

2. A new kind of politics - The rule of the Servant: He rules space and time

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[0 : 00] Now, in your Bibles, please, if you would look at page 602, and we are turning again to Isaiah 42. Our subject today is verses 5 to 9 in this new series, which I've called The New Kind of Politics, The Rule of the Servant.

But we're going to read from verses 1 to 9. So, Isaiah 42, verse 1. And it is God himself who is speaking these words.

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.

[1 : 08] 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 birth 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. 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. Amen.

That is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts and to our minds. I want you to think of two sets of pictures.

[2 : 17] I want you to think, first of all, of a scene of great destruction, of devastation, and of bewilderment. We are in a ruined city. Bombs have rained from the sky.

The military have rampaged through it. There are screaming children. There are people lying with all kinds of injuries, with all kinds of terrible wounds.

The sky is dark. The outlook is dismal. There is a river running past, but it is a river that is choked with corpses and with debris. A scene of total devastation and utter dismay.

Why don't you come with me to another set of pictures, beside another river. A river that is flowing gently through a very attractive countryside. Meadows, hills, trees on either side.

There are houses beside it, not far from the bank, but they look secure and peaceful. There are children there as well, but they are playing happily, and their parents are keeping a watch on them.

[3 : 25] The sky is blue, and the sun is shining. And we ask ourselves, how can these two scenes be reconciled? Are they from different planets, from different worlds?

Now you and I know very well that they are not from different planets. They are from the same planet. And that planet is our planet, planet Earth. A world which has so much goodness, so much beauty, so much love, so much wonder.

And yet a world that has so much sorrow and evil, destruction and devastation. And how can the two be reconciled? What is there that gives us hope?

What is there that gives us some anticipation that one day there will indeed be a new kind of politics? Now I often say to the Cornhill students, only partly tongue-in-cheek.

In fact, increasingly not tongue-in-cheek at all. The Bible is divided into two parts. Not the parts that you think, the Old and the New Testament, but Genesis 1, verse 1, and the rest.

[4 : 33] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the rest of the Bible takes that statement and unpacks from it the whole of the Gospel.

When you come to the end of the Bible, you find God is saying, See, I am making, see, I am creating everything new. And the whole of the Biblical Gospel rests on that fact that God is the Creator who brings things out of nothing, who brings life out of death, who brings light out of darkness.

That's our starting point today as we look at verses 5 to 9. This servant not only rules gently and strongly, but he rules space and time.

After all, that's what Genesis 1, verse 1 is about. He created heaven and earth. He created the universe. He created space, if you like. And it goes on to talk about the days of creation, that God created time.

And as Isaiah the prophet, in the 8th century BC, in a time of great devastation, when the Assyrian armies are rampaging through Judah, and only stopped from taking Jerusalem at the last moment by the Lord himself, he's looking at the whole of space and time.

[5 : 53] And this is the great theme of these chapters in the middle of this book. This God is big enough, not only to have created space and time, but to rule space and time now.

And Isaiah is telling us how he is going to do this. And he's going to do it through his servant. Now in these chapters, the theme of servant occurs over and over again.

Sometimes it is Israel, the nation of Israel, in 41, verse 8, chapter we looked at in these services some months ago. You, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen.

Israel chosen to be a light to the nations. Israel chosen to bring the saving truth of God to the whole world. Israel failed. But from Israel comes another servant who does not fail and will not fail.

This is the Lord's true and perfect servant. And as the rule of that servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, as it spreads throughout hearts and lives throughout the world, then that anticipates the kingdom that is to come.

[7 : 00] See, this is a kind of hourglass passage. In other words, so much of the teaching of the Bible flows through this passage and then flows out again. So let's look at how this passage develops in two ways.

First of all, in verse 5, Isaiah is saying, creation shows God's power and also his tenderness. These two truths about God, which are so, so important to hold together.

However, if he isn't a God of power, if he isn't the creator of heaven and earth, then we have no guarantee he will fulfill his purpose. On the other hand, if he's not a God of tenderness and compassion, then we have no guarantee that he'll carry out his purpose in a way that will be loving, in a way that will be compassionate.

But in creation, he shows both these aspects. And he's going to do this through his servant. The servant who is his son and who is involved with him in creation.

John's Gospel tells us, without him, without Jesus, was nothing made that was made. Well, look at verse 5. This shows, first of all, his continuing commitment to his creation.

[8 : 16] He didn't just make it long ago, switch it on and then leave it, and tinker with it if things went wrong. He's continually involved in his creation. Look at these words, created, stretched out, spread out, gives breath.

These are all parts of the verb that shows he's continually doing this. This is happening all the time. This is the relationship between the Lord and creation.

It's a continuing relationship. First of all, the word created. This is a word only ever used of God. A particular word used here never has any subject other than God throughout the Bible, because only God can truly create.

Shakespeare wrote wonderful plays. He did not create language. Beethoven wrote wonderful music. He did not create sound. We can only create if we are given the wherewithal to create.

We are given the materials to create with. God creates by his speech, by his breath, by his spirit. I mean, think about it for a moment or two.

[9 : 24] If you think that you can create, let me ask you a few questions. Can you think of a new primary colour? A new primary colour? Not a shading of other.

Remember when I was a boy, you used to have those wonderful paint boxes, all these wonderful names like burnt sienna and so on for the various shades. But these are all secondary colours, aren't they?

Can you think of a third sex? Can you think of a creature that's not simply bits of other creatures stuck together? We can be inventive, we can be creative, but we cannot create.

He's stretched out the heavens. In other words, the universe is vast, but it's not limitless. It's enormous beyond our imagination and our telescopes are revealed ever more and more vast expanses throughout this universe.

It's all in God's hand. He stretched it out. He gave it its limits. He spread out the earth, the extent of the earth and the productivity of the earth and what comes from it.

[10 : 27] You see, the pagans in Isaiah's time believed the fertility came from the fertility gods. The pagans in our time think it comes from scientific agriculture. But in fact, that's not the case.

The Creator made it all. There is nothing in all creation. That's why Paul says in Romans 8, since he made everything in creation, that nothing in all creation can separate us from his love.

So there's continuing commitment to creation. But in the second part of the verse, his continuing commitment to people, to humanity, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.

Once again, it's his power, the breath that he gives. Echo of Genesis 2, when he made Adam and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

It wasn't a self-propagating evolutionary surge. It was the breath of God which created humans. But also his continuing concern, spirit to those who walk in it.

[11 : 30] In the Bible we use the word walk. It tends to mean the whole of life in all its aspects, in all its activities, in all its direction. So our human weakness, our vulnerability, are in his strong and in his gentle hands.

So creation shows his commitment to the created order and also his commitment to humanity. Secondly, in verses 6 to 10, history, what actually happens on earth, shows his power and his purpose.

He's referred to humanity in the end of verse 5. And for the rest of these verses, he talks about how this all works out. These aren't just grandiose ideas.

They're very practical ideas working out in daily living. And first of all, he commits himself to his servant. Verse 6, I am the Lord, I have called you. And the you here is the servant.

This one who will come into space and time and carry out God's purposes. And these purposes are righteous. They are just. That's why I call this a new kind of politics.

[12 : 37] This new reign, these new politics will bring justice for everyone. And notice, I will give you as a covenant. Now covenant is one of the great Bible words.

This is how God relates. Not just to people, but to the universe. Because creation itself is a covenant. When God created this wonderful universe in which we live, extravagantly, generously poured out his grace.

After all, God didn't need to give us sunsets. God didn't need to give us trees and flowers and birdsong. God didn't need to give us moonlit on the waters. He's given us all these things because of his generosity.

He relates by covenant. And creation itself is a covenant. And after the flood, after the judgment of the flood, he reaffirms this covenant to Noah. As long as the earth remains, summer and winter, seed time and harvest, day and night, will never cease.

So, the extreme winter weather we experienced some months ago. Global warming. Oil slicks. All the ash clouds. All these things are under his control.

[13 : 52] And all that makes life difficult and dangerous is under his control. Notice a light for the nations opening the eyes that are blind. Blindness of wrong ideas.

The blindness of deceitfulness and lies. The blindness that does not see the world as God sees it. The light of truth. And he breaks the power and the curse of sin to bring out prisoners from the dungeon.

From the prison those who sit in darkness. There are Wesley's great hymn. Your eye diffused the quickening ray I woke. The dungeon flamed with light. That's the kind of experience that Isaiah is talking about.

Now, this is not naivety. People like Dawkins will say you're living in La La Land if you're a Christian. Isaiah is saying the opposite. Isaiah is saying unless your eyes are opened to the wonder and the glory of the creator and also to see clearly the curse and the sinfulness of creation, that's really the only thing that ultimately makes sense, doesn't it?

Why do we come back to the point I made at the beginning? Why is there so much beauty? Why is there so much love? Why is there so much goodness in the world? Why is there so much ugliness?

[15 : 03] Why is there so much sin? Why is there so much evil? And the reason for the latter is the curse because of our rebellion. When Adam fell, read about it in Genesis 3, creation fell with him.

And one day when God's children are perfectly like Christ, perfectly redeemed, then creation will be freed from the curse. And redeemed humanity will resume its ancient mandate to be stewards over lords of creation.

So he commits himself to his servant because his servant is going to carry these things out. That's exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ did in his earthly life, opening the blind eyes, healing the lame, raising the dead.

And will happen fully in the new creation when none of those things are there any longer. And he is the only God. I am the Lord. I am Yahweh. That is my name.

Now in chapter 41, we looked at seeing the world as God sees it. If he is the only God, then this is the only way to see the world.

[16 : 15] This is the only way in which we can have a proper world view. He is a personal God with a name. That is my name. The covenant God who commits himself with promises that he will not break.

He is not the unknown God whom Paul found an altar to in Athens. He is the God who reveals himself in his servant in Christ Jesus.

My glory. Glory comes from a word that means to be heavy, to be solid. It means that God is utterly real. God is utterly convincing.

It also means the light by which we see that. God is God. In Isaiah, in his great vision, back in chapter 6, says the whole earth is filled with his glory. Now that's true even today.

But it's also filled with the curse. One day it will be fully visible. The message of the prophets essentially is God will be God and the world will know it.

[17 : 17] God is God now whether the world knows it or not. But one day it will be visible, even to the blindest of eyes, that God is God. And you'll notice that his difference from idols, carved idols.

Isaiah, as I've said before, mocks idolatry. It's not so much he sees it as wickedness. He sees it as stupid. Imagine all this. You go and you build something. You bow down to something that's less than you.

Why is it so wrong to have images? Because God already has his image in the world and his image is humanity. And therefore to make something that's less than humanity and to worship as God is to live in futility.

And in what way is he so different from those idols? Look at verse 9. The former things have come to pass. Now as this God understands the course of history.

Back in chapter 41, verse 22, God says to the godlets, Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them.

[18 : 21] In other words, don't just tell us what happened, but tell us the explanation why they happened. And even more new things I now declare. Before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Only the creator can say that because only the creator can carry it out. So you see, all this is not just wonderful ideas, it's very practical.

When the devout Jew tumbled out of bed in the morning, he would repeat the great words of Deuteronomy, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Now if the Lord our God is one, then that means that every part of our lives belong to him.

We don't have gods who look after our relationships, others who look after our work, Others who look after our homes, and still others, the dark gods whom we've got to try and placate.

We have one God who is in charge of the whole of our lives, And that takes away muddle and confusion, and gives a great sense of clarity. There is only one God.

[19 : 22] And that really has two effects, I think, when we take it seriously. First of all, it's a challenge. Those of us who are not yet Christian, If there is only one God, Who made you, and one day will judge you, Then you need to come to know that God.

You need to come to know him through Jesus Christ, By repentance and faith. And if we are Christian, It's a challenge to open all parts of our lives to him.

Most of us have little secret rooms in our lives, That we like to keep to ourselves, and for ourselves. The challenge of this is, no, they all belong to him. There is also tremendous security, isn't there?

There is no part of my life that he does not control. There is nothing that has happened or can happen, That he is not in charge of. And all this is, And all this takes flesh in the form of Jesus Christ.

Not just a beautiful idea, A beautiful philosophy. All this takes human form, When Jesus Christ, the servant of God, Came into the world, Gave himself for us, And rose again for us, And opened the kingdom of heaven, To all who believe.

[20 : 37] That is the gospel. And that is the word, From Isaiah, For us today. Let's pray. God our Father, How we praise you, That you have come down to us, That you have opened the way back to yourself, That you have not left us to grope, And fumble and stumble after you in the dark, That you have sent the light of the world, Jesus Christ, Into the world, And into our hearts.

Bless us now, Father, Through the rest of today, And through the days to follow, And help us indeed, To live the life, That is a true life, A life that sees things as you see it, And that lives life as you created it to be.

And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.