50. I'm going to read the entire chapter and just see how far we get, but in this chapter we have a wonderful revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The editors in this Bible put "Christ's Patient Suffering." Some would read it and think that it just refers to what Isaiah faced in his day as the Lord's prophet to a hardened people, but we know that every prophet, every priest, every king in the Old Testament was a type and picture of the Lord Jesus Christ and so we would be remiss to read this and not see Christ in this.

I've entitled this message "Christ the Willing Bond Servant." Back in the Old Testament, the bond servant was one that because of a debt, would then be subject to the one to whom he owed the debt. If you got yourself in debt to where you couldn't pay, there wasn't such a thing as a debtor's prison, you literally bonded yourself to that person that you owed, having borrowed the money, and you worked for them in return until the debt was paid. And that is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ as you remember not too long ago we studied in Isaiah 42 where God the Father said, "Behold my servant whom I uphold." There was a debt to be paid that was owed to the Father, not by Christ, but by the sinner and there was no way, just like in the old days, that you could pay other than indebting yourself to the one you owed. But do you realize if God had required that debt of us we would have to spend eternity in hell and never have it paid? So God being merciful and gracious, appointed his Son to be that representative bond servant who would actually come and submit himself to the Father and work out that righteousness that was due him on behalf of his people and not only fulfill the precepts of that law, but actually pay the penalty in his death: the just for the unjust.

The reason I'm saying that is down in verse 5, we're going to see this. As you get down to verse 5 and 6, you realize this isn't talking about Isaiah where it says, "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." You can go back in the Old Testament law and read where a bond servant, if after having served the entire debt was then free to go but loving his master, determined to stay, the master would literally take him over to a doorpost and with an awl would put a hole in his ear and that was a mark that he was forever indebted to his master. This little word here, "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear," is what that's talking about, that Christ was that willing bond servant. So the entire chapter is built around that thought, so let's read it with that in mind. Isaiah 50, beginning with verse 1,

1 Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. 2 Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. 3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. 4 The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. 5 The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. 6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. 8 He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. 9 Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. 10 Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. 11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

So in this chapter, we have, first of all, in verses 1 through 3, those to whom God sends this message being justly charged with bringing their troubles upon themselves. Now, how in difficulty some like to blame God for their trouble or they act as if this isn't quite fair, and yet were God to deal with us according to our iniquities, anything this side of hell is a mercy and this is what God is reminding Israel of as he foretells of their being taken away into captivity by the Babylonians and the complaints that would rise up and the actual raising the fist in the face of God. It's interesting that people don't like to own their sin and yet when it comes time of trouble, they show God to be just in condemning them because they act just like they said they weren't. "I'm not a rebel," and yet they raise their fist in the face of God. Such is the nature of the heart.

So that's what we're going to see here in verses 1 through 3, how God is just in his dealing with men as sinners and yet in verses 7 through 9, which is going to be the heart of this message, we see how God is merciful and that there are those for whom he did send his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and would send him and when Isaiah prophesied this, it was still 500 years before Christ would come. What God is doing is painting a picture of his mercy and showing them why he would not completely utterly destroy Israel. There are some, when they read Israel and see how obstinate and idolatrous they were as

a nation, they say, "Well, if I was God, I'd just send them all to hell." Well, had he done that, had he destroyed that nation, he would have gone against what he said he would do and that was preserve a remnant, preserve a seed from which his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, should come.

So we see clearly Christ foretold. You know, he is really the subject all the way through here, the "I's." When he says, "I was not rebellious"; verse 6, "I gave my back." That's Christ speaking even before his coming as God and showing, really, his faithfulness as a bond servant to the Father in contrast to all others. So this gives you a little idea of where we're headed here.

In verses 1 through 3, I want you to see how Christ is that faithful bond servant in contrast to all others. Again, what comes to mind is what David said in Psalm 130, "Lord, if you should mark iniquities, who could stand?" And if the Lord has taught us of his Son, there is not a person sitting here that he has taught that can blame God for their sin or blame God for whatever affliction or trial he brings upon us for our sin. As I've said to you before, the Lord does not punish us for our sins but he certainly will chasten us by our sin if we're his. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens. He will not allow your sin to draw you away from him, such is his purpose in saving sinners. He will not allow you to go the way you would go, but don't take glory to yourself for staying the course. They that persevere, at the end shall be saved, is what the Scripture says but I don't know a person that in the end, being the Lord's, is going to take credit for having persevered. At our deathbed, we'll have to say it's the Lord and his mercies, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." It's not because I have the strength, but he gave it to me. It's not because I have the faith, but he gave it to me. It's not because I had the eyes to see, he gave me the eyes to see.

That's really the challenge here in these first three verses. There are those who have professed to be the people of God and yet when dealt with severely and I believe the Lord uses trials to sift men, to test their profession. You may wonder why it is that the Lord brings trials in his congregation, well, it's to test men out. It tests men's profession. Trial doesn't produce faith but it certainly reveals what kind of faith there is or if there is any at all. There are some that bear up for a while but then, like the chaff, the wind blows them away and many there are that profess to be the Lord's and yet when the trials come, they lay the fault on him as if he had been too hard with them. I don't know if you know people like that but I've run across some that have told me, "You know, I used to attend a place of worship. I used to read the word, but then such-and-such happened in my life and when that happened, do you know what? It just so utterly rocked me that I don't know whether to believe in God anymore or not." You find them sitting at home bitter. They won't ever darken the door of a congregation again, even though the truth may be preached there. Their ears are hardened and they're bitter and they are blaming God. "If God was a God of love," they say, "why would he ever do such a thing to me?" They can never take the blame themselves, being sinners.

Certainly this is God's challenge here. He challenges them, Israel, in verses 1 and 2, to prove or to produce any evidence, any that have a quarrel with God, to say what they say

because they were saying that, "Well, God has just abandoned us." When he says here, "Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?" He said, "Did I ever give you a bill of divorcement? Did I ever say I divorced you?" These were some of the criticisms that were expected and anticipated when the Lord would take him away into captivity. They would say, "Well, the Lord has abandoned us. He didn't hold true to his promise. He wasn't faithful." Isn't that one of the greatest signs of a depraved nature that we would blame God rather than take the blame ourselves? But, you know, it goes all the way back to the garden. Do you remember when the Lord questioned Adam as to where he was? What was the first thing he said? "The woman that thou gavest me." So he was immediately blaming God for his sin and that's what men will do. It's easier to blame someone else than to take responsibility. But what God is saying here in verse 1 is that they could not even produce one evidence that he had somehow divorced them or gone back on what he had promised.

So he's saying that he had been to them a husband and back then, it's like our Lord said when the Pharisees said, "Well, didn't Moses give permission to grant a letter of divorce?" And the Lord said, "Because of the hardness of your hearts. That's why. The reason there was even anything in the law concerning divorcement was because of the hardness of your heart." There had to be a law to protect the woman being put away because it was within the power of the man to do so. But the point here is not that God did the same but just the opposite. They could not say that God had dealt with them. It was true that they were separated from the land, or would be because all this is prophetic, Isaiah living in the days prior to Israel being taken into captivity. And they would be for 70 years without an altar, without a sacrifice, without an ephod, in other words, that breastplate of the high priest going in, and yet in no way was God divorcing them. He had promised to bring them back. It was a time of separation and yet they were blaming God and finding fault with his will and purpose even in that.

Now, when I say that, just like the Israel of old, there was a remnant. There was a people whom the Lord had taught and drawn to himself such as Daniel and his three friends that did not blame God. When you go back and read in Daniel during that time of captivity, he was confessing his sin and the sins of the people before the Lord when the Lord sent one of his angels to reassure them that the time was close for them to be brought back into the land. It's like when we chasten our children. What you're looking for is a cry of repentance. You're not looking for them after you have chastened them to stick their tongue out at you and raise their chin and put their fist in your face, but that's the nature of children so to do. That's their rebellion. They want to blame you rather than take responsibility for their fault and for their sin and we've all been down that path.

But, again, what the Lord is doing here is showing himself faithful. When I say the Lord, I'm talking about Christ, the bond servant. We're going to see just how faithful he is in that it was for such sinners that he came to die. Not for the righteous, but for sinners and this is where it pulls us in now as we consider, "If Christ died for me, if he paid my debt, I was every bit as rebellious. I was every bit opposing to God's mercy and grace as anyone mentioned here and it brings me to wonder why it is that God would ever have saved me. Why it is that he should not have given me a bill of divorcement but he didn't."

You notice he says there in verse 1, "Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away." I believe when the Lord begins to deal in the heart of one of his own, that's the first thing they do. They own their own sinfulness. To confess your sins is to say the same thing about yourself as God says. All the arguing, all the self-justifying, all the excuses go away and, like David, we would say, "Lord, if you should mark iniquities, who could stand?" Any that have been taught of the Lord have asked that way. The Lord has so taught them. You know, I hear some tell me, "Well, if the Lord hadn't blamed me for Adam's sin, I'd be better." Well, you certainly haven't proven yourself better. He put you under condemnation in Adam yeah, but now just the way you reason and argue shows that he was right in doing so.

We're sinners not only by nature but we are sinners by practice and we prove it every day by the way we think less of God than he deserves. It's not so much us out robbing a bank. A lot of people reason that way. The Pharisees reasoned that way. "We be not sinners." And the Lord graciously brought the law to bear on them and said, "It's not just the letter of the law but it's the spirit of the law." You might say, "Well, I've never committed adultery." Well, have you ever had a lustful thought? The Lord said you're an adulterer. "I'm not a murderer. I've never taken these hands and killed anybody." Well, have you ever gotten angry with somebody to the point where you thought, "Boy, if I could, I'd kill him"? The law condemns you as a murderer.

It's what our nature is and that's why the Lord is saying here, "You have sold yourselves." You see, we are sinners by nature and that's why we sin and yet just by our sinning, we give God just right to condemn us should he be so pleased to do so and none can say in the end, "The Lord has dealt unjustly with us." You can see there that this charge that they were bringing against the Lord, the Lord in wisdom brings back against them and shows them that they are the ones that deserve the chastening and the condemnation.

Then in verse 2, if all we had was verse 1, where would be the hope? Even here the Lord says, "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem?" You see, this brings us, again, to the question of: who is it that the Lord saves? If people are sent to hell and end up in condemnation, it's certainly not because God's hand is short that he cannot save or his power to deliver. He says, "or have I no power to deliver?" There are some and this flies in their face that argue that God really wants everybody to be saved. You want to be saved but, alas, they are too strong for him. That's not the God of Scripture.

He says, "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem?" He could redeem every sinner but he has not so purposed. It's not because his hand is short that he cannot deliver. What it's amounting to is to show us that if any are delivered, if any are saved, it's by his grace. His grace alone and that's all we can say. If the Lord has been pleased to be merciful to you or to me, the only thing I can say is it pleased him to be merciful to this sinner, a sinner saved by grace. Not for anything in myself. Not because I was any wiser or any better.

He shows his power in verse 2, "behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea." If God can dry up the sea and I love the Scriptures for this reason, "their fish stinketh, because there is no water." You think naturally a fish is made for the water but if the Lord dries up the water what good is the fish? You go out deep sea fishing and you see the strength of some of these fish that the Lord has created and fishermen like to take pride and have their picture taken next to their prize catch, but those fish are nothing without that water and it's the Lord that has put them in that water. The point there is that we're nothing without his sustaining hand. If you think yourself anything before a holy God, all God has to do is dry up the water, remove his hand of mercy from upon you, and watch what happens to you. The next time you walk past that lunatic that's out there and I see quite a few walking down the street from my office. You know, you stand out there to get some fresh air and there are some pretty funny looking people walking up and down that street and you can tend to kind of look down your nose at them sometimes, but then the Lord causes me to think, "But for his mercy, that would be me." All he'd have to do is just change one little chemical in my brain or cause me to somehow ruin my mind with drugs and some other things that some of these have done and now they're kind of like mindless people walking up and down talking to themselves. But for the mercy of God. This is what our Lord is reminding them of here. Without the water, we'd die of thirst and he says, "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering."

So this is the Lord. It's not for lack of strength in him but he saves whom he will and it is for such that Christ is that faithful bond servant. If you're the Lord's, you know what I'm talking about. You bow before him and say, "That was me. I take the blame for my sin and who I am before God," but for his grace and mercy. But then in the remaining verses, 4 through 9 here, here's where we see Christ as that willing bond servant. He's faithful. We know that. He will not give his people over to condemnation, those that he has purposed to save. But he is that willing bond servant that is qualified to serve his Father and done so on behalf of this people that God has purposed to save.

When he says, verse 4, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned," this is not Isaiah speaking here. I know it does take the Lord's wisdom for any of his servants to declare his Gospel. There is no question. It takes Moses, that was one of his complaints. He said he didn't know how to speak and the Lord reminded him, "Who made your tongue?" Certainly there might be some application here as far as Isaiah was concerned but this is dealing with far more than Isaiah because, as you read on, verse 5, we begin to see, no, this has to do with Christ. "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." Would he have had reason to? Yeah. We, even our best state as sinners, still have conditional love. I know we talk about unconditional love but all it takes is for somebody to spite you enough and you will show your true colors. You'll write them off and such is our nature. Thankfully our Lord is not that way and although the Lord sent many prophets, the Scriptures say, and Israel rejected them all, Isaiah included, even when he sent his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Scriptures say, "He came unto his own and his own received him not."

Such is the nature of men and were it left to man, none would believe him. That would be true of us too. The fact that you trust Christ and rest in him today has nothing to do with

anything in yourself. In fact, if you look over in John 1, I'd like to support this with some Scripture but in John 1, it says there in verse 10, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Of all people, this Jewish people with all of the confirmations of who he was as the Son of God, you would say, "Well, they of all people should have received him." Well, no, they're no better than the ungodly, what they called ungodly Gentiles, because left to themselves it's obvious they were of the same nature.

You say, "Well, who did believe?" Look at verse 12, "But as many as received him," so it shows there were many that did receive him, "as many as received him," here's why they received him, "to them gave he power," that word is "right" or "privilege," "to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." So the reason they received him was because he gave them the power, the authority, to become the sons of God. That's the only reason. Don't read it as natural minds read it, "Well, if you receive him, then he will give you the power." I've always said if you could receive him, you don't need the power. You've done what was necessary. The reason it says, "to them gave he the power," was to show the source that anything we have received is of him and certainly, that's the message that John the Baptist preached as well, that what we have we have from him. So it points us to this fact that were Christ not that faithful bond servant, none of us would be saved, so let us give him the glory. Let us praise his name for that patient work that he came to do. We have no reason to doubt or to question the Lord's work.

Here in verses 5 and 6 of Isaiah 50, it speaks of that patience. Some of the old writers like to call it his passive obedience. "Passive" in the sense that he humbled himself and quietly and willingly gave his back to the smiters. When it says there, "I was not rebellious," had we been that one that had been so treated by sinners, we would have reacted. We would have when smitten, smitten back. Defended ourselves. He didn't. You stop and think about his willingness, again, as God's bond servant, such was Christ's love for his Father to save this people that his Father sent him to save, that he willingly withheld his tongue.

He willingly submitted to the contradiction of sinners, that he might faithfully serve his Father to the point, it says there in verse 6, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Again, we could at this point say, "Well, how evil those that did such to our Lord," but remember, if you're the Lord's, then those that did that to him actually were your representative. It's a reminder that my sin put him there and even though I wasn't alive at the time when he gave his back to the smiter, he was bearing that chastisement for my peace, and when he gave his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, I mentioned that in our earlier hour, that we in no way want to diminish the fact that Christ was God but at the same time, we in no way want to diminish the fact that he was man.

When it talks about them plucking off his beard, his hair, you can imagine a person with a beard and just taking and pulling that out of his skin. Such was the hatred. That takes some hatred to do that to a man, but such was the hatred and contempt for him declaring himself the Son of God, and all of this he bore. He opened not his mouth and hid not his

face from shame and spitting. You think what is the worst thing you can do to show disdain to somebody other than killing them is to spit. To spit in their face. But, you know, as the Lord dealt with my heart and caused me to see my own sin, he also caused me to see I was one of those that had spit in his face and I could not place the blame on them. The Lord's Spirit wouldn't allow it. I had to take the blame. I still do. You say, "Well, God put him there." Yes, but my sin put him there. You with wicked hands have taken and crucified. Unless you see that, you've not seen the death of Christ as it is, but in all of that, he was the faithful servant and willingly. That's what I get from this.

"I was not rebellious." Sometimes when you talk about the distinctive grace of God and how he saves some and not others, some people just look at it as being some sort of arbitrary...no, there was a willingness on the part of Christ to come and to lay down his life for sinners such as we are and it shows him to be that faithful servant where it says even there in verse 7, "For the Lord GOD will help me." You see, this is the humanness of Christ. Such was the weight of the burden of sin that he was to bear that it took God the Father strengthening him to that task as a man. This wasn't just a play. This wasn't a dress rehearsal that he went through, "Okay, now we're done. We can move on." No, all of this was necessary that God might be just in justifying his people.

When it says there, "therefore have I set my face like a flint," he's talking about that cross work that he came to do. There was a determination in him as a man to do that work to the satisfaction of his Father. You say, "All for what?" Well, for a very rebellious people. For ones that while we were yet sinners, Scripture says, Christ died for us. How can we not marvel? How can we not bow in adoration to such a bond servant? Such a Savior he is.

You can see in verse 8 it says, "He is near that justifieth me." There wasn't any man to justify Christ. When he was there, he stood alone, and yet, "He is near that justifieth me." He's talking there about having accomplished the work and God the Father being satisfied.

"Who will contend with me?" It says, "let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me." This is the thing about the work of Christ. So complete it is and for those that he accomplished it for that there is therefore now no condemnation. Not even God himself will find fault with any for whom Christ died, so great is that work that he accomplished.

He says there, verse 9, "Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?" It sounds a little bit like what Paul wrote in Romans. It is God that justifies.

"They all shall wax old as a garment," it sounds like the book of Hebrews there, "the moth shall eat them up." People tend to say: only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. Have you ever heard that? That's completely backwards. Anything that we do for him is nothing but like a garment, the moth that eats it up. Well, I'll tell you a work that does last: it's his work. Only life will soon be past, only what

Christ has done shall last. That better be where we are looking, to him and to his finished work. What a faithful bond servant he is.