

Trusting God

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[0 : 0 0] thank you Samuel for reading as Martin said my name is Jack I'm a ministry trainee here hello as well if you're watching at home I'm just going to pray for God's help as we start Father God as we come to your word now please help us to understand it please be at work to change us through it and please help us to have a better understanding of your son Jesus and what he has done for us in Jesus name Amen so we're going to start this week where we finished last week and that is that God has a staggering plan Isaiah is writing in around 700 BC, 700 years before Jesus and he's writing for Israel God's chosen nation and Israel they're about to be invaded and enslaved by a foreign empire the Babylonians and all of the people are going to be scattered hundreds of miles from their home but despite their slavery and despite the enormous distance through Isaiah God tells them what he is going to do he is going to bring them back home he is going to bring them back home to him safely and if that didn't sound like it was big enough or amazing enough already

God said well it is it's not enough if it was just Israel that vision would be too small this salvation this being brought home to God it's going to go to the whole world and so visualize your world map or the globe that you have at home and from the tip of southern America Patagonia you know made famous by the fleeces to the furthest east of Russia billions of people hundreds of countries tens of thousands of ethnicities God's salvation is going to extend to all of them as well people will from all over the world will one day be in heaven in a world made right with God and over the past couple of weeks as we've been looking at the servant songs Isaiah has been introducing us to this servant person who is going to make all of this happen I think here's the thing do we find this hard to believe do we find it hard to believe this is going to happen because sometimes trusting God and trusting God's big rescue plan it can actually look a bit silly it can look a bit stupid or a bit unrealistic well why would you say that there are all sorts of reasons

I think we could say that forget the global scale we might say well just take a look at me take a look at myself I wouldn't think I don't know about you I don't think I look very saved to be honest I'm no better off objectively than before when you started trusting Jesus definitely in comparison to my friends who trust Jesus in lots of ways I'm still here the world hasn't changed I still make the same I'm stuck I still make the same old mistakes that I always made and what can make it look even more silly is that there are kind of many better looking courses of action that we could take and forget trusting God's plan to make the world a better place there are all sorts of things that we can do together as people to make the world better in the church it would be easy to say look at the incredible work of other organisations and individuals and just to see how they have made the world better

I was on a website the other day called Reasons to be Cheerful it's not to be confused with the Ed Miliband podcast of the same name but it presents itself as a catalogue of human achievement and human success one story on there there's a Brazilian city Belo Horizonte I think I pronounced that right it's probably wrong 2.5 million people and the city and its kind of authorities have apparently managed to end hunger by lowering the price of basic food items and by providing free food through various institutions it's an amazing thing to have done for a city of that size and we could say well we don't really need God's salvation whatever that is let's just do something much more tangible let's take matters into our own hands when it comes to making the world better and we can be tempted to ask God the question God what are you doing what is your plan for all of this and in answer to that

Isaiah wants to introduce us to a person and someone he calls a servant we spent the past two weeks in the servant songs we've got one more week to go after this this is a third of the four songs and they are poems that describe a person and what a single person is going to do and as we meet him let's see what we learn about trusting God with what he is doing so if you close the sheets open

these sheets back up again we've got Isaiah chapter 50 on the inside of them it'll be really helpful to me if you're able to follow along with them so what is this person like what makes him tick so let's see the first way he introduces himself look at verse 4 the sovereign Lord has given me a well instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary he wakens me morning by morning wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed what do we learn about him well you can see it there in both halves of the verse can't you there's a repeated word instructed well instructed this servant he is someone who has been perfectly taught by God you can see it in how he speaks he has a well instructed tongue so that when he speaks he speaks as someone who completely knows what he is talking about because he has first been taught by God and we've often heard someone speak where you think oh you've just got no idea what you're talking about but this servant he's never like that whenever he opens his mouth he always speaks as someone who knows his stuff he properly knows whereas someone might be able to talk about their favorite musician or their favorite author or their favorite actor or whatever pet topic they have this servant he's been taught by the sovereign God that is his area of expertise he is taught by God so he can speak about God and then we see he doesn't just speak but he listens as well also in verse 4 he wakens me morning by morning wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed that's the other mark of someone who is being taught perfectly they do something well they always know how to listen and the servant he listens and he listens and he listens he listens every morning before you or I have got out of bed had a shower had a morning coffee he listens to God he listens to the sovereign

[7 : 26] Lord of the universe and perhaps a good word to describe him is that he is the perfect disciple he has learned something perfectly there's a TV show on at the moment called The Queen's Gambit it's about chess I haven't actually seen it but I have developed simultaneously not related to a concurrent online chess addiction and it's taught me well it's taught me one thing anyway if you wanted to learn about chess you shouldn't ask me basically I'm not very good I lose a lot you start off with a basic rating and you play more games it goes up or down and my rating has just gone straight off a cliff if you were to learn about chess from me you'd lose quite a lot but if you really wanted to learn about chess you'd find someone who knows chess perfectly and right now that guy in the world the number one is a Norwegian guy called Magnus Carlsen Magnus Carlsen he's a current chess world champion he's got the longest unbeaten run in chess history he's got the highest ever rating of any player ever and you'll bet that Magnus Carlsen has studied chess he'll know chess inside out he'll have studied all the famous games and he'll know every move and every variation of every position that the pieces could be on the board so that he always knows what the right thing to do is if you want to know something about chess you go and ask

Magnus Carlsen and you'll probably win a few more games if he taught you and it's like that when it comes to God's servant he is the expert he is the one who has been perfectly taught but what is the purpose of the servant being taught something perfectly and we know the purpose of knowledge isn't just to sit around and to do nothing with it the purpose of his knowledge is that he is supposed to do something so let's look at verse 5 and verse 6 and see what he is to do I'll read them out again the sovereign Lord has opened my ears I have not been rebellious I have not turned away I offered my back to those who beat me my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting I think as I read that

I was just restruct by two phrases both in verse 6 I offered my back I did not hide my face why was I surprised about this well just thinking about it I mean if someone was to mock you to shout at you or to spit at you you would look wouldn't you you'd turn your head you wouldn't be able to look or if someone was to threaten to hit you it would be impossible not to cower not to try and shield yourself with your arms but not this servant he offers his back when they came to beat him he turns his face towards them and why why does he do this well you see it there in verse 5 the sovereign lord has opened my ears I have not been rebellious I have not turned away God has taught him something so he wants to obey God the sovereign lord of the universe he has asked him to do something so he does it and that's how verse 5 and verse 6 fit together verse 5 says he obeys God verse 6 shows us how he obeys God the servant he obediently suffers and the result of this learning from God this discipleship from God is that he faces this one commentator puts it like this his suffering is flogging gratuitous torture and personal humiliation and it's in his obedience to God that he goes through it because for him to turn away from that not to do that would be to reject God to disobey God his listening is not useless his actions they match his words he doesn't just talk a good game his words aren't empty he backs it up I was thinking about this what's it like to go

through that sort of thing I guess it's a bit like when you learn about a World War I in school you learn about how they often teenagers they fought in trenches and how when they wanted to attack and they wanted to take ground they had to climb up out of the trenches and with hundreds of soldiers waiting for them on the other side of no man's land all pointing guns at them I just remember learning about that and thinking it sounds utterly terrifying imagine the strength that you would need to be able to obey a command that's going to lead you to almost certain pain and you can understand why people would refuse to do it out of fear and this servant out of his obedience to God is going to undergo immense suffering so that's our second thing about him our first thing that he's perfectly taught our second thing is that he obediently suffers and I think as we read we think why is he willing to do this and it looks kind of stupid doesn't it surely the God of the universe he's not going to ask him to do something as ridiculous as this as wasteful as this but look at what the servant has to say in verse seven because the sovereign lord helps me [13:17] I will not be disgraced therefore have I set my face like flint and I know I will not be put to shame what strikes you as you read that what comes across about him well for me it's his confidence complete confidence he's saying although it's going to look to everyone else like I'm a failure I'm a wretch and the lowest of low I'm going to be publicly humiliated the Lord God helps me I will not be disgraced disgraced and what really puts an edge on this is that things like flogging and being beaten especially in that culture they would normally happen to someone who has done something wrong and this is a punishment and if someone allows themselves to go through that they are admitting that they have also done something wrong they tacitly admit it and he's saying that even though it's going to look like

I've done something wrong I won't be put to shame it won't be pointless and it won't be futile or wrong he has confidence in his future and how much confidence well let's look at verse 8 and verse 9 he who vindicates me is near who then will bring charges against me let us face each other who is my accuser let him confront me it is the sovereign lord who helps me who will condemn me they will all wear out like a garment the moths will eat them up now I thought I'd take a bit of a chance for us to think about the word vindicate you can see it there in verse 8 can't you and I often find when I read the bible I come across a word I'm like I don't really know what that means I think I could probably use it in a sentence but say if in a staff meeting Martin was to put me on the spot and say Jack define the word vindicate to me I think what was right and it means for everyone to look at what you said and what you did and say that was the right thing to say or to do so imagine you're at your place of work and you've been accused of something someone saying that you've broken the rules or done something wrong in a particular way that you have done your work so there needs to be an investigation they they're going to speak to everyone who you talked to about it to find out what happened whether what you did was right and to be vindicated means to have them look at what you did and how you did it and to say you did this right there was nothing wrong with what you did and this servant is completely confident if there was a court this is a courtroom scene isn't to be in the wrong even though it may have looked bad at one stage in the future he's going to be shown to have done the right thing so what he's perfectly taught he obediently suffers and he is completely confident so why does

Isaiah want us to meet the servant why does he tell us this about him well he gives us what he wants us to do in verse 10 you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant let the one who walks in the dark who has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on their God so why should we listen to him and trust in the name of the Lord and obey the voice of the servant we can see at the end of verse we are in darkness let the one who walks in the dark who has no light and what does darkness mean it could just sound like Christian jargon kind of a vague word not really sure what it means but darkness and darkness particularly in Isaiah has a meaning darkness in Isaiah means that they are under God's judgment people are under God's judgment that God is angry at the way that people have treated him and ignored him and so they had been separated from him and cast away I'm going to read some verses from earlier in Isaiah chapter 48 verse 8 don't turn it just listen to the words I read out and just compare them with the verses we have particularly verse 5 so Isaiah 48 verse 8 you have neither heard nor understood from of old your ears have not been open well do I know how treacherous you are you were called a rebel from birth that verse is describing God's people the people of Israel and it's completely the opposite to the way the servant is isn't it they rebel they have closed ears but this servant he has open ears and he has not been rebellious but the people of Israel they never listened to God and

they never did what God said and the problem is if you are in darkness if you are in rebellion against God and it's impossible for them to determine what is right the way they should go they can't help themselves and just like

Israel were then so we are now we are also people who are by ourselves people in darkness under God's judgment and rebellion in rebellion against him and we are in a terrible situation as humanity and we can't see our way out and the world around us knows that there is something wrong but they don't know what it is and they don't know how to fix it so they can look around for all sorts of ways to try and sort out all sorts of projects or you can give up and try and enjoy life and forget about it and us trying to find our own way out of our predicament is like being caught out on the mountains you don't know and you're out on a walk and it's getting dark you've got no map you've lost the path you've got no torches and no compass and the dark is rolling in your mobile has thrown out a battery and you're cold and you're stuck you can't find your own way but the amazing thing that we have in this sermon is that we have someone who completely knows and he is the one who is going to show us our way out from the problem of our rebellion against

[20 : 10] God and the problem we started off talking about was the problem that God's rescue plan just doesn't seem believable to us it seems kind of counter intuitive silly it just seems too big and it seems too impossible and the reason that is because it just doesn't look like much now we trust in Jesus a man who died on a cross 2,000 years ago and we think that believing in him ourselves and telling other people about him is the way that God is going to do his big rescue plan and he's going to make everything new again and to the world and I think sometimes you feel like this to us they think we should do something concrete we should stop obsessing about Jesus and his death and what that has done but Isaiah wants us to listen to this servant to listen to him and what does that mean

I think in this passage it means sharing Jesus his confidence that his death and his suffering was not in vain it wasn't wrong even though it looked terrible at the time one day he was going to be vindicated he was going to be shown to be right there's this kind of tension in the life of the servant he suffers and that looks terrible looks like he's doing something wrong but he's going to be shown to have done something right and so it makes sense that trusting Jesus might feel a little bit like that as well we might feel in our trust of him we might feel that same tension trusting his suffering doesn't look like a victory for us trusting Jesus it doesn't look like we are winning but Isaiah wants us to know that it's not a mistake to trust a Jesus who is like this his suffering didn't look like a victory at the time but when he was raised from the dead when he was resurrected he was shown that he had done the right thing and even more we're still waiting for his further vindication when he returns and makes the world right and only then will it look like that we have done the right thing in trusting him only when he is completely vindicated at his return will that be the case and so Jesus is asking us will you listen to me will you trust me because he is completely confident in what he is doing this rescue plan of trusting Jesus in his death isn't an accident and he's asking us to share his confidence about his role in achieving God's plan we'll see about more about how exactly his suffering achieves God's rescue plan next week but very briefly it's that he takes the punishment that our sin deserved so that we can be made right with God and he declares that salvation to us people who are weary and burdened by sin and its consequences but verse 11 gives us an alternative doesn't it there's another option let's look at verse 11 again but now all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches go walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze this is what you shall receive from my hand you will lie down in torment we can we can try and provide our own way of seeing things our own way of making sense of the world an attitude that starts with us and builds up from our reason and what we think is right and how we think things should work it's an attitude that forgets about

God and says that as people by ourselves we can do things our own way and the world is full of alternatives to Jesus and his way and full of things that look like they provide light and provide reason and provide a way out but they don't and the consequence of going that way well verse 11 first of all they get burnt up by what they set alight but verse 11 the end of verse 11 this is what you shall receive from my hand you will lie down in torment to not trust the servant and to not trust his salvation and the way that he is doing it is to leave yourself under the judgment of God and to lie down in torment to face real pain real pain and real grief because of the anger of God but if we decide that we want to listen to the servant or to listen to Jesus and what he has to say how can listen to his voice is going to mean trying to understand

Jesus and what he has to say better and how he is doing God's work is going to mean understanding Jesus his innocent suffering and understanding that Jesus his suffering is the way that God achieves his huge rescue plan and is therefore our source of comfort and reassurance about God and his plan and if you're watching this or here and you don't trust in Jesus at the moment I think the implication for you is that you need to get to know Jesus before you dismiss the God you think is not there and before you say it's all a fairy story it's all made up take a proper look at the person of Jesus and his life and what he did drop us an email in the church obviously if you like to find it more if you know someone who does trust in Jesus and why don't you chat to them and ask them why Jesus' suffering matters so much and for us who do trust in

[26 : 10] Jesus here's what I'd encourage us to do when we feel down or unsure or uncertain about God and what he is doing take a look again at the person of Jesus and what his suffering did and share his confidence that even though it doesn't look great now one day we along with him will be vindicated by God and the servant gives us a word to people who are weary that although we are downtrodden and helpless he is perfectly obedient able to help us and to bring us the good news of his suffering and death on our behalf let's pray Father please help us help us to trust him and his suffering that that is your rescue plan for us please comfort us with that this week and help us to trust you as we go forward in Jesus name Amen