

The Where, the Why & the How

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 September 2018

Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] As we look at this part of chapter 41 in Isaiah, I'd like us to think for a little while about this verse 8. But thou Israel art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

The context in this chapter 41 is a contrast, first of all, with the false gods which the rest of the nations worship. Because we've got here, you know, the isles of the park both saw it in fear. And they helped everyone, his neighbour, everyone said to his brother, be of good courage. A carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, he that smootheth with the hammer, him that smote the anvil, saying it's ready for the soldering.

He fastened it with nails that it should not move. The whole picture here is of the creating of an idol, making of a statue that has to be fastened and has to be carried along. Has to be shaped and graven and covered with gold, and then men bow down and worship it.

That which is the work of their own hands. That these are dead, lifeless things. Just as so many of the things to which men give their energies, their time, their resources, their very lifeblood, are dead and lifeless things that cannot see.

[1 : 11] And much as they cannot help those who serve them, so we have the contrast further on in the chapter how the Lord repeatedly says, He will help his servant.

I am with thee, be not dismayed. I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. I, the Lord, will hold thy right hand. Verse 13, saying, fear not, I will help thee.

Fear not thou worm, Jacob. In other words, one who is constantly regarded with contempt, who is trodden underfoot by everyone else. The Lord will hold him up because he is his servant.

Because there is this relationship to him. The contrast is both with the false gods that the other nations worship, and also with the helplessness of Jacob himself.

But with the power that the Lord gives to him. But thou, Israel, art my servant. Jacob, whom I have chosen. The seed of Abraham, my friend.

[2 : 10] In this brief verse, we have, I would suggest to you, three things that are drawn to our attention. First of all, where we are. Our situation. What we are called to be.

Servants of the living God. Thou, Israel, art my servant. This is a present tense. It's where we are now. And it is what we are called to be. Servants of the living God.

Secondly, we've got the reason for that position. And we've described as Jacob, whom I have chosen. The reason he's his servant is because God has chosen him.

It is the grace of election from all eternity. And thirdly, we have the means employed in bringing Jacob to be the servant of God. And by extension, all those who become his servants.

And that is being the seed of Abraham, his friend. You could say we've got the where, the why, and the how in this brief little verse of how God deals with us.

[3 : 09] The where, the why, and the how. Where we are now. And that is first of all, thou, Israel, art my servant. We are called to serve. We spoke with the children a few minutes ago about how everybody in a sense has to serve somebody.

We all work for somebody. Even if we're at the top of the political tree. Whether we're prime minister or president of the United States or Russia or whatever. They're all serving somebody. Whether they're serving the people or serving the state.

They all answer to somebody else. They can all be removed ultimately. Even if they are, you know, like a hereditary monarch. Like our queen is eventually going to be removed by death by God.

So nobody is here forever. We all answer to somebody because we have duties to other people.

When you get to the top of the tree, your duty is to those who are under you.

That you must guide and help and lead and protect and provide for them. So everybody serves somebody. But who we serve is what confers the nobility or, if you like, the status upon our

servanthood.

[4 : 14] As we said, you know, let's say somebody was a secretary for a branch manager or somebody maybe in Caithness or here in the islands. It's Dorname or Lachmadi or wherever it might be. And there you are typing away doing your admin or whatever in the office and filing and everything.

And for the manager who's in the next office in this little branch office. In Storname or Lachmadi or whatever. And then you get the opportunity, as I say, to be maybe with the, to be secretary or admin assistant to the chief boss in Edinburgh or in London or somewhere.

And there you are. Yeah, nice or bigger office, but you're doing the same thing. You're doing the typing, the filing, the admin, the keeping the diary and so on. You're doing perhaps pretty much exactly the same work. But you'd say it was a huge promotion.

You'd say that the job that you were in now was much more important than the job you were in before. Because of who it is you are serving. It is the nature, as it were, of those whom we serve which confer statements or nobility upon the service that we render.

And we are called to serve the living God. Thou, Israel, art my servant. The living God in contrast to all the dead things that men give their time and their energy to.

[5 : 29] Christ himself said that he came not to serve, not to be served, but to serve. And to give his life a ransom for many. If it is truly Christ that is in our hearts, then we can't scorn to be servants.

For it is in truth the highest privilege of mankind. To serve the living and true God. You know, that's our job. To glorify God. To serve, to enjoy him forever. To serve him with all that we have.

Such service, of course, calls for humility. For obedience to our Lord's wishes and commands. And the subserving of our will under his divine will.

Yes, in truth it is a dying to serve. And to our own petty desires and ambitions. All of which we lay down at the master's feet. But in this surrendering of our will, our ambitions, our desires, and making them subject to his will, his desires, his commands.

We become thereby the functionaries, the hands, the feet, the living representatives of the Lord himself. We become his ambassadors.

[6 : 39] We may scorn to be such a servant, preferring to be our own ambassadors. But in seeking such an impoverished honour, we truly do ourselves no favours.

Hear what the Queen of Sheba said about the servants of King Solomon. 1 Kings chapter 10, we read it verse 4. When the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and the rapporel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.

And she said to the King, In other words, what she was saying is, It is more glorious to be a servant at the court of King Solomon, than to be one's own king or monarch in some petty impoverished kingdom somewhere else.

And Jesus said it of himself, Behold, a greater than Solomon is here. A servant is ever at his master's disposal.

As we know, he may wait upon his master all the day long. You know, sometimes you might see pictures of these great big state banquets people have. And dotted along the walls, you'll see these guys in their sort of bibs and waistcoats and sort of penguin suits, and there they are standing, you know, just waiting very, very still.

[8 : 24] And they will only move if somebody sort of signals or says that they need help with a plate or with a cup. Then they'll be right there, and they'll be taking them off, giving out the vegetables or gathering in the plates or whatever.

But until anybody calls them, they stand there, and they're not moving and they're not doing anything. Does that mean they're doing nothing? No, they are serving. They're doing their job. They're fulfilling their duty.

They are there waiting upon the instructions of their master. Even though they may not physically move for a long time, he may not actually require them to perform any task.

Yet by the very act of quietly waiting upon him, he is doing his servant's duty. He is working. He is serving. The Thessalonians, we are told in 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 9, turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

But we also are called to turn from our idols. The things that clutter up our lives and suck the lifeblood of our attentions and our time and our desires.

[9 : 30] Our idols are whatever we make to be more important than the Lord. Whatever we keep first and foremost in our lives ahead of the Lord has become, by definition, our idol.

It has become the most important thing in our lives. And the thing that is most important we define as our God. Whether small g or capital G, we might not say it is. We might say, oh no, God is much more important.

So we would say, well, how much time do you give to God in the week? We might say, how much energy do you put into your relationship with the Lord? How much do you give to the Lord's work? Of course, you know, how much focus do you have upon the Lord?

Oh, well, I haven't time for that. I'm busy with this. And God understands that. He knows that. So I give this much time maybe to my work, this much time to my hobbies, this much time to my home and my family life, this much time to my own affairs and so on.

There's really nothing left. So how important then is God to you? How much are you serving the Lord? Or are these other things really your gods?

[10 : 33] Really the thing that is most important in your life? Where do you expend yourself? To what do you give your resources, your time, your heart, your love, all the lifeblood of your very being?

To whom does it go? Where does it flow? And if it is not to the Lord first and foremost, then these other things have become our idols, our false gods.

And we are called to lay these things aside, to lay them down at the foot of the cross and give our lives, our time, our attention, our very heart to serving the living God. That doesn't mean we stop doing these things.

That doesn't mean when people came to John the Baptist and the publicans and the soldiers, what shall we do? He didn't say, oh, stop being publicans and stop being soldiers. Just come out into the desert with me and just pray and meditate the whole time.

That's not what we're to do. We're to be salt and light in the world. We're to be living for the Lord. We are to be doing all the things that the Lord calls us to do. But we're to be doing them as his servants.

[11 : 38] If we are busy in our home, we are to be doing it as the Lord's people. If we're discharging our duty and our daily employments, we're to be doing it as the Lord's people. We're to take the Lord with us, as it were, into our work, into our home, into our life.

We're to begin the day with him. We should close the day with him. The Lord and his word should be central in our lives if he is truly our God. Otherwise, he's just being pushed to the periphery. This is to become the most important thing in our lives. It is to become the ultimate category of our identification. I may say I'm a plumber, I'm an electrician, I'm a carpenter, I'm a secretary, I'm an executive, or whatever I may do.

But first and foremost, if we are the Lord, I am a Christian. Whatever else I may do or be or say, I am a Christian. It's more important than the fact that I may be Scottish or Irish or English or Nigerian or whatever I may be.

I'm a Christian. It is my first identity. And this new identity surpasses all other identities of language or nationality or gender or employment status.

[12 : 46] As Paul writes to the Galatians, reading chapter 3, in verses 27 and 28, For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond nor free. There is neither male nor female. For ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Because we have been made new in Christ, that is our first and primary identity.

For Jacob, for thou is wither my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen. For Jacob, this new identity goes in hand in hand with his status as a servant of the living God.

And it is expressed in the new name, Israel. His old name was Jacob. His new name is Israel. This is what we read, of course. Genesis 32, verse 24.

Jacob was left alone. And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Verse 26.

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

[13 : 46] And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob, which means crooked or supplanter. And he said, Thy name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel, which means a prince with God.

For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed. As a prince hast thou power with God with men and hast prevailed.

But only with the seven king, Jesus, could one be at the same time a prince with God and the servant of God. Having wrestled and prevailed, this is Jacob's reward.

A new identity whose rank is to be royal and whose function is to serve. It is this new identity, this royal rank and divine service to which the Lord calls sinners of all ages and characters and nationalities.

This is the free offer of the gospel. This is made to sinners wherever they are. Whatever country they live in, whatever language they speak, whatever their gender or employment status or social background or whatever it may be.

[14 : 54] This is the free offer of the gospel at once, both invitation and command. Remember what Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17, you know, The times of this ignorance God went after, now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.

This is where we are now. The free offer of the gospel. The call to serve. Secondly then, we have the reason why.

Thou Israel art my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen. If we are privileged to serve the Lord, if we are enabled by grace to repent and believe the gospel, to give our lives into his hand, what has caused us to do this?

Why do some, from the privilege of a Christian upbringing, turn their backs upon the Lord and either drift into indifference and unbelief or in some cases become violently hostile enemies to Christ and to the gospel?

Whilst others from the same Christian upbringing go on in the faith of Christ and still others with no Christian background whatsoever are converted and saved.

[16 : 03] There is no human explanation for this. Why, and I've given this example I realised in the past, you know, in my former parish, why two elderly brothers living in the same house all their lives, having the same parents, the same blood, the same DNA, the same interaction of outward factors and influences, should be one of them, should be one of them, should be one of them, a Christian, elder and faithful in the church to his dying day, and the other should have no interest whatsoever, ever darken the door of the Lord's house.

This is quite simply the free grace of election. And what we learn from this verse is that whilst Israel is described as my servant, thou Israel art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, it is the new character who serves God, or by his new name and identity, Israel, it is Jacob whom I have chosen, the old name and the old identity who is chosen.

He doesn't, in other words, this choosing, this electing happens long before any change in the character of the individual. God does not choose Jacob because he turned to God and so became Israel.

But rather God makes choice of Jacob from all eternity. And so in the fullness of time, in response to that electing grace, Jacob turns to serve the living God as Israel, the prince of God.

Thus we read in Romans 9 and verse 10, And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by her father Isaac, for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that called it, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger.

[17 : 59] As it is written, Jacob hath I loved, but Esau hath I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

So it is not of him that willeth, not of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. Truly we love him only because he first loved us.

God is in control. That is the reason why you serve him. And if you are not his servant, not living in obedience to him, or not having given over your life to him, you don't need to despair about the deep mysteries of election.

Say, oh, well, what chance have I gone if I'm not chosen? So on. These things are beyond any of us. They're beyond any professing Christian. They're beyond any deep intellectual professor.

They're beyond any human knowledge. These deep things belong exclusively to God. You and I do not understand them. We cannot say why this person should be chosen, why that one should be bypassed.

[19 : 07] But the fact of the matter is that the Lord chooses who and when and how and why, according to his grace. There is always yet hope, whilst there is the free offer of the gospel.

The reasons why belong to God. But where we are now still applies. We are in the place and time of the free offer of the gospel to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and so be saved.

This is both invitation and command. God does not lie. Any who will come to him, he will receive. It is his grace that is offered.

It is his free mercy that is held out. This is the reason why God's electing grace from all eternity. Thou, Israel, art my servant.

That is where we are now, but we're called to be. Jacob, whom I have chosen, it is election from all eternity. And then we have the means employed, the haru, the seed of Abraham, my servant.

[20 : 15] Now, God chooses. Well, surely that's the means employed, isn't it? Well, no. A farmer may choose one field for crops and bypass another, but still he must plow it and sow it.

These would be the means by which he raises the crop in the field he has chosen. Yes, he chooses the field, but he still has to plow it, sow it, and work it.

The means that he uses. So, when the Lord chooses his elect from all eternity, still there is a means that must be employed in bringing them.

There is a means by which he would raise the crop and bring it home to harvest. So, the means God employs are to make his chosen children heirs, seed of faithful Abraham, God's friend.

This is what we read. Abraham, my friend. And since Abraham is the friend of God, Abraham's family will likewise have entrance and be welcome wherever Abraham himself is welcome.

[21 : 21] Abraham, my friend, my friend, my friend, because there's the connection. Now, all of myself, we've all had this. There have all been times when, say, you've been invited to a party or to a wedding or to an event, not because you're such a great person, but because you either happen to be married to, or in the same family as, or brother or sister to, or a special friend of, the real person that they want to bring.

You know, let's say that it's somebody, a lifelong friend of somebody long before you ever met them, and then you come to the Holy Spirit and become your friend and become part of your family. So, you get invited too. You get invited and you're welcome, not because of who you are, but of who you are connected to, who you are related to, who you are the close friend of.

Since Abraham is the friend of God, Abraham's family will likewise have entrance and be welcomed wherever Abraham himself is welcomed. Now, of course, Abraham here is one of those Old Testament patriarchs who prefigures Christ, pointing us forward to the one who was the fulfillment of all the promises to Abraham.

Jesus said to the Jews in John 8, verses 56 and then 58, Their father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

In other words, he had been God the Son from all eternity. If we want a more explicit fulfilling of this prophecy, of Abraham's seed, into that of Christ, we need to look no further.

[22 : 58] The Galatians that we looked at a few minutes ago, in Galatians chapter 3, we read from verse 7, Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, those who put their trust in the Lord, who believe in it, those who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Not just the Jewish people or the nation of Israel, but all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham.

And then again at verse 29, the last verse in that chapter, And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Abraham is the friend of God. Where Abraham is welcome, his seed are welcome. His children are welcome. They are his heirs, his children, because like them they become people of faith.

[24 : 03] As the seed of Abraham would be welcome, and have entrance wherever Abraham himself would be welcome, so likewise the seed of Christ enter into the presence of God's glory.

Not by virtue of any merit or accomplishment on their part, but rather simply because of their relation to Christ. You go to an exclusive club somewhere, perhaps an exclusive restaurant, and the doorman might look a bit at you askance, but he recognises the person you're with.

Oh, welcome this evening, Mr. So-and-so or Mrs. So-and-so. And if they say, well, he's with me, or she's with me, well, well, then that's no problem. The doorman will let you in, no bother. The bouncer is not going to give you a problem.

If you're with somebody, they recognise. We are entering heaven, as it were, with Christ, and in Christ. We are acceptable because of Christ, not because of our own merits.

Try going in that same exclusive establishment without your friend, or without the person that gave you out, you'll just be stopped at the door. You count for nothing. They count for everything. So it is with Christ, and heaven by virtue, not of anything in our part, but simply because of their relation to Christ.

[25 : 14] He is acceptable before God the Father. They are his, so by definition, they are acceptable. Isaiah 53, we read in verses 10 and 11, Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.

He hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, his descendants. But not physical.

Christ didn't have any children. He wasn't married. He didn't have any children, or grandchildren, or descendants, in a physical, biological sense. All his children are children in the spiritual sense.

By faith, they are enabled to become his children. He shall see his seed. He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul.

As we've said in the past, this term seed is really a reference to the males of the seed. Travail is a word used to describe childbirth. More like the female, the mother kind of bringing forth.

[26 : 14] There's neither the souls he has brought to the new birth. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant, there's that word again, justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.

The whole chapter of Isaiah 53 reminds us of the sufferings of Christ, and the sacrifice that he made for sinners like us. When we consider how much our Lord endured, and the price that he paid, we begin to see something of how much the Lord must surely love sinners.

Sinners must surely love this lost and fallen world. You know, truly, it's like it says, God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. Now God is not under any illusions. He sees the world as it is. He sees all the sin, and the darkness, and the cruelty, and the oppression, and the violence, so that he sees all the harm that is done, and all the sin, that every single person is guilty of.

But still we read, God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, if we put our trust, our faith in Christ, his righteousness becomes ours.

[27 : 46] He has done everything for us. He has laid down his life willingly, in a holy contract with his Father's justice. Becoming the Lamb slain, not merely from the days of Pontius Pilate, but the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

This is a sacrifice that was made and contracted, and contracted before the world came into being, and was fulfilled in the fullness of time. God has done this so that sinners might be saved.

God has chosen from all eternity sinners to be saved, and to be transformed in their lives, and hearts, and identities by the gospel of Christ. He has given to them the gift of faith.

As Ephesians tells us, chapter 2, verse 8, for by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not in yourselves, it is the gift of God. The gift that they might become by faith, the seed of Abraham, and heirs together with him of the promises.

And having done all this, he freely invites all, men and women and boys and girls and followers and natures and black and white, to repent and believe the gospel, to become servants, as he himself came not to be served, but to serve.

[29 : 05] In other words, he invites us to become like him. In 1 John chapter 3, we did it verse 2, Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So we read, But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend.

We have seen a purpose. We have looked at the reason why. We have looked at the means employed by God. Our greatest privilege and highest calling is to become servants of the living and true God, of royal rank and divine service.

This is the free offer of the gospel. It is at once both invitation and command. It is so good that Christ wants none to go out of it and so orders his disciples to go out into all the world and to invite all.

It is so urgent that he commands all, lest any lose the prize by sloth or time-wasting. Wherever we may ultimately be, or wherever we may finally spend eternity, today the free offer of grace is on the table still.

[30 : 35] There is still an open door of grace, still an open opportunity of salvation. This is the good news. And this is where we are now.

Let us pray.