

Text: Isa 42.1-9

So we come to the Servant Songs for our Christmas series.

If you missed our afternoon services, I did two “prelude” messages from Isaiah 41 that you might like to check out.

Today we are in the first Servant song.

The first controversy with this song is the question, “Who is the Servant?” Who or what is God talking about in this song.

- Christians have interpreted the four main songs as Messianic
- Jews interpret all the servant songs as the nation Israel (at least, since the time of Christ... some saw the Messiah in them before the time of Christ)
- Liberals often dismiss them as merely a reference to Cyrus the Persian, not a supernatural servant (though Isaiah speaking almost two hundred years before Cyrus would still be remarkable)

We will touch on this controversy at points throughout, but of course the person we see in these songs is our wonderful Lord, Jesus Christ.

I had a little exchange with a good friend of mine who teaches at Bob Jones University. He mentioned something he wrote on his blog last February.

There is a concept in the doctrine of Christ where some think that Jesus grew in his consciousness of himself just as he grew according to Luke 2.

Lk 2.52 ¶ And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Consequently, as the Lord grew, he “grew into” his mission, understanding who he was and why he was sent as he stepped into his work. That doesn’t make him any less God the Son during the time of growth, but it tries to grasp the idea of “emptying himself” spoken of in Philippians. Here is what my friend said:

“This concept has raised in my mind visual images of the boy Jesus listening to the Scripture in the synagogue. (His family almost certainly did not have Tanakh scrolls that he could read at home.) At some point along the way, when he heard the Servant Songs read, he realized, ‘That’s me! That’s talking about me!’ Did this realization hit him suddenly, like the proverbial

Mack truck, or did the light of understanding rise slowly in his mind, like dawn on the eastern horizon?"¹

We can't really answer Dan's questions. But here is what I want to accomplish with these messages, right from this first one:

These passages are talking about Jesus. And you and me. And what love Jesus (and God) has for us. And how we can love him in return.

Read Isa 42.1-9

Proposition: God's glorious plan is to solve the problems caused by sin through the work of his Servant.

I. God's Announcement (1-4)

A. The audience (who should, "Behold!")

1. One commentator:

"The prophet's audience is unclear until 42:9."²

2. In v. 9, God speaks to "you" who will see God's fulfilled prophecy

3. In our prelude sessions, God called all the nations to witness his arousing one to come from the east (Cyrus) (41.2)

4. Later, he challenges the nations, who resort to idolatry, to have their idols "state their case" (41.21-24)

5. Finally, the voice of God to the nations: Behold, all of them are false (41.29)

6. And then the next verse: 42.1 — Behold my Servant

The audience is surely Israel, to whom Isaiah spoke, but ultimately the audience is the whole world. The message of the servant is a message to everyone.

B. The well-qualified Servant

1. He is chosen by God

¹ "Servant Songs, Part 1: Introduction," *Dan Olinger* (blog), February 19, 2024, <https://danolinger.com/2024/02/19/servant-songs-part-1-introduction/>.

² Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 15B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 160.

- a. The word refers to “a careful, well thought-out choice”³
 - b. Translated by ἐκλεκτός (*elect*) in LXX
 - c. As such, enjoys the delight of God
 - d. And upheld by God
2. He is empowered by “My Spirit”

Mk 1.9-11 ¶ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.¹⁰ Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

Mt 12.28 “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Isa 11.2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

C. The world-wide mission

1. The mission in a word: “Justice”
 - a. The word is mišpāṭ, מִשְׁפָּט — “judgement, justice” (Miss Potts)
 - b. “can be used to designate almost any aspect of civil or religious government”⁴
 - 1) Sovereignty
 - 2) Magisterial authority
 - 3) Civic justice applied by civic leaders
 - 4) An ordinance of law
 - 5) Establishing human rights
 - 6) Etc.
2. The word is repeated through the announcement (1, 3, 4)

³ John N. Oswalt, “231 בְּחַר,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 100.

⁴ Lindsey, 17.

3. Justice is for all nations

- a. Verse 1: “justice to the nations”
- b. Verse 4: “established justice in the earth”
- c. The longing expectations of everyone:

And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law

We see wars raging across the world: we wait for justice

We see crime going unpunished, or lightly punished: we wait for justice

We see sin exalted, and order overturned: rioting, ‘woke’ justice, repression of speech, overthrowing creation (gender-bending): we wait for justice

D. The singular characteristics

1. His manner in his coming
 - a. Not crying out
 - b. Not making his voice heard

“This Servant would not serve the Lord ostentatiously, nor would He advertise Himself. His ministry would be quiet, non-aggressive, and unthreatening. Obviously Cyrus was not this Servant.”⁵

2. His manner in his ministry
 - a. Consider how frail the reed is to start with – not a robust cedar tree!
 - b. Consider the bruised weed, damaged, bent over by the wind
 - c. Consider the smoldering wick, about to go out

He will not establish justice by might, but by mercy.

⁵ Constable, *Expository Notes*, 42.2.

“The servant seeks to bless, not to destroy. He is a gracious Sovereign, not a tyrant. A reed is weak to start with, but this one is cracked or partially broken (cf. 36:6). He will handle such a ‘bruised reed’ with great care.”⁶

3. His faithfulness: “not disheartened or crushed”
 - a. Same words as the bruised reed and the dimly burning wick
 - b. Set in a chiastic structure

3: Bruised reed (<i>ratzutz</i>)	smoking (<i>kehah</i>)
4: He will not grow dim (<i>yikheh</i>)	he will not be crushed (<i>yarutz</i>)

This is the only hint of suffering in this song: he will heal the bruised by taking the bruises.

II. God’s Commission (5-7)

A. The voice changes

1. Notice the pronouns: “he” in vv. 1-4
2. Now, “you” in v. 6: “I have called you”
3. He is speaking directly to the Servant here

B. The speaker elevated

1. The message to the servant begins from the throne room of heaven, the seat of the Creator God
2. Notice how the song carries us swiftly through Genesis 1:

Who created the heavens and stretched them out
 Who spread out the earth and its offspring
 Who gives breath to the people on it
 And spirit to those who walk in it

C. The mission expanded

1. Some repetition:
 - a. In v. 1: My Servant, whom I uphold

⁶ Lindsey, “Servant Songs Part 1,” 20.

- b. Here: I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you
- 2. The mission involves spiritual change for the peoples/nations
 - a. Covenant to the people
 - b. Light to the nations

The term “people” often refers to Israel exclusively, but here we see it clearly connect with the nations: see v. 1, nations, v. 4, coastlands, v. 5, people, all focusing on a mission wider than Israel.

3. The method

To open blind eyes
 To bring out prisoners from the dungeon
 And those who dwell in darkness from the prison

III. God’s Purpose (8-9)

Why does God plan to do this, especially when sinners deserve wrath, not mercy?

A. The display of his glory (8)

1. Sinners turned to vain idols

Recall sinners nailing up vain idols on their stands so they wouldn’t fall over, even while they were trusting in them (41.7)

2. God will not let that stand

Recall Dagon on his face before the ark
 In the Servant, God’s great glory is displayed through all nations for all time — saving sinners.

B. The proof of his glory

1. The former things came to pass (past fulfilled prophecies)

At this point in Isaiah, it probably refers directly to things God said about the Assyrians, but there is a long history of this.

2. The Lord speaks forth new things now: the Servant prophecy

Before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you

Conclusion:

Proposition: God's glorious plan is to solve the problems caused by sin through the work of his Servant.

What a glory it is to have God tell us of his plans so far in advance!

The whole prophecy is not complete: we still wait for real justice.

But the meek and mild Servant has come; he has already triumphed over sin and death; and he has promised to return.

You need to be ready for him. Submit your heart to him, follow him, love him.