

A Bruised Reed He Will Not Break (Isaiah 42)

The Identity of the Servant

We come this morning to the first of the four “Servant Songs” found in Isaiah 40–66 (42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). Who is this “Servant of the LORD?” Anyone who has read through the Bible and witnessed how the New Testament picks up these Servant Songs and applies them to Jesus Christ will want to suggest that Jesus is the Servant of the LORD. And you would be correct, so far as your response goes; but this response does not go far enough, for the answer is somewhat more complex. It does not take into account the variety of ways in which Isaiah uses the phrase “My servant” (עבדי) or “servant of the LORD” (עבד יהוה) in this latter section of Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 41:8–9, the LORD appears to be speaking of the redeemed remnant of Israel when He says,

*But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off” (41:8–9)*

This clearly refers to a redeemed people, not the Redeemer. Or, in Isaiah 42:18–19, when the LORD says,

*Hear, you deaf,
and look, you blind, that you may see!
Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as my dedicated one,
or blind as the servant of the LORD? (42:18–19)*

Surely, the LORD is not calling the Messiah blind and deaf. For in Isaiah 42:6, the LORD says He will send His Servant to open the eyes of the blind!

*I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness. (42:6–7)*

The blind cannot give sight to the blind. Isaiah 42:19, then, would appear to refer to faithless Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, the people of the Mosaic covenant, the nation that repeatedly violated its covenant with God. Or, what about in Isaiah 49:5–6, where we read,

*And now the LORD says,
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him—
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—
he says:
“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (49:5–6)*

The LORD tells His Servant that He is sending Him to bring Jacob back to him, to gather Israel to him. And not only Israel, but the Servant of the LORD will be a light for the nations, and His salvation will extend to the ends of the earth. This cannot refer to national/ethnic Israel, for how

could exiled Israel bring back exiled Israel? Nor can it refer to the redeemed remnant, for this clearly speaks to the Redeemer, not the redeemed.¹

So I suggest that the “servant of the LORD” refers to three distinct, yet related groups in Isaiah 40–66, and that we must distinguish between them if we are to understand Isaiah rightly.

- At times, “servant of the LORD” refers to national/ethnic Israel, what I will call old covenant Israel. These are the physical descendants of Abraham, constituted as a nation at Sinai under the Mosaic covenant, a covenant of both blessing and cursing. Israel violated this covenant, thus incurring the curse of conquest and exile.
- At times, “servant of the LORD” refers to spiritual/faithful Israel, what I will call new covenant Israel, also known as the church. These are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, both Jew and Gentile who are in covenant with God through Christ and are heirs of the everlasting blessing.
- At times, “servant of the LORD” refers to Jesus Christ, the true Son of Israel, the Messiah. He is the mediator of the new covenant, and the Redeemer of God’s elect.

And though we must distinguish between these three groups, there is an organic connection between them. Old covenant Israel violates the covenant, and is thus cast away by God, all but a remnant. This was prophesied in Isaiah’s commission in Isaiah 6:

And he said, “Go, and say to this people:

*“‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing but do not perceive.’*

*Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”*

¹ For the preceding section, I have been helped by the discussion in Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, NAC 15b (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 152–56. The conclusions I draw are my own.

*Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"
And he said:
"Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is a desolate waste,
and the LORD removes people far away,
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
And though a tenth remain in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak,
whose stump remains when it is felled."
The holy seed is its stump. (6:9–13)*

Old covenant (national/ethnic) Israel is the people whose hearts are dulled and whose eyes are blinded. They are cut down and burned until all that remains is a single stump, a holy seed. Jesus is that holy seed (Jn 12:24), born out of old covenant Israel. And those to whom He gives life, those who grow out from Him, both Jew and Gentile, are the new covenant Israel. We find the same story in Galatians 3, where Paul explains how it is that believing Gentiles are the heirs of the Abrahamic promise while unbelieving Jews are not.

Now the promises [justification unto everlasting life, the gift of the Spirit, and fellowship with God (3:6–14)] were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. (Gal 3:16)

This what I mean when I say that Jesus is the true Israelite. He is the one, true heir of the Abrahamic promise, not the physical descendants of Abraham. So Paul files down the covenant people from many (old covenant Israel) down to one (Jesus Christ). But then he expands it again to include all who are baptized into Christ through faith.

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. . . . For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:7, 27–29)

Those who are in Christ, who are Abraham's offspring through faith, baptized into Christ by the Spirit, are the new covenant Israel. Thus, in Galatians 3 we find all three “servants of the LORD” represented—old covenant Israel (to whom the promise was *not* made [3:16–18]), Jesus Christ (to whom the promise *was* made [3:16]), and new covenant Israel (those who receive the promise in Christ [3:7, 27–29]).

This is the way I believe the servant passages function in Isaiah. We will come across passages that speak of the servant(s) of the LORD as blind and disobedient—these refer to old covenant Israel. We will come across passages that speak of the servant(s) of the LORD as a redeemed, multiethnic, believing people—these refer to new covenant Israel, the church. And we will come across passages that refer to a single, central, messianic figure, the Servant of the LORD—these refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Israelite, the Redeemer of God's elect. With these identities established, let's turn to Isaiah 42, in which we find the first of four Servant Songs—beautiful, glorious descriptions of the redeeming work of *the* Servant of the LORD, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Character of the Servant (42:1–4)

You will note that in the outline, sometimes “servant” is plural (“servants”) and sometimes singular (“servant”). Pay attention to the difference, for I think we find all three of the aforementioned groups represented, although only two of them are referred to explicitly as “my servant” (vv. 1, 19) or “the servant of the LORD” (v. 19). But in vv. 1–9, the servant of the LORD is clearly the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we had any doubts, the NT puts those doubts to rest because Matthew 12:18–20 quotes vv. 1–3 and explicitly says they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This first of the Servant Songs may be divided into two sections: the *character* of the Servant (vv. 1–4), and the *commission* of the Servant (vv. 5–9). In the first, the LORD speaks *about* His Servant, inviting us to behold His Servant and primarily telling us what His servant is

like; while in the second, the LORD speaks *to* His servant, telling Him what His servant is to do.²

*Behold, my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be discouraged
till he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his law. (42:1–4)*

The command that stands at the head of this passage is to “behold” (יִהְיֶה) the LORD’s Servant.³ What are we to behold? What does the LORD want us to see in Him? The LORD highlights four defining characteristics.

First, He is God’s eternally beloved Servant—“whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights” (v. 1a). These three words indicate an extremely intimate, affectionate relationship between God and His Servant. But when did this relationship begin? When did the LORD choose His Servant? Having established that the Servant is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternally-begotten Son of God (e.g. Mt 12:17–21), when did God the Father determine to send God the Son to be the Redeemer of His elect? Peter says it was “before the foundation of the world”:⁴

² J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 318.

³ Motyer, 319.

⁴ Andrew M. Davis, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Isaiah* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 244.

He was foreknown [chosen] before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Pt 1:20–21)

For those looking for a theological category, this election of the eternally-begotten, eternally-beloved Son to be the Servant transpired in the pretemporal covenant of redemption, the “eternal covenant” (Heb 13:20) in which God the Father covenanted to save a people by a mediator, God the Son covenanted to accomplish their redemption by becoming that mediator, and God the Spirit covenanted to apply that work of redemption to the elect by giving them life and bringing them to faith. Verse 1, in other words, takes us back before the creation of the world into the council of the eternal Trinity, in which the Father chose to redeem His people through the service of His eternally-beloved, eternally-begotten Son. The Servant of the LORD is none other than the Son of God become the Son of Man. This eternal upholding, eternal election, eternal delight of God the Father in God the Son then went public at Jesus’ baptism.

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Mt 3:16–17)

Do you see how Jesus’ baptism was the public outworking of Isaiah 42:1–2? In eternity past, God the Father chose His Servant, His Son, in whom He eternally delighted; in eternity past, God the Son accepted the commission, and agreed to become the Redeemer of God’s elect. Then, in time, in AD 27 to be precise, that eternal election was made visible in Jesus’ baptism—“This is my beloved Son, in whom I well pleased.” *This is my Servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.* And in receiving baptism, Jesus was publicly accepting His messianic commission—“Behold, I come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book” (Heb 10:7 [Ps 40:8]). This takes us to the second characteristic of the Servant...

Second, He is God’s anointed and empowered Servant—“I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring justice to the nations.” Again, this was publicly fulfilled in Jesus’ baptism, in which the Spirit descended like a dove and rested upon Him. What is going on there? I think the best

way to understand the significance of this event is to see it as God's public anointing of Jesus to fulfill the three-fold messianic office of prophet, priest, and king. Recognition of the three-fold office (*munus triplex*) is one of the greatest contributions of Reformation theology, particularly that of John Calvin.⁵ There were three anointed offices in Old Testament Israel:

- The *prophet* spoke God's word to God's people, thus revealing the will of God to the people of God.
- The *priest* represented the people before God by making sacrifices and intercession.
- The *king* ruled and reigned over God's people, by conquering God's enemies and defending and protecting God's people.

Each of these offices were anointed with oil as a visible sign of God's promise to provide them with the Holy Spirit to empower them to perform their ministry. Thus, when God anointed His incarnate Son with the Holy Spirit on the occasion of His baptism, when He put His Spirit upon His Servant, He was signifying to His people that in the Messiah, in the Servant of the LORD, all three offices find their fulfillment.

- Jesus is the perfect and final prophet, revealing the will of God to the people of God.

No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten [μονογενὴς] God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known [“revealed him” — ἐξηγήσατο]. (Jn 1:18)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb 1:1–2)

The Baptist Catechism states, “Christ executes the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation” (Q. 27).

- Jesus is the perfect and final priest. In fact, Jesus is both priest and sacrifice, offering Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice of atonement and interceding for us as our great high priest.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008; orig. 1559), 2.15.1–6.

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Heb 2:17)

... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb 9:14)

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25)

Again, the Catechism states, “Christ executes the office of a priest in His once offering up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us” (Q. 28).

- Jesus is the perfect and final king, the everlasting Son of David.

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Lk 1:32–33)

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (1 Cor 15:25)

Finally, the Catechism states, “Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies” (Q. 28).

I am not suggesting that those who were present to witness Jesus’ baptism understood all this; I suspect they were too terrified by the voice from heaven to comprehend much at all (Lk 3:22). I am suggesting that this is the significance of Jesus’ baptism and endowment with the Spirit, which was understood later, in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection (Lk 24:45).

Third, He is God’s humble and gentle Servant—“He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick

he will not quench.” Verse 2 speaks to Jesus’ humility, a trait that marked His ministry from His incarnation to His resurrection. He was not born into wealth or power; rather, he was born in a stable, into a family of poor peasants. He routinely rejected the spotlight (cf. Jn 6:15), frequently commanding those He healed and liberated to say nothing of what He had done (e.g. Mk 1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). His kingdom did not come through violent conquest or coercive power or fascist propaganda, the way tyrants attempt to establish their regimes. Andrew Davis comments,

[H]e will not cry out or shout or lift up his voice in the streets. This refers to the harsh sound of tyranny, like a Nazi warrior yelling, “Schnell! Schnell!” to the terrorized citizens of a newly conquered city, commanding them to run onto a waiting train to a concentration camp. Or the strident sounds of a rabble-rousing dissident, who stands on a wall to harangue the populace with ideology demanding revolution. Jesus established his kingdom by speaking words of peace and truth to brokenhearted sinners.⁶

Verse 3 speaks to His compassion and the gentle way He deals with the broken and contrite. A bruised reed is one that has been broken and is hanging on by a slender thread; a smoldering wick is one that has burned down to the wax and is about to be extinguished. The Servant will be gentle with such weak and broken sinners. To the paralytic He said, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven” (Mt 9:2). To the woman with the issue of blood, who screwed up her courage to touch just the hem of His garment, He said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well” (Mt 9:22).⁷ To the prostitute who, despite her shame, snuck into His presence while He reclined at table with Simon the Pharisee, weeping profusely, wetting His feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair, kissing his feet and anointing them with oil, Jesus honored her in the presence of the proud Pharisee and said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Lk 7:48, 50). To the adulterous woman about to be stoned, Jesus stood between the woman and her accusers, telling them that if they were without sin, only then could they cast their stone. After they had all dropped their stones and departed, Jesus turned to her and said,

⁶ Davis, 245. Motyer writes, “If a distinction is intended in the three verbs, *shout* (שָׁעַק, ‘to shriek’) suggests that which startles; *cry out* (נָשָׂא, ‘raise [one’s voice]’) indicates an attempt to dominate, to shout others down; and *raise his voice* (לִישָׁמִיעַ קוֹלָיו, ‘make his voice heard’) maybe suggests self-advertisement. But these facets should not be pressed; the intention is to create a cumulative emphasis on a quiet, unaggressive, unthreatening ministry”; Motyer, 320.

⁷ Davis, 245.

“Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more” (Jn 8:11).⁸ We will return to v. 3 at the conclusion of this sermon.

Fourth, He is God’s resilient and persevering Servant. “[H]e will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.” He will persevere to the end; He will see the mission accomplished. He will not stumble, He will not stop until He sees His kingdom established and He can triumphantly cry out, “It is finished!” (Jn 19:30). To “bring forth justice to the nations,” to “establish justice in the earth,” to bring “his law” to the coastlands all refer to the establishment of His kingdom. His kingdom is a kingdom of justice, a kingdom of righteousness, where the law of Christ reigns. This kingdom was inaugurated at Christ’s first advent, in His life, death, and resurrection; it will be consummated at Christ’s second coming, when He returns in salvation for His people and in judgment upon His enemies; and in between those two advents, His church—which is an embassy of His kingdom upon the earth—takes His law to the coastlands when we go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded (Mt 28:18–20).

The Commission of the Servant (42:5–9)

In vv. 5–9 Isaiah turns from the *character* of the Servant to His *commission*; God ceases to speak *about* His Servant and instead speaks directly *to* His Servant.

*Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people on it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;*

⁸ I am aware that this passage (Jn 7:53–8:11) is likely not original to John’s Gospel. My own position is that it is likely historical, an authentic part of the apostolic tradition that later scribes added to the Gospel in order to preserve it. See Timothy Haupt, “No Condemnation Now I Dread (John 7:53–8:11).”

*I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to carved idols.
Behold, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth
I tell you of them.” (42:5–9)*

I think we can discern in these verses five primary tasks for which the LORD commissions His Servant.

First, the Servant of the LORD is to reconcile a fallen creation to its Creator. I think this is the reason the LORD identifies Himself as the one “who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it” (v. 5).⁹ Earlier, in Isaiah 40:12ff, the LORD pointed to His wisdom, power, and faithfulness revealed in creation to assure His people that He was willing and able to keep His promise. I think the doctrine of creation works in the same way here, only now applied to all peoples (the focus of Isaiah 42 is on the “nations” (vv. 1, 6, 10) and the “coastlands” (vv. 3, 10, 12) and the “end of the earth” (v. 10). The idea is this—Is the God who created and sustains the earth and its peoples, going to leave them in spiritual blindness and captivity, accursed and alienated from Himself? No! He will bring His salvation to the nations;

⁹ In a delightful paragraph, Motyer notes that “the four participles, *created, stretched, spread* and *gives*, describe the fourfold, unchanging relationship between the Lord and the created order. He exercises an ongoing creative activity. . . . Life (*breath*; Gn 2:7) is not the product of a self-existing evolutionary surge but the direct act of the Creator; it is not held in perpetuity following an initial divine donation but enjoyed by courtesy of his continuing ‘giving’”; Motyer, 321–22.

He will reconcile all nations to Himself.¹⁰ The same truth will be reiterated in the second of the Servant Songs:

*“it is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (49:6)*

The Servant will reverse the curse of Babel and bring the nations back to their Creator and God.

Second, the Servant of the LORD is to mediate a new covenant between God and sinners. “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.” Notice closely the language—the Servant will not merely renew the covenant, or proclaim the covenant, He will *be* the covenant. He will be the means by which sinners are reconciled to their God.¹¹ We are reminded of the words of Christ at the Last Supper:

*“... this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.”
(Mt 26:28)*

“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Lk 22:20)

Here we stand at the center of the gospel. So if you found your way here this morning and you are not a Christian but are wondering what Christianity is all about, here it is. Here is its central message. As sinners (and that includes everyone in this room [Rom 3:10–12, 23]), we faced two insurmountable problems that alienated us from God—we lacked the righteousness that merits

¹⁰ “In 40:12ff. the doctrine of the Lord as Creator was meant for the comfort of Zion: Can such a God, who originates, maintains, controls and directs all things (37:16), forget his people or renege on his promises? The same doctrine is now turned towards the world. Its implication is to raise a question. If he is the universal life-giver, has he plans for the world or only for the chosen few?” Motyer, 321.

¹¹ “These are amazing words, for Jesus doesn’t merely *proclaim* a new covenant to Israel and to the world—he *is* the new covenant”; Davis, 246. “The servant will *be* a covenant, i.e. the means through whom people will come into a covenantal relation with the Lord”; Motyer, 322.

the blessing of God's favor, and our sin incurred the curse of God's wrath. In becoming a covenant for us—that is, in mediating a covenant between God and sinners—Christ conquered both of these problems. In His Person and in His life He possessed and performed the righteousness that merits God's blessing (“I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you”)—He loved God supremely and others sincerely. And in His death on the cross, He bore our sin and guilt, offering Himself to God in atonement and perfectly satisfying the demands of God's justice. Thus, whenever a sinner is united to Christ by the Spirit through faith, he is united to Christ's blood and righteousness and thus receives the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life and fellowship with God.

But though Jesus is “a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,” the nations are blind to His glory, and the people are in bondage to their sin. Therefore, it takes more than the blood and righteousness of Christ to reconcile sinners to God. The redemption accomplished *for* sinners must be applied *to* sinners. So, thirdly, the Servant of the LORD is to gather sinners into this new covenant with God—“to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” For this purpose, Christ rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sent forth His Word and Spirit into the world. Through the preaching of the word of Christ and by the power of the Spirit of Christ, Jesus opens eyes that are blind and they see all-satisfying glory of God, they lay down their idols, and they receive from Christ by faith all that He is for them—His blood that atones for their sin, His righteousness that merits the everlasting inheritance, and His life that never ends. Through the preaching of the word of Christ and by the power of the Spirit of Christ, Jesus brings out of the dungeon, out of the dark prison of sin, those in bondage to evil desires and He sets them free to walk in the light. When Charles Wesley reflected upon this powerful, regenerating work of Christ in his own life, he put it into verse:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown through Christ my own!

Fourth, in this way the Servant brings glory to the LORD, the one, true and living God—
“I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.”
When Jesus opens the eyes of the blind, when He sets the captives free, when they enter into
covenant with God through faith in Christ, receiving and resting in Christ alone for redemption,
they cast away their idols and give all glory and praise to the triune God. They become
worshippers of God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).

Finally, the Servant is to fulfill the Scriptures—“Behold, the former things have come to
pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.” How many times
in the course of Jesus’ ministry did He explain His actions by saying, “So that the Scripture may
be fulfilled?” How many times do the Gospel writers explain the events of Jesus’ life, death, and
resurrection in the same way? Why? Why did God foretell all these events, rather than just doing
them? It goes back to Isaiah 41, where God challenged the nations to bring forth their idols and
put them to the test. Can they prophesy future events, much less bring them to pass? No, they
cannot, for they are no gods; they are nothing, less than nothing. But the LORD can and does
ordain the future and bring it to pass. He predicts the future because He controls the future, and
He controls the future because He is the first and the last, the one, true, living and eternal God.¹²

The Worship of the Servant (42:10–12)

The command at the head of vv. 1–9 was, “Behold my servant.” We have attempted to do
just that this morning. We have spent the past half hour beholding Jesus. Now what is the
appropriate response to what we have seen? It is worship. So we find a new command at the
head of vv. 10–17: “Sing!”

¹² “Fulfilled prophecy gives the gospel message tremendous credibility”; Davis, 246.

*Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise from the end of the earth,
you who go down to the sea, and all that fills it,
the coastlands and their inhabitants.
Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice,
the villages that Kedar inhabits;
let the habitants of Sela sing for joy,
let them shout from the top of the mountains.
Let them give glory to the LORD,
and declare his praise in the coastlands. (42:10–12)*

There are two main points of emphasis in these verses.

- First, the praise is *extensive*—those who dwell in ends of the earth, those who sail upon the sea, those who inhabit the coastlands, those who live in the desert... they are all worshipping the God of Israel. It is not surprising, then, that when John sees a vision of the worshipping multitude in Revelation 5 and 7 that not one tribe, tongue, people, or nation is missing. Truly, God will receive worship from the ends of the earth.
- Second, the grace of God will conquer even His most bitter enemies. The villages of Kedar were the descendants of Ishmael; the habitants of Sela were the Edomites. These, too, will shout God's praise from the desert floors and the tops of the mountains.¹³ Worship is inherent in the redeemed soul. Fire is hot, water is wet, and saints sing... loudly and with great joy. If they don't sing, they're not saints.

The Conquest of the Servant (42:13–17)

It is not immediately apparent how the next section fits with the theme, but I think vv. 13–17 explain how the LORD created the situation described in vv. 10–12. How did the LORD restore all nations to their proper role of worshipping Him and giving Him glory? The answer given in vv. 13–17 is that He conquered the peoples like a warrior. Some He conquers with grace; some He conquers in wrath.

¹³ Davis, 247; Motyer, 324.

*The LORD goes out like a mighty man,
like a man of war he stirs up his zeal;
he cries out, he shouts aloud,
he shows himself mighty against his foes. (42:13)*

“Warrior” (גבור) and “man of war” (איש מלחמות) carry the connotation of a violent conquest. Even the next verse, with its imagery of childbirth, connotes that something is about to violently break through.

*For a long time I have held my peace;
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
I will gasp and pant. (42:14)*

But as we continue, we see that the LORD’s conquest actually takes two forms—some He gently saves like a guide leading the blind, while others—who trust in idols—He crushes and puts to shame. He conquers some with grace, and He conquers some with wrath. But He conquers all.

*I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up the pools.
And I will lead the blind in a way they do not know,
in paths that they have not known I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I do,
and I do not forsake them.
[But] They are turned back and utterly put to shame,
who trust in carved idols,
who say to metal images,
“You are our gods.” (42:13–17)*

I take these verses to refer to the ministry of the Servant of the LORD, a ministry of both salvation and judgment, inaugurated in His first advent and consummated in His second.¹⁴

The Rejection of the Servants (42:18–25)

Before we return to v. 3 to conclude the sermon, let's take a moment and look at vv. 18–25, which describe the “servant of the LORD”—now referring to old covenant Israel—as a blind, deaf, and disobedient people who have rejected their God.

*Hear, you deaf,
and look, you blind, that you may see!
Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as my dedicated one,
or blind as the servant of the LORD?
He sees many things, but does not observe them;
his ears are open, but he does not hear.
The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake,
to magnify his law and make it glorious.
But this is a people plundered and looted;
they are all of them trapped in holes
and hidden in prisons;
they have become plunder with none to rescue,
spoil with none to say, “Restore!”
Who among you will give ear to this,
will attend and listen for the time to come?
Who gave up Jacob to the looter,
and Israel to the plunderers?
Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned,*

¹⁴ “According to verse 7, ministry to *the blind* was the work of the servant; now it is the Lord himself. This is the same ambivalence as between the Messianic king and the Lord in chapters 1–37. The solution of the ambivalence will be the same also as when Isaiah made Lord and king one in deity (e.g. 9:6<7>)”; Motyer, 324–25.

*in whose ways they would not walk,
and whose law they would not obey?
So he poured out on him the heat of his anger
and the might of battle;
it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand
it burned him up, but he did not take it to heart. (42:18–25)*

Here Isaiah speaks to Jerusalem and to Judah in his own day, which was experiencing a precipitous moral and religious decline after the deliverance from Sennacherib and Assyrians; they were rapidly descending into idolatry and wickedness under the wicked reign of Manasseh.¹⁵ Israel had been called by God to be His servant and messenger, a kingdom of priests among the nations (Ex 19:6); but they were as blind and deaf as the nations that surrounded them (vv. 18–20). The LORD had magnified his law and made it glorious in Israel (v. 21), but they had rejected it. So the LORD gave them over to be plundered and looted, imprisoned and despoiled (vv. 22–23). Isaiah invites future generations—especially those in exile in Babylon—to consider that it was their sin that brought this destruction upon them, and to repent.

Behold and Sing

The application of Isaiah 42 is found in the first word of vv. 1 and 10: behold and sing. Behold the Servant of the LORD, who is:

- The eternally-beloved, eternally-begotten Son of God become the Son of Man.
- The anointed and empowered Prophet, Priest, and King.
- The humble and gentle Savior.
- The resilient and persevering Messiah, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down upon His throne at the right hand of God.

Behold the Servant of the LORD, who:

- Reconciled a fallen creation to its Creator.
- Mediated a new covenant between God and sinners.
- Gathered sinners into this new covenant through the regenerating work of His Spirit.
- Brings glory to the LORD by turning sinners into worshipers of the one true God.

¹⁵ Davis, 247–48.

- Does it all in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

This is the Servant of the LORD. Behold Him! And once you have beheld Him, worship Him. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth (42:10). This we will do in just a few moments.

But before I conclude, I want to return to v. 3, for the glory of God is particularly manifest in his humility and gentleness toward sinners.

*A bruised reed he will not break,
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.
he will faithfully bring forth justice. (42:3)*

Is that you this morning? Are you a bruised reed, a faintly burning wick? Has the Spirit revealed to your soul something of the depths of your sin, such that you feel yourself beyond hope of forgiveness? Do you fear that you have spurned Christ's mercy and sinned away the day of grace? Do you cry out heaven in sorrow but hear only silence? Take comfort in this text, beloved; it is for you. This is solid grace on which you may take your stand. Cling to Christ, for He will not break you. Cling to Christ, for He will not quench you. This is the same promise found in Psalm 51:17:

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Ps 51:17)*

Is your heart broken and contrite? God will not despise you. Keep calling on His name; keep crying out for mercy. He will hear; He will answer; He will not break you; He will not quench you; He will not despise you. Take your stand today on the promise of mercy from a humble and gentle Savior who says,

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden [bruised reeds and faintly burning wicks], and I will give you rest [I will not break you; I will not quench you]. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Mt 11:28–30)