

Sunday 2 November 2008

Global Mission 5

Being a Light to the Nations



**I'm setting you up as a light for the nations
so that my salvation becomes global!**

Isa 49.6 (The Message)

Eugene Peterson describes Isaiah as " the supreme poet-prophet to come out of the Hebrew people".

The words from Isaiah deal with three main themes: Judgment (chapters 1-39), Comfort (chapters 40-55), and Hope (chapters 56-66).

It is in the context of comfort that Israel is to discover just how great God's plans are.

This particular passage of scripture has become known as one of the servant songs that are to be found in Isaiah, these include Isa 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12.

The identity of the servant is multi layered, it certainly refers to the nation of Israel, Isa 49:3, a messianic figure Isa 42:1, a righteous sufferer Isa 52:13- 53:6, perhaps also to Isaiah.

The Servant is to be

1. Remembered not Forgotten

But Zion said, The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.
15 Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. Isa 49:14-16

This Servant has been called by God even before birth v1. Being called by God to bring God's people back in relationship with Him 46:5. Even within the context of exile God's people have not been forgotten by God. This is an even stronger assurance than a mother's love for her child. God is not absent minded or negligent God's people are not forgotten and are greatly valued by God. See the extent to which God's love reaches in Isa 52:13-53:1-12.

2. Fruitful not Barren

49:4 But I said, I have laboured to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due to me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God.

Without a doubt the Servant points us to Jesus and gives real insight as to how the fruitfulness of his ministry is perceived. In terms of a visible evidence of harvest there is very little. The Servant's work looks futile, yet God promises that the outcome will far exceed expectations; not only will this bring restoration to the people of Israel but will bring salvation to the very ends of the earth. This servant is to be its the world's Saviour.

Paul writing in Corinthians encourages us to persevere in order to be fruitful.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Cor 15:57-58.

3. Visible not Hidden

The Servant is a real visible presence in the world, in fact a light to the Gentiles (those who were not Jews). In other words this is going to be a universal light. The light is communicated through the powerful words that are spoken

He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour. Isa 49:2-3.

What God is doing is not to be hidden but will become visible.

Once again we see God as the God of Global Mission as the Message paraphrases Isa 49;6

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Jesus takes this scripture and applies it to himself and to his disciples.

Once again Jesus spoke to the people. This time he said, "I am the light for the world! Follow me, and you won't be walking in the dark. You will have the light that gives life." John 8.12

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5.14-16.

Just as God in Isa 49 empowers the Servant to be this light, so Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit is the Light of the World and as we reveal the light of Christ to others they will realize god has been at work.

Jesus tells us what we are as his followers but he also makes us aware that we could hide this light. Israel struggled as the people of God to recognize their place in global mission that too can be a danger for us. God desires his visible presence to be evident in our lives as Christians and we too are called to global mission that the offer of salvation, - the wholeness of life that God intends for the world.

For Small Groups Isaiah 49.1-18. John 8.12-20, Matthew 5.1-16

1. These verses are full of encouragement. Share any ways in which these verses speak to you.

2. Our Christian experience can vary, have you ever felt forgotten by God, share this experience if you feel able. Go on to share how you came to a place where you felt that God remembered you. Has God been able to use your experience to help others?

2. As you think about your Christian life do you think of it as being fruitful, what light does Isa 49.4 throw on this. Can you think of any times when this verse applied to Jesus.

3. What for us is being fruitful (see John 15.1-17)

4. What did Jesus mean when he described himself as "the Light of the World" and what does it mean when Jesus applies this title to his disciples?

5. Can we consciously cause our light to shine?

Pray for one another that our lives may provide a light for others to discover something of God.