



Lesson 6 April 4th, 2020

God's Just Servant

Study Scripture – Isaiah 42:1-9

Background Scripture – Isaiah 41-42

Key Verse:

*“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one in whom my soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth Justice to the nations.”*

Isaiah 42:1

INTRODUCTION

Our Lesson is a tremendous reminder of the promises of God and how He has acted faithfully to fulfill these promises to the fathers in the portrayal of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are therefore now dealing with the Covenant and how God went about fulfilling the terms of the Covenant with Israel and the nations.

The background of course lays in the fact that as Jesus said, **Salvation is of the Jews**, and therefore we should be aware that Israel was chosen by God to be the instrument through which the light of God would be brought to the entire world. Israel was not chosen because of their merit before God which involve the idea that they were blessed because they were good. Many in the nation fed into that rather sad state of belief. Similarly many believers today forget that they still possess the old nature, and that they are called by God not because they are good but because God chose to love them and call them by the work of the Holy Spirit even when they were enemies of God.

Remember therefore that God has chosen us so that we might see His grace and commit ourselves to Him and remain in God's will as the means of reaching others.

In order to understand what Isaiah communicated to Israel we must look briefly at the situation at that time. We will then be able to apply the lessons to this situation in our world.

In the previous chapter 41 God noted the political, economic, and military arrangements on the face of the earth. The different regimes then as now had tried to obtain and keep power to make societies in the way that they preferred

The world was out of control at every level and the different figures of power and authority had tried to set things in the way that they wished. This was a turbulent world of violence, inequality, evil, and dehumanizing policies of state. In this time of strife, poverty, and

hopelessness, the people of Israel had to struggle with their identity as a people for they knew that they were the Covenant people but sometimes things were good and sometimes they were bad.

The prophet Isaiah had told the nation that there was one Sovereign God, namely Yahweh. He was unimaginably powerful .He created the seas and He had held the seas in the hollow of His hands indicating that the mighty and large seas were just one little swallow as far as God was concerned. This figure and other figures of speech expressed His greatness.

Yahweh had told the nations to keep silence before Him as He put them in the Law Courts for them to answer charges against them. The pagans had made idols of wood and stone to worship them. They thought that these would protect them. But that was pretty stupid. But God had regarded Israel as His servant and told them they were not to fear though they were nothing more than a worm. God would not forsake them.

The question therefore was what God would do in these turbulent times when warlords and troops got their power out of the weapons and armies they had.

The prophet had said in chapter 41 God looked all over the Earth and asked these powerful leaders to offer solutions to the problem that faced the world and its suffering humanity for they had simply been unable to do anything but rip the world and its people apart. But this powerful creator God exists and speaks, describing Himself as follows:

***To whom then will you liken Me,
or to whom shall I be equal? says the Holy O.
Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these things,
Who brings out their host by number,
He calls them all by name,
By the greatness of His might
And the strength of His power;
Not one is missing.***

Chapter 40:28 tells us He is everlasting God, the Lord. He does not faint nor is weary and His understanding is unsearchable. The world therefore must be silent before Him for they are on trial. The leaders have failed to bring justice and righteousness and to help the people. So in chapter 41:28 God said to all leaders they were failures. So God speaks through the prophet that He had evaluated the leaders on the Earth and so He had to act as He wanted. God lamented:

***“For I looked, and there was no man,
I looked among them, but there was no Counsellor.
Who, when I asked of them, could answer a word.
Indeed they are all worthless,
Their works are nothing,
Their molded images are wind and confusion”.***



Our Lesson therefore looks at what God had to do to save the world. The prophet therefore introduces in this chapter the first of the four ‘Servant Songs’ in Isaiah, passages that talk about a Servant to whom the Lord God gives a critical mission.

In all of the passages that look at this Servant figure, it is clear that God feels tremendous compassion for people and though there is an emphasis on the justice, which the Servant brings, this justice from God really resembles compassion.

God intends apparently to do a great work for the benefit of the nation of Israel, but He also intends to benefit the entire world. This Servant figure is the instrument to accomplish the great work of rescue by God.

The historical context of Isaiah’s prophecy is a period of Assyrian ascendancy. The nation of Judah is wealthy and powerful and has many friends, but spiritually it is pretty low. There is a great deal of oppression and injustice and Isaiah prophesied that because of the bad situation judgment was certainly coming. God will use the Assyrians to chasten the people, but He will also use the Babylonians to inflict even more serious punishment, when the behaviour of the people continued to offend Him.

Isaiah condemned the people, but he also comforted them, by preparing them for the exile that was coming sometime in future.

The book of Isaiah had been alternating condemnation with comfort, and quite early began to refer to a powerful figure, someone who however remained partially hidden, a shadowy figure, that could do great things for Israel and the entire world. In chapter 40 the figure began to emerge somewhat more clearly, appearing as a Shepherd, but first he would have a forerunner that would prepare the way for him.

First God called the pagan nations both from the East (Mesopotamia), and from the West (around the Mediterranean area), to come to a Law Court to present their case and to hear Him present His case, and render judgment. In this Law Court God is Judge, prosecuting Attorney and jury.

God asked them if they were able to make the wrong things right and to bring justice to the world. They could not answer the charges, but quite fearful encouraged each other to “*be strong*”. They then turned to the maker of idols, asking him to make gods for them. (41:5-8).

God then turned to Israel and told them that they were different from the pagans and did not have to fear, since supernatural provision had been made to save and to vindicate them. God then called on the Gentile nations to present their case, their “strong arguments”, to bring their idols in to show what they could do.

God then laughed at the impotent idols that could not predict future, could not meet the needs of anyone, and who could not help in the event of an invasions came. Those that chose idols were an “abomination”.



That was God's summary of those that go into rebellion and submit themselves to idols. God challenged the idols in verses 21-22, where he described them in sarcastic language and was very contemptuous of idols and those that worshipped them. God made clear that the idols do a deadly thing to those that worshipped them. They could do nothing useful.

Note the warning that is given to us when we turn away from God and trust in the gods of this world, the ambition, fame, wealth, pleasure, "the system" and the powers that be. These gods are nothing and are impotent. If we follow the idols of the world, we will live empty and meaningless lives. The idols that men have will deliver only empty wind. The advice is, do not follow delusions or be captivated by illusions.

Remember those that worship other gods do so in vain and there is a massive difference between them and those that worship the true God. God takes away all fears and gives us everything, always acting to support his people and controlling all of history for the benefit of his people.

In the last verses of Isaiah 41 God called on the nations to "*Behold*" that the idols were worthless. Now He immediately calls on the nations to "*Behold*" the Servant of the Lord.

Note that in the Old Testament Scripture, Jesus is pictured in four ways. He is pictured as King, the King of Israel, and of course Israel loved that picture, for it spoke of a Mighty Warrior, a triumphant, great, invincible Redeemer who would move against the enemy nations and subdue them.

The Scriptures also spoke of Messiah as the Servant, and a suffering Servant. This confused the people of Israel tremendously and they struggled to reconcile both pictures. They declined to accept that Joseph was a pretty clear picture of the Messiah, for he suffered first and then was elevated to glory. Instead some of the Rabbis talked of two Messiahs, one called "Messiah Ben-Joseph", the suffering One, and the other "Messiah Ben-David", the kingly One.

Then there is the other portrait of a Messiah coming as Man, born of a virgin, living in Bethlehem and interacting with men through the stages of babyhood, childhood, youth, and manhood.

Then associated with this was the picture, which presented Him as God, the Everlasting One.

So the prophecies pictured the Messiah as King, Servant, Man, and God, the same way Jesus Christ is presented in the Gospels.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. The nations are called to examine this Servant closely. This is a Servant, a bondsman, and a slave as you are aware, is one that is owned by another.



The first critically important thing therefore that is said of the 'one' appointed to this most difficult task was that he was a servant.

This was very contrary to the preferred status of the nations of the world. This option could be contrasted with all the other options.

God had just before this asked the nations of the world to come to the law Court and offer their solutions to the problems of mankind, but all they had to offer was idolatry, hot air, and empty wind, absolutely nothing of substance. They could not help anyone out of the difficult circumstances of life.

But now, God called on them to pay strict attention to His option. So He said, "*Behold my Servant*".

The title used for God here is no ordinary title, but it is the Almighty God. This is the absolute Sovereign of the universe, who dwells in the light that no one can approach, the Creator God, the Eternal Yahweh God.

One writer states:

"Yahweh reveals three characteristics of the servant'
first Yahweh upholds (*tamak*) the servant. The Hebrew word *tamak* means to grasp, to hold, or to support. Yahweh holds his servant in an affectionate embrace -- support him-gives him what he needs to succeed in his Godly endeavours.
Second, Yahweh has chosen the servant, so the servant is responding to Yahweh's initiative rather than acting on his own.
Third, Yahweh delights in the servant. This servant is not a mere two in Yahweh's hands, but is someone who brings joy to Yahweh's soul or heart".

God, protected and led Him. Clearly the Servant has necessarily depended on God the heavenly Father for direction, support and strength in everything that He did; for only by totally depending on God in His ministry would He be effective. So God the Father strengthened Him and supported Him.

He was God's Servant, obviously chosen not for exclusive privilege, after all he was a Servant, but for a specific task, to be a blessing to others. He was elected of God, and clearly not like others.

A Servant not only learns obedience to the will of his Lord, but he always does that will and advances the interest of God.

This servant was chosen by God as the best person for the job. He did not push himself into the service because of ambition but was called of God. So God had confidence in Him and trusted Him.

God now declared His deep love, affection and admiration for His Servant. His soul delighted in this Servant. He was satisfied with Him.



To qualify Him for His office, God placed His Spirit upon Him, filling Him, surrounding Him and totally covering Him with His Holy Spirit. The Servant had the Power of the Holy Spirit.

It is amazing that this One who comes is a bond slave, a menial labourer who is a slave to another, working totally as his Master wished. He had no rights of His own but was powerless and helpless, living in full obedience to His God.

This is not simple, for Isaiah in Chapter 40 had introduced a strong Shepherd King, a powerful but gentle and tender person, who completely controlled the world and every individual in it. But now, this figure is described as a Servant.

The question of who this Servant is, is an important one, and it is to be noted that the Jews, in almost all their translations from Hebrew and Aramaic in Verse one had inserted the word Messiah between the third and fourth words, so that it read, “ Behold, My Servant, Messiah”. But many Jewish commentators hold the position that this Servant referred to the nation of Israel, basing their view on passages such as chapter 41:9, other passages which views the tiny believing remnant as the Servant and passages such as 42:19 which even portrays the unbelieving nation as the ‘Servant of the Lord’.

The phrase, ‘the Servant’, could also focus on one person, Messiah, who is the quintessential Israelite. We should never forget the unbreakable and most close connection between the nation of Israel with its Messiah, for God sees them as one. “Salvation”, Jesus said, “*is of the Jews*”, and He could bring salvation to the world because He was a Jew. This of course is a very offensive concept to Gentiles, and has brought regrettable hostility and diabolical hatred against Jews. But those who approach the people of God in this way will face a tragic end.

Note that the descriptions of the Messiah match Jesus Christ of Nazareth perfectly. It is only blindness of an extreme sort that could stop the people of Israel from seeing this fact. So we pray that God will take the veil from their eyes.

This Messiah will not only bring light to the people of Israel, but He will bring justice to the nations of the world, the pagans. Messiah is the answer to the idolatry, waywardness, and rebellion of Israel, as well as to the incredibly foolish idolatry of the ignorant the ***goyim***, **Gentiles**.

Verse 2. The task of bringing justice to the nations would obviously not be one without opposition and He would patiently “*endure the contradiction of sinners against himself*”. He would not go about making a great deal of noise about His accomplishments and try to build a great reputation and seek attention. He would work in obscurity. He would be unassuming.

Since the Servant Messiah is introducing a spiritual kingdom He does not use carnal weapons. He does not have to be pompous and attention seeking. His approach is very different from that of the world.



It is interesting to note what the word 'justice' means, and what the word 'righteousness' means, for they are always found together in the Old Testament Scriptures.

"Righteousness" means to bring something in line with a standard or a norm. When scales were accurate they were called "righteous weights". Evergreen trees were often described as trees of righteousness, because they did not drop their leaves, but always looked beautiful and in good shape all year-round.

Of course, because of the attractiveness of these trees, the foolish pagans began to worship them and we have adopted some of that by bringing that kind of tree into our homes at certain times of year, associating it with the birth of Jesus. But we know that the times normally celebrated as the birth of Jesus is all wrong anyway, and originated in paganism.

The idea of righteousness really means bringing something into right standard, into conformity with what it ought to be. The standard in Scripture is of course the character of God. "Righteousness" therefore means bringing something into conformity with the character of God.

Justice is the application of righteousness. It is the practical out-working of righteousness, bringing about the state of righteousness, whether in a nation or in an individual.

So the Servant of the Lord will bring about justice in the world, meaning that He will establish everything according to a right standard, just as they ought to be. In doing that He will quietly follow the will of His Master, not demanding recognition or promoting Himself.

The Servant Messiah knew that He was empowered by the Spirit. He knew His God loved Him and had specifically chosen Him. So He could do His work quietly and steadily, because He knew that He was loved, approved of and was the delight of His Father.

Note that we are assured that the Father loves and accepts us and therefore we can always continue steadfast in what we are doing when we serve God,

When people reject us, when they are not delighted that we do the work of God, do not appreciate our work for God, we will not stumble under the rejection of men. For we know that we have the Spirit and demonstrate always the fruit of the Spirit, and so are a source of delight to the Heavenly Father.

We too must continue to work quietly, not be pompous, and not be self-promoting, but concentrate on bringing glory only to the Father.

Verse 3. The ways of God are not the ways of men and we should learn the right way to behave. We should recognize the lives that show true virtue by watching how the Servant Messiah operated and the kinds of people to whom He was drawn.

We tend to believe that the best people in the sight of God are those who are:

- strong



- spiritually secure
- have an excellent grasp and understanding of all spiritual matters and doctrine
- handle all their problems efficiently
- do not struggle with the problems of life like others
- are in positions of leadership
- have great self-esteem
- have everything well put together

But God now talks about the kinds of people to whom the servant Messiah will minister, to whom He will bring justice or practical righteousness.

We can now see precisely the kind of “justice” that the Lord has in mind.

Note the extreme unique and extraordinary patience, mildness, tenderness and gentleness that He will bring as He works with the people to whom He is attracted.

Remember also that it is in obscurity that Messiah cares for people. He brings His ministry of justice and focuses on specific kinds of individuals, though of course He cares for all and benefits all with whom He comes into contact.

Understand also that He will be dealing with sinners, those who are wicked and the need is that He be patient with them, so that they can be led to repentance.

Isaiah 36: tells us what a “*bruised reed*” means. Egypt is called a “*bruised reed*,” because the nation of Israel wanted it to support it, a burden that Egypt could not really bear. So this phrase refers to someone who has been so weakened, that he could not bear any more burdens. They are unable to help anyone, including themselves.

Normally, the rulers of the earth would simply break and discard those bruised reeds. But not so the *Servant of the Lord*.

A *lighted candle* that had been burning but was now ready to go out, now burning in such a low way to indicate that it had no inner resources, now only smoking but really giving no light, is normally simply put out and discarded. But not so would the Servant deal with those who are disheartened, crushed and discarded by society and its rulers. He would not throw away those like the bruised reeds and the dimly smoking wicks.

This tells us that if there was any evidence of faith or a little strength or desire, Servant Messiah would encourage it, increases the strength, supports those with little to offer and considered that they are mere humans.

It is therefore a clear lie from the Pit of Hell, that God will be put off from us because we are struggling. He comes precisely to care for, and minister to the broken, the bruised, and nearly extinguished. One writer puts it this way:



“The Lord props up the broken reed, and he fans into flame the smoking flax. That is what he was called to do. He came he said, “as a physician to the sick” (Mark 2:17). Those were the people he was drawn to, the ones he ministers to.”

Then he continues:

“If the truth is to be known, all of us have troubled hearts. All of us are broken reeds, despite the front that we erect. We are smoking flax. And that is what draws the Lord to our aid. He wants to minister to us, to fan us back into flame, prop us up, strengthen and encourage us.

And that is the ministry that we are called to, as well. We are to seek out the weak and the floundering and the struggling and to minister to them. And, by so doing, Isaiah tells us again, he will faithfully bring forth justice.”

Another writer adds:

“The good news is that this Servant Jesus will never give up on the human race or on anyone of us individually. He will never get frustrated or disgusted with any of us and say, “I’ve had it with you. I can’t take this anymore. You’ve blown it too many times.” He will never have a nervous breakdown and resign from ministry. Because of that persistence and confidence, his ministry ultimately came to the cross.”

But note the warning from another famous writer:

“Note, Jesus Christ is very tender toward those that have true grace, though they are but weak in it, and accepts the willingness of the spirit, pardoning and passing by the weakness of the flesh.”

Verse 4. The Servant Messiah will do His work of bringing justice, like the ultimate tenacious bulldog. He will be persistent, will never be discouraged in His mission and no one will ever dissuade Him from accomplishing His task. He will be courageous, constant and persevering despite hard service and opposition. He will be able to say with truth finally *“It is finished.”*

It is interesting to note that the term *“fail”* and *“be discouraged”* are the same terms in Hebrew that mean to ‘burn dimly’ and to be ‘bruised’. So Messiah, the Servant, will not be like the people who are like ‘reeds’ and ‘wicks’ become disheartened and crushed. He will continue and fulfill His mission, though He will suffer injustice.

He will never give up, never get fainthearted, and never say, as one writer comforts us:

“One more time and I am not available; one more time and I won’t forgive. He will continue to minister to the weak and lowly and to the oppressed, and establish justice. He will establish his church, build his government, begin to change the world and teach men what is necessary for their salvation.’

The Gentiles would welcome His law as something that they have always been looking for and they will be ready to receive it, asking, “What will you have us to do”?



Clearly then, God wants the Gentiles to embrace His kingdom and His justice. They will accept His righteousness and apply it, so that they will do justly.

The Gentiles who will accept Him will abandon all elements of paganism and idolatry. The Servant will establish His justice throughout all the tribes of the earth. This is certain. It is important for us to now establish who this 'Servant' is.

The New Testament tells us without note, that the *Servant of the Lord* is Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42:1-4 and tells us in Matthew 12:15-21 that Jesus fulfilled this role.

1 Peter 2:4 and other passages tell us that Jesus was "*chosen*" by God. When Israel failed in its task as the *Servant of God*, the responsibility passed to Jesus, a faithful Israelite and in every respect He fulfilled the call from God to bring forth justice.

When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the Spirit of the Lord came on Him. God declared Jesus to be the one in whom "*my soul delights*", and the one in whom "*I am well pleased*".

So Jesus was unassuming and quiet in His ministry, not seeking self-recognition. He suffered injustice but He did so silently and willingly, because He was so concerned with bringing justice.

Verse 5. God now pulled rank, using His royal titles, that differentiated Him from all others, identifying Himself as the Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven, and earth responsible for all creation.

He declared, as one writer puts it, that:

"He is the fountain of all being and therefore the fountain of all power. He is the fountain of being, 1. In the upper world; for he created the heavens and stretched them out. 2. In the lower world: for he spread forth the earth, and made it a capacious habitation, and that which comes out of it is produced by his power. 3. In the world of mankind: He is breath to the people upon it, not only air to breathe in, but the breath of life itself and organs to breathe with; nay, he gives spirit, the powers and faculties of a rational and soul of those that walk therein."

Verse 6. His covenant name is used to show that He is the self-existent God and the faithful God and because of this, He was able and willing to give His Servant, not only as the Mediator of the covenant, but as the Covenant itself. He will be the focus of the Covenant.

In addition, this covenant relationship that God had previously entered into with the people of Israel, would now be extended to all people. The Servant Messiah would be a light to the nations of the Gentiles.

No wonder then that we are warned of the importance of the Lord's Supper. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we must remember that we focus on His death, the Covenant in His blood. We do not focus on ourselves but on Him when we eat the bread and drink the cup,



for then we worship in the presence of the living God, our Redeemer. Treating that Supper lightly we are told, will bring personal disaster.

In Him would be Life for the world and Light for the world. It is God's righteousness that makes Him call the Servant and act for the people of the earth.

God will in His righteousness accompany the Servant intimately, standing by, holding Him up, keeping Him throughout all the difficult circumstances, so that He would never falter. When God calls His elect He helps them and holds their hands. The existence of the Servant Messiah guarantees the covenant of God for both Israel and the Gentiles. But Christ Himself is the Covenant, the new Covenant.

Verse 7. Here we see His work of bringing justice practicality demonstrated. He will:

- open the *eyes of the "blind"*, giving both spiritual and physical vision
- bring freedom to prisoners,
- enable those in spiritual darkness to have and use their liberty properly.

This is transformation in the heart of individuals. This is light and freedom. This was a new kind of justice, which would start in the human heart.

The work of the Servant refers to actions on behalf of people who are congenitally blind and people who are captive from birth. This rescue and healing removes the distortion from men's eyes and frees them from condemnation and the load of guilt and shame.

Verse 8. God again repeats His covenant name, to affirm that no one can do what He can do. He will perform what He had promised.

No one will share His glory or praise. The people of Israel and the Gentiles might be fond of worshiping idols and graven images, but that means nothing to God, for those things will never receive any honour or respect. God is jealous and nothing but stand in competition to Him.

Note that this theme is continued in Verses 10-11 which strongly emphasize the uniqueness of the God who can do and will do what no one else can do.

Verse 9. This action of God is brand-new, never seen before. This transforming work of the heart is the result of this work of justice by the Servant.

God has promised "*the new things*" through His Servant. In order to point out the certainty of these things coming to pass, God invited the people to look back at the things that He had promised in the past. All these things had come to pass exactly as promised. No promise had ever failed. The new promises would be fulfilled in their proper time, just as the old ones were. The people should be encouraged that God is constant and never makes a mistake.



Verse 10-12. The only rational response to these truths is of course praise and worship. Isaiah does precisely that in verses 10 through 13.

He was confident that God will do what he had promised. He was extremely grateful. It could scarcely be imagined that God would give Christ as *a light to the Gentiles!* This called for a new song in praise, for these new blessings.

Everyone, no matter where in the world, should therefore praise God. They should shout from the top of the mountains in singing. They should give glory to God, for He is worthy to be praised. This new thing is too important to be kept in silence.

CONCLUSION

The Servant is an amazing figure, and God is an amazing God. We have been privileged to listen to the Father speak to His beloved Son, talking to each other about their love for us.

We hear their intimate conversation, the Father setting the stage for His Servant Jesus His Son, to come to earth as the new Covenant that brings salvation.

We hear that the Servant will accomplish the “*new things*” promised by the Father, and will glorify Him. We hear the Father telling the Son that He is in full support of His mission to save us.

We see the great lengths to which the Father goes to make sure that the Servant is chosen, upheld, filled with His Spirit, called in righteousness, held by the hand and watched over.

Can we doubt that we must be worth it to Him?

Can we then reject Him, or treat His work lightly, or make excuses for not conforming to His righteousness?

Remember that there is still the work of Jesus to be done. He has brought justice to us and we are His people. He now wants to use us to bring justice to the bruised reeds and the dimly smoking wicks, the blind and imprisoned.

He has given us the ministry to open the eyes of the blind and to set the prisoners free.

We should pursue justice, for we are servants chosen by God, upheld by God and empowered by His Spirit. He is establishing justice in the earth through us, and we must take this task seriously. We will be judged on what we have done. There are many rewards awaiting faithful workers.



Remember that God owns us; we have been bought with a price, which was Jesus' death on the Cross. This is a great privilege.

Let us respond in praise and worship as Isaiah did, not only praising with our lips, but with all that we have and in the way we live. Let us follow Christ and behave in righteousness and justice.

