

The Servant
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Rom 10:16

(NA 27th ed.)

Ἀλλ' οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.
Ἡσαίας γὰρ λέγει,
Κύριε, τίς ἐπίστευσε
τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν;

(ESV)

But they have not all obeyed the gospel.
For Isaiah says,
“Lord, who has believed
what he has heard from us?”

Take note of *pan* for “all.” You may discern “evangel” in “gospel.” In line 2 Isaiah’s name is readily discernable; also see the third singular form of *legō*, “says.” “Lord” in line 3 should be recognizable. The last word there is augmented for the aorist tense from *pisteuō*, “to believe.” In line 4 is *akoē*, “heard.” Think “acoustics.” Hypo-hearing means “obey” in line 1.

There are arguably five Servant Songs in Isaiah. In our verse, Paul cites Isa 53:1, which begins a robust account of the suffering Servant, complete with details like “he was pierced for our transgressions,” “with his wounds we are healed,” he was “silent” in his afflictions, like a “rich man in his death,” his sufferings will “make many to be accounted righteous,” and so on. It is because of this sort of material that Isaiah is sometimes called the fifth gospel. Often in ordination exams, candidates are asked to identify Isaiah’s suffering Servant, and without fail they all rightly name Jesus. The Ethiopian eunuch pondered the same Isaian passage, and Phillip also named Jesus in it (Acts 8:32 – 35).

There is more than one “servant” in Isaiah, however. Isa 20:3 calls Isaiah a servant. In 37:35, David is a servant too. In 41:8 – 10, the quite needy Israel is also a servant. Who else is a servant? In our verse, Paul applies Isa 53:1 to

his own ministry. One verse earlier (Rom 10:15), Paul also cites Isa 52:7, Isaiah's lead-in to his description of the suffering Servant, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news." Paul sees in the Servant Songs not only the suffering Servant himself, but also the later preaching of the gospel, the bringing of the good news—and the Jews largely rejecting it. Paul sees his own ministry as part and parcel of Isaiah's Servant Songs.

Paul also exactly quotes from another Servant Song (Isa 49:8) in 2 Cor 6:2. Here, he again applies it to those who preach the gospel. Who then is Isaiah's Servant of God according to Paul? Certainly Jesus. But sometimes, the "servant" texts also include the evangelist who preaches. Compare for example Acts 13:47 and Isa 49:5 – 6. Who is the light to the nations there? Go on, look!

Now look at 1 Pet 2:21 – 25, which draws on Isaiah 53 to explain that Christ's sufferings are an example for us to follow. We also should commit no sin, be guileless, and not threaten in response to threats. We are to suffer for what is right, like he did. Isaiah's suffering Servant describes not only Jesus' once-for-all suffering and death, but is also our example—and in that sense describes us too.

So Isaiah's description of the Servant, seen in the light of the New Testament, includes you! You are part of his unfolding story. You are exhorted to follow his example. To apply the Servant Songs today is to live and be willing to suffer like Jesus, and to bring his gospel to those who have not yet heard.

Sometimes when I hear candidates for ministry asked who the Servant in Isaiah is, just once I would like to hear one of them say that along with Jesus,

the Servant Songs as read in the New Testament includes Paul or Barnabas, or even the people of God today.

Who has believed it? Many have. Many will. But first, they need to hear. Why not put yourself on the line, like Jesus our Example did, and let them know where you stand? Tell them of what he did for you. Show them what he means to you. Fulfill your role in Isaiah's story of the Servant. Be a light to the nations. Be a servant of God yourself.

Isaiah prophesies that when the anguish of his soul is completed, the Servant who suffered will enjoy the fruit of his labor and will divide the spoils of the earth with many (Isa 53:12). Portions will be shared. This Day still awaits its consummate fulfillment. We are awaiting the Servant's return, when he comes to reward his own. He will look at you then and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your master" (Matt 25:21). Amen, Come Lord Jesus.