



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG73: Transforming Presence (6/6)
Transforming Faith

Isaiah 50:1-11

Home Group Study Notes

22nd July 2012 - Revd Tom Loh



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

When you consider the human race are you optimistic, or pessimistic? Are we basically good, or basically bad?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: In Isaiah 50:1-3 we see that the Lord was displeased with Israel and found that no-one had faith in him. How does sin completely ruin our relationship with God?

2: Verses 4-9 are often referred to as one of the four Servant Songs of Isaiah that are talking about the Messiah. What comparisons can you see between this Servant and Jesus? Why is the Servant so reluctant to stick-up for himself?

3: Verses 10-11. In what way can this faithful Servant be a Saviour for faithless Israel?

This means that instead of having a righteousness of our own that comes through good behaviour and religious rules, we can receive the righteousness of Jesus, simply by faith. This means that his standing before God becomes our standing before God. It is a gift of grace from God. This is the only way sinners can become friends with God. When God the Father looks down from heaven upon us, he no longer sees faithless sinners whom he wants to send away with a certificate of divorce. Rather, he now sees sons and daughters, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and in whom he is well pleased.

This is the gospel; that because of Jesus, faithless sinners can be considered righteous and faithful, not because of anything we have done, but because of the life and death Christ lived on our behalf. He stands as our representative in heaven before the Father, and we can be assured that no matter what, Christ will never forget us, as Isaiah says, "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! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." (Isaiah 49:15-16).

Transforming Faith

Faith is transforming. It fundamentally transforms who we are. When we put our faith in Jesus we are no longer considered condemned sinners, but spotless children of God. Transforming faith is not about trying hard to be good. It is the opposite. It is realising we have no goodness of our own, but only that which comes through faith in Jesus, a goodness that comes from God. When we realise that Jesus is our goodness, we will know the liberating joy that we can at one time be both miserable sinners, yet still pleasing to God. This faith will transform our lives for we will no longer live lives of fear, but true freedom.

**Living God,
Draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
To live your love with generosity and joy, imagination and courage;
For the sake of your world and in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The questions for discussion are among those posed in the Transforming Presence Paper and the answers will inform our on-going discussion. Discuss as many of them in your group as time permits (*It would be helpful if Home Group Leaders feed back any comments to Paul, Tom or Shirley or your churchwardens, Don and Linda*).

Verse 6 demonstrates the extent to which Jesus did not exert his own independence. Rather than casting aside his enemies and trampling them under his feet, Jesus surrendered himself to the power of his enemies. It requires an enormous amount of humility and love to offer your cheek to your enemy when you easily possess the power to overcome them. For sinful humans this is almost impossible. Everyday we justify and defend ourselves before others in all sorts of situations with our words and actions. We cannot bear it when we do not receive the proper respect and honour due to us, and often cannot even let the smallest of injustices against us go. However, Christ was able to suffer injustice and humiliation because he trusted all judgement to his heavenly Father, and not to himself.

In verses 7-9 the Servant of the Lord resolves not to defend himself but let the Lord God vindicate him. This requires enormous faith and restraint. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus resolved to walk the path through the valley of death trusting that his Father would safely deliver him to the other side. Jesus knew that no matter what accusations Pilate, the Jews, the crowds, or the Evil One might throw at him, the approval of the Father would be enough for him to feel secure. Jesus' faith in his Father was absolute. The peer pressures of the world did not threaten his identity. Unlike us, Jesus could actually do the right thing in the hardest of all possible situations because he loved the Lord God with all of his mind, all of his strength, and all of his soul.

The mockery of Christ's execution tested the love and faithfulness of God's servant way beyond anything we could endure. Where we failed in life, Jesus succeeded. In the suffering and death of Jesus, God finally found a human who was worthy of inheriting his Kingdom. God the Father publicly declared his approval of Jesus when he said at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased." In Christ, the worldwide search for faith is over, and the Father has found his chosen one.

The Lord God looks for faith in us, and sees Christ (50:10-11)

In verse 10, we hear the plea of Isaiah for faithless Israel to trust in the Lord and his faithful Servant. There are really only two choices for us who walk in this darkness of this sinful world. Either we go it alone and trust in our own righteousness, or we put our faith in the salvation of the Servant. In verse 11 Isaiah shows us the real folly of going it alone, and refusing the salvation offered to us in Christ. It would be like trying to live in a dark world only by the light of a torch lit from a fire. Though we may get by for a short while, our light will soon burn out and we would be left in utter darkness.

However if we trust in Christ, then he becomes our light and our salvation. This chapter in Isaiah clearly shows that though we are faithless, Christ is faithful. And so by trusting in Jesus we can share in his faithfulness. Through union with Christ, the faithful life that Jesus lived becomes our faithful life. On the cross, Jesus takes upon himself our faithless life and was condemned for it.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is our righteousness (Jer 23:6, Romans 3:21-24, 2 Cor 5:21, Phil 3:9...).

4: In verse 11 Isaiah warns the people about providing their own flaming torches. What do you think he means by this?

5: The New Testament tells us that if we have faith in Jesus then we share in his righteousness [faithfulness](Rom 3:21-24, 5:1-2, Phil 3:7-9). What difference does knowing this make to our daily life?

6: Our Home Group series on Bishop Stephen's theme for the Diocese of *Transforming Presence* has been an interesting one: encouraging and challenging in equal measure, but one that reminds us that our hope is found *In Christ Alone*. What, for you, has been the most memorable aspect of this series of studies? What has encouraged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG73: Transforming Presence (6/6) *Transforming Faith*

Isaiah 50:1-11

Home Group Sermon Notes

22nd July 2012 - Revd Tom Loh

The Lord God looks for faith and finds none (50:1-3)

Every year our nation is glued to the television set as Simon Cowell scours the nation looking for people who have talent (Britain's Got Talent). Thousands of auditions from the four corners of Britain weed out the chaff in order to find the best, most talented, and most worthy to perform before the Queen.

The Bible tells us that God does something similar. He scours the earth looking for anyone who has faith, anyone who pleases him. The only difference is that he searches the earth and finds no-one – Isaiah 50:2, “When I came, why was there no-one? When I called, why was there no-one to answer?” Earlier in Isaiah, the Lord God says “I look but there is no-one – no-one among them to give counsel, no-one to give answer when I ask them. See, they are all false! Their deeds amount to nothing; their images are but wind and confusion,” (41:28-29).

The Bible says that when the Lord God of Heaven looks down upon the earth he optimistically hopes to find something that pleases him, someone who shows promise, someone who actually does love and trust in him. But he finds none.

We live in an age that celebrates the achievements of human civilisation perhaps more than any other period in history. Yet the Lord God sees through all our pretences and our charades, and looks deep into our souls and finds nothing that pleases him. Underlying all our civilised behaviour and human interaction he observes nothing truly pure, honourable, worthy or lovely. Everything he sees is tainted with the filth of human sin.

The Lord tells us through the prophet Isaiah that all of us together have become like one who is unclean, and that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags before the Him (Isaiah 64:6). Thus, even the most noble and honourable acts we can muster as humans are always ruined by the hubris that lurks in the shadows. As Paul the Apostle writes in his letter to the Romans, “When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:21-24).

When Paul examines his own heart and life he sees that even in his best moments, evil and sin are always there to taint it. Each of us knows something of that. A generous act, a kind word, or a self-less gesture is so quickly accompanied by feelings of pride and self-congratulation. It need only be small, but even a little evil corrupts even the purest of hearts. Just as a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.

Why is it important that we recognise such a pessimistic and futile view of the human condition? Because we need to totally squash the idea that we are fundamentally good at heart. The majority of people in today's society tend to feel that despite all our faults, failures and flaws, that we're still fundamentally good people (after all, there's always someone with worse faults than our own, right?). This is a dangerous false hope, that can lead to what the Bible calls self-righteousness – the idea that based upon our own merits we are worthy of God's acceptance and favour. As long as we hold onto the delusion of being good we'll never truly look for a saviour.

The sobering reality is that the living God cannot find even one person with whom he is truly pleased. Worse than this, he is deeply grieved and angered by the evil that resides within every human being, and he longs to rid himself of it. And so we read Isaiah 50:1 that because of sin, the Lord God sent Israel away from himself with a certificate of divorce. This is a huge problem that applies to the whole of the human race, for ever since the Garden of Eden, all of us have been exiled from the Lord God because of our sin.

The Lord God looks for faith and finds His Servant (50:4-9).

After the long and unsuccessful search has been made, the Lord God eventually finds one man who is truly faithful to the Father in heaven. Isaiah 50:4-9, is known as one of the four Servant Songs of Isaiah (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 53:1-11). These passages of Isaiah are all about the coming Messiah. Isaiah 50:4-9 is written in the first person and they prophesy the very words of Christ, the Servant of the Lord. When we read these verses we are getting an insight into the words and thoughts of Jesus seven hundred years before he was born of Mary.

In verse 4 we read that the Servant of the Lord is someone who listens to God the Father and speaks only words that he has been instructed to speak by the Father. Jesus himself says that he only speaks the words the Father has taught him to say (John 8:28, 12:49). Rather than just speaking his own words, Jesus listens to God his Father. How different are we sinful humans who so readily speak words that come from hearts full of pride, anger and boastfulness, (Luke 6:45)?

In verse 5 we read that, unlike Israel, Christ is always obedient to the Father. He is not rebellious towards his loving Father like a moody teenager, but utterly trusts his Father's love like an obedient child. This is quite remarkable considering who Jesus is. He is not some vulnerable and fragile infant, but the eternal, mighty and powerful Word of the Father, who was there at the Father's side before all worlds began. Yet, Jesus refrains from exerting any kind of independence from his Father, but chooses to depend on Him for all things.