The Suffering Servant

Read the four “suffering servant” poems in Isaiah 42:1-4, Isaiah 49:1-6, Isaiah 50:4-9 & Isaiah 52:13-53:12

For each of these passages pick out:

* the servant’s titles or identity
* the servant’s tasks
* the means of service

What do you think is the major emphasis in each of the different songs?

Is there a defined outcome from the servant songs?

In English we no longer use you & youse (Dutch: you & jullie, French tu & vous) but Hebrew does. As you look back over the songs, can you pick out the singular and plural uses of you (so much easier if you have a French or Dutch Bible!). Why do you think Isaiah is using both? Who is he referring to?

Looking at Isaiah 53:4-12, what are the key ideas that are repeated and emphasised? Why do you think these are so important? How do they summarise the ideas in the previous poems?

Look at Acts 8:26-35. Philip is asked to explain this passage to the Ethiopian. He will have told him that it was about Jesus. What else would he have said?

Look at Philippians 2: 5 – 11. If you had to explain Isaiah 53:4-12 to someone who was not a Christian, how would you do so?

ALL CREATION

ALL PEOPLE

ALL ISRAEL

TRUE ISRAEL

SERVANT

*As we have gone through Isaiah, as it has picked*

*up the story of the Hebrew Scriptures, we see God’s*

*plan for all creation to live under his rule.*

*Yet humanity refuses to live under his rule.*

*So, Abraham is called and Israel are called to live*

*under and demonstrate God’s rule. Yet the Kings fail.*

*Still there is a remnant, the true Israel who live*

*under God’s rule, but that is not enough.*

*So, one servant will come. This is the suffering*

*servant who will live with complete obedience*

*under the rule of God.*

Isaiah wants us to see that the whole of Human history points to this one moment, when the suffering servant will come to live and die amongst us. If you were to ask random people in the street what the most important moment in human history was, what would they say? How would you explain Isaiah’s viewpoint to them? Why might some Christians struggle to agree with Isaiah?

Whilst it is important to see the big story in Isaiah, it is also worth taking time to meditate on the individual aspects of the story. What do the suffering servant songs tell us of the extent of God’s love for us?

How much does God value each and every one of us? What does this say to how we see ourselves? What does it say about how we should treat others?

Why did Jesus have to suffer as well as die? Why could he not just have been executed swiftly?

How do the servant songs speak into our human experience of futility, anguish and suffering?

Why should we fight injustice in our world, rather than simply waiting for Jesus’ perfect Kingdom to come?

In what ways does our church demonstrate to those that see us that we are living under the rule of God as our true king?

in what ways as Christians are we called to experience suffering as the suffering servant did? In the light of this, how do we pray for those with long term illness or injury?