

My Servant

Isaiah 42:1-9

I introduced Deuteronomy last week as a book about Jesus, and clearly I could give the same introduction to Isaiah. Clearly, plainly, obviously, the passage we come to today begins a long series of chapters that focus on Jesus as the suffering servant, the Messiah who would lay down his life for the sins of his people. This servant would suffer as the atoning sacrifice for sin. His suffering would satisfy the judgment and justice of a righteous and holy God against those whom Paul describes in Ephesians 2 as by nature, children of wrath.

Let me again put this into context. Isaiah is prophesying in the 8th century BC, beginning about 740 BC, in the year King Uzziah died. He is warning the southern two tribes of Judah about the coming judgment of God, and the first 39 chapters are filled with predictions and descriptions of that judgment. Then in chapter 40, everything changes. It's like the transition from the Old Testament to the New, from the warning of judgment to come, with the promise of the Messiah, to the arrival of that Messiah. That transition to the encouragement of the gospel is how chapter 40 begins, with words so specifically fulfilled by the incarnation of Jesus.

Is. 40:1 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. 2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins." 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Here in chapter 42, the comfort of the gospel is made clear. The way of the Lord is prepared. Jesus is identified. So this afternoon we will look first at,

I. THE IDENTITY OF THE SERVANT.

v.1

Just to demonstrate clearly how this shows us Jesus, we read in,

Mat. 12:15 But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. 16 Yet He warned them not to make Him known, 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 18 "Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He will declare justice to the Gentiles. 19 He will not quarrel nor cry out, Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. 20 A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory; 21 And in His name Gentiles will trust."

So this is Jesus.

A. My servant.

That servant is brought back into focus in Isaiah 52:13, then his work as a suffering servant is explained in the next chapter,

Is. 53:3 "He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by

His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Nowhere is the work of Jesus described more clearly!

This identity of the servant continues into the New Testament, with Peter’s preaching to the Jews in,

Acts 3:25 “You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ 26 To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.”

Then again, in the prayer recorded in,

Acts 4:27 “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

Jesus came to be a servant, not to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for man. Next Isaiah identifies Jesus as,

B. My Chosen One.

My Elect One. The one God the Father chose before the foundation of the world.

At the transfiguration, when Jesus and Moses and Elijah appeared to the disciples, we read these words in,

Luke 9:34 “While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One. Hear Him!”

Thirdly, the servant is identified as,

C. The object of my delight.

The one “in whom My soul delights,” verse 1.

That delight of the Father in his son is described at both the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration I mentioned just a bit ago.

Luke 3:22 “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”

And then, Mat. 17:5 “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

Then a fourth identification given to Jesus the Servant.

D. The one anointed by my Holy Spirit.

v.1 “I have put My Spirit upon Him.”

There you see a clear an unmistakable union between all three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And I just read from Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism when this identification was formally and personally given to Jesus.

Luke 3:22 “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him.”

That’s Jesus! The one whom God the Father calls “My Servant.” Then notice,

II. THE Demeanor OF THE SERVANT.

His actions, but more so, how he behaves. What he does, when he is accomplishing his work of redemption. To put it simply,

A. He submits to suffering.

In other words, he suffers silently. He offers no defense. No objection. No complaint.

v.2 “He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.”

The point is his willing submission to accomplish his father’s will.

Is. 53:7 “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”

This is how Jesus is described for us by Peter.

1 Peter 2:21 “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Isaiah then adds a marvelous description of Jesus in verse 3, building on the idea of Jesus’ own suffering. It was his suffering that made him a sympathetic high priest, teaching him not to cause anyone else to suffer unnecessarily.

B. He demonstrates compassion to those who suffer.

Specifically, v.3

I have come to appreciate these words greatly as I have grown and matured, and as I have suffered at the hands of others whom I would argue have not acted as Jesus did. When Jesus encountered someone wounded, someone grieved by their suffering, someone struggling, he did not add to their distress. Quite to the contrary, when he encountered a bruised reed, he was gentle and kind. He would not break that reed. When he encountered someone who could be described as a smoldering wick, smoking flax about to be extinguished, he didn’t quench the flame that remained.

And we so easily do that. In our fallen sinfulness, we kick people who are down. We blame the victim. We oppress those who are wounded. It is one of the worst traits of fallen humanity. And Jesus would have none of it. He is a tender shepherd, who licks the wounds, as it were, of those who suffer.

As we studied last week from,

Is. 40:11 “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”

Jesus proclaimed the gospel with these words from,

Is. 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has

sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

Jesus heals the brokenhearted. He opens the prison doors to those who are bound. And he says to you and to me,

Mat. 11:28 “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

All of that is for your encouragement,

Heb. 4:15 “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

And as you benefit from that tender mercy, please consider how you can show it to others as well. And realize how easy it is to do the opposite, to cause harm to the most weak and vulnerable. It is godly to be gracious. It is Christ-like to be kind. It is a virtue to offer protection and encouragement to those who are vulnerable. And it is wicked to oppress them!

Well, let’s keep moving. We see in the end of verse 3 and verse 4 that,

C. He will persevere.

He will succeed. He will bring justice.

v.3b-4 “He will bring forth justice for truth. 4 He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth.”

He will accomplish his goal. He will fulfill his father’s will. And the justice of which I preached this morning from Deuteronomy 1 will be established. Surely, that lack of justice is what often afflicts us with a terrible burden. Things are not fair, injustice among men is a primary source of great anguish in the lives of many people. Sometimes to despair. But Jesus will not rest until he finishes what he started. He will make all things right, he will establish justice.

And he himself will not waiver nor be discouraged in that pursuit, as you and I might be.

v.4

That is the work of the suffering servant, the divine messiah, Jesus the son of God. And Isaiah continues then with a description of,

III. THE CALLING OF THE SERVANT.

The tone of the prophecy shifts a bit. The Lord himself now speaks, the Father. He proclaims his own glory, then applies all of that glory to Jesus the Messiah. And that becomes Jesus’ calling.

A. A calling from his Father.

v.5-6a

Verse 5 describes God’s infinite and eternal attributes. His glory. He, and he alone, created the heavens. He spread forth the earth. And he created mankind as well, breathing breath of

life into the dust of the earth. All of that repeats what we studied in,

Is. 40:12 “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, Measured heaven with a span And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales And the hills in a balance? 13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has taught Him? 14 With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?”

Is. 40:21 “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.”

And that great and eternal God the Father is the one who called his son to be the Messiah, the suffering servant, the good shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep.

And finally, that calling is shown to be,

B. A calling to the world.

v.6b-9

Jesus is the covenant, the mediator of the covenant between God and his people. And the great covenant promise made so evident to Abraham was that all the nations would be blest in him. Not just the one nation of Israel, but all the nations of the world. The Gentiles.

That proclamation of the gospel was known even to believers

in the Old Testament. Remember Simeon, who when he saw Jesus found the greatest desires of his life to be fulfilled.

Luke 2:29 “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”

This was the preaching of Paul at Antioch,

Acts 13:44 “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

This has always been the message of the gospel, that Jesus would be the light of the world, the whole world.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Rom. 10:9 “...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between

Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

And that is the gospel I preach to you today. I proclaim to you Jesus as the light of the world.

v.7

And the prophecy of Isaiah 42 then turns to the Lord speaking for himself, proclaiming the gospel himself.

v.8-9

So please take all of these words as the encouragement rightly offered by the gospel. Consider the servant, Jesus the Messiah, and marvel that he would so well and so faithfully shepherd his sheep. And whatever the circumstances of your life, turn to him in faith and repentance, with loving adoration and warm and ardent worship!

1 Peter 2:25 “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”