

Behold the Servant

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[0 : 00] Well, I'll leave you to read these at your leisure, but we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning. And as you know, these last couple of weeks, Phil Copeland has been preaching in these great chapters of Isaiah.

And this morning we turn to Isaiah chapter 42. And we're reading here this wonderful passage which incorporates the first of the so-called servant songs of Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 42 and we're going to read verses 1 to 17. It's page 602, I think, if you have a church visitor's Bible. And let's read together.

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.

[1 : 02] 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. 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.

I will give you as a covenant for the people. As a light for the nations. To open eyes that are blind. To bring out the prisoners from the dungeon.

And 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.

[2 : 04] Behold the former things have come to pass. And new things I now declare. Before they spring forth I tell you of them. 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 coastland and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice.

The villages of Kedar inhabit. Let the inhabitants of Selah 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. 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. For a long time I have held my peace. I have kept still and restrained myself.

[3 : 01] Now I will cry out like a woman in labor. I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills. And drum up, dry up all their vegetation.

I will turn the rivers into islands. And dry up the pools. And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know. And paths 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. They are turned back and utterly put to shame. Who trust in carved idols. Who say to metal images, You are our gods.

Amen. And may God bless to us. His word. Well good morning.

[4 : 00] And please do turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 42. We live in a world that is full of injustice. But what is the ultimate injustice?

What is the worst injustice of all time? Isaiah 42 will tell us. Before we look at the chapter, let's recap what we've seen in our studies over the past couple of weeks.

Remember when Isaiah wrote this section of his book, the people of God were facing dark and distressing days ahead of them. Remember back then, the majority of the people of Judah had sunk into deep unbelief.

They had spurned God's grace, rejected relationship with him, broken covenant with him. The Lord had sent prophet after prophet to call them back in repentance, but to no avail. And so at the end of chapter 39, Isaiah announced that the Lord is going to bring upon his people the ultimate covenant curse, exile.

That is, in the years ahead, the Lord is going to raise up the Babylonians. Their ferocious war machine will sweep across the nations and come upon Judah. Jerusalem will be utterly ransacked and ruined.

[5 : 13] As will the temple ransacked and ruined. Many of the Lord's people will be executed. Many of the Lord's people will see their loved ones killed right in front of their eyes.

But the vast majority of the people, including the Davidic king, the king in the line of David, will be taken off into Babylonian captivity, away from the land of promise.

In other words, everything that tangibly declared to the people that they were the Lord's people will be stripped from them. And having heard all of that, you can just imagine how the remnant of faith, the small group of real believers in Judah, would have responded.

You can picture them running up to Isaiah in desperation, saying, Isaiah, what does this mean for all of the Lord's promises? What about his promise, his covenant promise, to use us, the seed of Abraham, to bless all the nations of the earth?

Is that promise dead in the water? Is it all over? Please tell us, Isaiah, is there any hope? And in chapter 40, the Lord, in response, gives a mind-blowing message of comfort and hope.

[6 : 23] A message to strengthen and lift up his faithful remnant in the exile, so that they will continue to trust in the Lord and live for him with all of their strength, as they're blasted by Babylon.

So the Lord gives Isaiah a glorious vision of what will happen after the exile is over. So 40 verses 1 to 4, the Lord promises that a time will come when his people will no longer be in exile, they will be pardoned for their sin.

That is, they will have peace with God again, and the Lord himself on that day will come personally to save and shepherd his exiled people. The vision there was amazing.

He will come, marching triumphantly through the wilderness. All the terrain will be leveled out flat in front of him like a majestic, victorious, triumphant highway. Almost like some kind of a glorious red carpet.

And he will come into Babylon, and he will be unstoppable, and he will do what he did at the exodus. His mighty right hand will wipe away the enemy, all those who have oppressed his people.

[7 : 26] He will gather up his people in his arms, like a shepherd gathers up a lost sheep. He will turn around, and he will march back down to Zion, where he will dwell with his people secure forever and ever.

And on that day, his people will never have any needs ever again. Because if they have a need, the Lord will meet it immediately. Well, you remember those of you who were here a couple of weeks ago, it seemed that the Lord, looking ahead to all of that, acknowledges that some of the remnant of real believers in exile would struggle to really believe that that was going to happen.

Because their circumstances in exile were going to be so grim and horrific. And it seems the exiles had two doubts. Doubt number one was this. Is the Lord really powerful enough to save and shepherd us?

And doubt number two. Is the Lord really willing to save and shepherd us? And in Isaiah 40, verse 12 to 31, the prophet responds to these two doubts by saying, Yes, the Lord really is powerful enough to save you.

Don't let your hard surroundings diminish your view of God and his power. He's not a big man. He's not a bigger version of you and me. He's not a creature. He is the all-powerful, all-knowing creator of the cosmos.

[8 : 45] His power and his strength are limitless. There is none like him. So yes, he really is powerful to save and shepherd you. And he's also willing to save and shepherd you.

He is ready to give you all the strength that you could possibly need to help you stand and persevere by faith in these days of exile. So turn to him. Trust him.

Build your life upon his word. And he will keep you through your darkest hour. In fact, more than that, says Isaiah, those who wait upon the Lord's promises, they will be rewarded.

Ultimately, they will be raised in power. It will be as though they had the wings of eagles. And in chapter 41, which we looked at last Sunday, Isaiah turns to address another pastoral problem brewing in these exiles of the future.

It seems that the exiles may be tempted to doubt that the Lord is the sovereign God of the nations, the sovereign Lord of history. And so in chapter 41, Isaiah describes to the remnant of faith this cosmic courtroom scene where the Lord God of Israel calls into the courtroom to stand before him for questioning all the nations of the earth.

[10:01] And what the Lord does is he majestically displays that he alone is the Lord of history. History is his story. And what he does is he gives the nations a glimpse of the future.

And he says, look into the future with me. Look and see in the east. See this king that's rising up? There's a king coming. He's going to sweep across all other powers. He will be so successful. He's coming right for you, Babylon.

He is that way. He's coming because I am raising him up. Because I alone am the sovereign Lord of history. No human power or human throne rises to the top on its own.

It only rises up because I have let it do so. And I have raised it up. And that, by the way, coming king was the king of Persia, Cyrus. And so the Lord says, don't trust in futile idols.

Because compared to me, they're nothing. They are futile. And in 41 verse 21 to 29, the Lord goes on in his courtroom to utterly mock and humiliate and lampoon the gods of the nations directly.

[11:03] It's a comical scene. He says in the courtroom to the nations, Okay, nations, go out of the courtroom and go and fetch your gods. Bring them in here. Of course, you'll have to bring them in and carry them yourself because they cannot come in of their own accord.

They can't walk. So bring your statues in and lay them out before me. That's where the nations go. They go and fetch their little statues of stone and wood. They carry them in and lay them down in front of the Lord God Almighty.

And the Lord God starts to taunt these statues. And he says, come on then, false gods, the false gods that the nations trust in for eternal security. Come on then, show us your knowledge of the future.

Show that you can match me in the way that I've just predicted the coming of Cyrus. Come on. Hello? Anyone there? And there's nothing. Okay, false gods, says the Lord.

Tell us the meaning about the history. Tell us the meaning about what has gone before this point. And again, silence. So the Lord says, okay, we should do something. Do a powerful work.

[12:05] Come on, show us your power and your majesty. And again, the courtroom says, silent and still. Because the gods of the nations are no gods at all. They don't exist. They are mere figments of human imagination.

Products of a sinful human heart and mind. And the Lord says, no, do not trust in futile false gods. It says, I, the Lord, alone, I am the true living God.

And if you trust in me, you will not be full of fear. But your future will be so secure forever and ever. You will dwell in a paradise with me. That's what chapter 41 is all about.

But as we come to the end of that chapter, a question rises up in our minds if we are careful readers. And the question is this. Well, how will the nations be saved?

Yes. Yes. If they're currently in such bondage, if they're currently held in darkness of such false faith and false gods, then how are they going to be transformed to turn away from idols and to trust in the Lord and to receive the strength that he offers them back in 41 verse 1?

[13:14] How are they going to do that? What's the answer to the idol problem? And the answer is 42 verse 1. The Lord will send his servant.

42 verse 1, he says, Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. This servant is the Lord's solution to the problem of idolatry.

And as you'll know from this section of Isaiah from 40 to 55, it contains really four songs about this unique servant of the Lord. This is the first of them in chapter 42.

And I would like us to look at this song in three questions, asking three questions. Number one, question one. Who is this servant?

Who is this servant? Well, much ink has been used up in the commentaries about whom the Lord is referring to here. Some claim that this servant is the nation of Israel.

[14:14] And friends, I cannot possibly see how anyone in their right mind could think that that's whom the Lord is speaking about here. You only have to read the second half of this chapter from verse 18 onwards to see that the nation of Israel has become a spiritually blind, deaf, and rebellious servant who is currently sitting under God's wrath.

So we can rule out the nation of Israel. Others claim that the servant here is the remnant of faith within Judah. They think that's the case because back in 41 verse 8, the remnant is referred to as the servant.

Still, others claim that the servant here is referring to the Persian king Cyrus who's coming, and the Lord will use in his purposes to kick off the initial return from exile. But when you look at this servant and you go through the details of how Isaiah describes him, you think it cannot be the remnant. It cannot be Cyrus. It is a unique individual. So let's look at what Isaiah says about him then. Notice firstly how this servant is the complete opposite of the pagan false gods, the complete antithesis of the pagan false gods.

The Lord really drives home this point by using three statements that begin with the word behold or look. Please look back at 41 verse 24, where the Lord is lampooning the pagan gods directly.

[15:36] He says, behold, look, you, you pagan gods are nothing, and your work is less than nothing. An abomination is he who chooses you, you pagan idols. Then look on to 41 verse 29.

The Lord again, speaking to the pagan gods, says, behold, they, the pagan gods, are all a delusion. Their works are nothing. Their metal images are empty wind.

And then wham, 42 verse 1, but behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom my soul delights. Don't look to the false gods.

Look to my servant. He is the total antithesis of the pagan idols. When you look at the pagan idols, you see nothing. When you look at my servant, you see the true God displayed in him.

You see me displayed in him. In other words, this coming servant will be what the nation of Israel failed to be. They were called to be the Lord's servant who displayed the Lord's light and his beauty amongst the nations.

[16:40] Because of their unbelief, they failed. But not this servant. He will display perfectly the true God. If you want to know what I'm like, says the Lord. If you want to know me, look at my servant.

He is your only hope. Notice that we are also told that this servant will live in perfect relationship with the Lord. The Lord looks at his chosen one and he says, look, here is the one I love.

Here is the one who has great intimacy with me. I love him. He is my servant. In verse 2, this servant will have the Lord's spirit upon him. That means loads of things.

Let me just fire some at you. That means that the servant will have an intimate relationship with the Lord. He will be the prophet par excellence. He will know the mind of the Lord and will be able to minister the mind of the Lord to others.

And of course, having the spirit upon him also means that he will be fully equipped and enabled to do anything that he wants. He will be able to achieve all of his work. He will be unstoppable.

[17:41] And friends, if you were to sit down and read through the whole of Isaiah from start to finish, it will only take you a couple of hours, then you would know that there is another one in this book who is described in the exact same way as this servant.

Back in chapter 11, the Lord promises one day that he is going to raise up the ultimate Davidic king. One whose name will be Emmanuel. God with us. And listen to how the Lord describes him.

Chapter 11. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his root shall bear fruit. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. The spirit of wisdom and understanding.

The spirit of counsel and might. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. See the similarities here? Are we supposed to see a connection between the Davidic king and the servant?

I think so. So, so far, who is the servant? Well, Isaiah says he is the true Israel. He's described in the same way as the ultimate Davidic king.

[18:42] And he is the one who will display God perfectly. He is so powerful. And when he comes, he will be unstoppable in his mission. He will be the ultimate king. But he won't behave like the other kings of the earth.

Please look at verse 2. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the streets. Now, this does not mean that his words will be weak and ineffective.

Far from it. Rather, it means that this servant will be, well, he won't be ostentatious. Or promote himself like the other rulers of the earth do with all of their pride and their pomp and arrogance. No. When you look at this servant, when he comes, you will see one who is the embodiment of meekness and majesty combined in the one person. And please look at verse 4. He will not grow faint or be discouraged. Where have we heard that description used earlier on in this section of Isaiah? Answer 40 verse 28.

[19 : 42] When the Lord himself is described as one who will not grow faint or weary or discouraged. Now, what does that mean about the servant's identity? Well, again, it means he will have limitless power.

He will not stop until his work is finished. But this can also mean that he is the ultimate believer. The believer par excellence. Remember, at the end of chapter 40, the Lord says, All those who wait for me, I will give them strength.

Limitless strength. And so this servant, he could be the believer par excellence. But then again, he could also be one with the Lord himself.

That's also an implication of what verse 4 is saying. Oh, what a mystery. So in summary, who is the servant? Well, he is the one who will perfectly display the true God.

And therefore, he will be the true Israel. Everything that nation failed to be. He's in perfect relationship with the Lord. He knows the Lord intimately through the Spirit. He's described in the same terms as the ultimate Davidic king.

[20 : 43] He will be meekness and majesty combined in the one body. He is as powerful as the Lord is. He might even be at one with the Lord himself divine.

He is unstoppable in his mission. That's question one. Question two. What work will this servant carry out?

What work will he carry out? What is he to do? Well, it's mentioned three times in this passage. Verse one. He will bring forth justice. Verse three.

He will bring forth justice. Verse four. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice on the earth. So that is his work.

He's come and he's been sent to establish justice on the earth. Now, we need to be careful here. Because remember, Bible words have Bible meanings. And sometimes a Bible word can mean different things.

[21 : 38] And Isaiah, the word justice can mean different things. Sometimes to bring justice, it refers to bringing correct and right moral order in the world.

Other times bringing justice refers to the vindication, the public vindication of God's people. It's not right that those who honor the Lord should be dishonored. The people who honor the Lord should be honored.

And as you read through this book of Isaiah towards the end, you will see that when the servant comes, he will establish both of these things. He will put all wrongs right and he will publicly vindicate his people and smash those who have oppressed his people.

But the justice that the servant is to bring here will be something very specific. And the context tells us what it is. When the servant comes, he will deal with the greatest injustice of all.

And what's that? The greatest injustice is that the living, true God doesn't receive the praise and glory that he deserves from the hearts of human beings. Idolatry is the greatest injustice.

[22 : 46] That human beings and the nations give their worship to false gods instead of the God who made them, who sustains them and gives them life. The God who keeps us all breathing. That is the greatest injustice.

And that is the injustice that the servant has been sent to deal with. How will he achieve such a thing? Well, look at the end of verse 4. The coastlands, the nations wait for his law.

In other words, the thing that will free the nations from their idolatry to worship the true God is the servant's law, his teaching. That's what law means here. His instruction, his words is what will set the captives free.

The servant is called to come and proclaim the authoritative word of God to the world so that idolatry will be exposed for what it really is. And as the servant does this, justice will be established because sinful hearts will be released from the dark dungeon of idol worship to trust the living God. And to start to live for him and give him glory. The glory that is due to him. Verses 5 to 9 confirm that this is so. In verses 5 to 9, the direction of the conversation changes.

[23 : 55] And Isaiah describes a conversation between the Lord speaking to his servant. So in verse 5, the sovereign Lord of creation, the one who made everything and sustains all life, shows how much he cares for his creation by calling his servant to him and saying, verse 6, I am the Lord, I am the Lord.

I have called you my servant in righteousness. I will take you my servant by the hand and keep you. I will give you my servant as a covenant for the people.

A light to 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. That's what the Lord is saying to his servant.

Please go to them. Go to the nations and reveal the truth about me. Reveal the light of my revelation. And as you go to the Gentiles, you will be the embodiment of all of my covenant promises, my servant.

When the Gentiles encounter you, when they listen to you and believe in you, they will be brought into covenant relationship with me. And through you, they will receive all of the covenant blessings that I want to give them.

[25 : 03] Oh, my servant, go to those. They're so desperate. There's such a need. They're so lost. Go and liberate them with your words. Verse 8. Do that, please, because I am the Lord.

Then there is no other. I will not give my glory to other gods. Go and destroy idol worship, my servant. That is the work that the Lord is calling his servant to do.

Go and destroy idolatry. Well, question 3. What will be the fruit of the servant's work? Answer.

Universal praise to the Lord. That is what we see in verse 10 to 13. Isaiah invites people from all nations to join together in praising the Lord for what he promises to do through his servant.

And, of course, as Isaiah does this, he's really giving us a glimpse of what will happen in the future once the servant has carried out all his work. Please look at verse 10. Let me read these verses.

Let them shout from the top of the mountains.

[26 : 25] Let them give glory to the Lord and declare his praise in the coastlands. It is a beautiful picture of universal praise happening across the whole of the Gentile world.

From the tops of the mountains down to the coastlands, to the sea. In every city, in every village, the whole Gentile world is exploding with praise.

But no longer praise for their idols. Praise in the Holy One of Israel. The living and true God.

Because of the servant and what he's done. And in verse 14 to 17, the Lord speaks once again.

And he affirms that this promise... Sorry, he affirms that this universal praise... Well, it will come about because he will not rest until he has established this universal praise of his name.

Verse 14, he says...

[27 : 45] I will go through anything that stands in my way. I will establish universal praise of my name by saving people from spiritual blindness. Verse 16, I will guide them out of their bondage to false idols.

I will not forsake them. They will remain secure unlike... Verse 17, all those who choose to reject me and remain in idolatry. They will be ultimately put to shame forever.

I, the Lord, have spoken. I will do as I've promised. And I will do it through my servant. And friends, what an encouragement these verses must have been to those sitting in exile all those years after Isaiah originally wrote them.

The exiles would have been greatly encouraged by this because it declared to them that the Lord's promise of salvation to bless the nations through the seed of Abraham is not dead in the water.

For the servant is coming. And today, as we look back from our point in history, we can see how these promises have found their glorious fulfillment and how they're continuing to be fulfilled this very day.

[28 : 54] And they should bring greater encouragement to us as the people of God today. But you only have to read a few pages of any of the gospel accounts to see clearly that this servant of Isaiah is none other than the Lord Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus. He came into this world and he was born not in a royal palace, but in a dingy stable. It was meekness.

He was born and when he came in, he was incognito, living as one of the nation of Israel. He didn't grow up in Bethlehem, the royal city of David, where you might expect God's king to live.

Instead, he grew up in Nazareth. Yuck! Nazareth was like a total dismal armpit of a town. A place that was greatly despised by the people of Israel back then.

You read on through the gospels and Jesus' life remained that way. His life was exactly the meek servant that you see. Described in Isaiah 42.

[29 : 54] And just think of that glorious scene of his baptism. Think of it when he'd just come out of the water, no doubt standing on the river bank. What happened? Well, the heavens were ripped apart and the voice of God the Father proclaimed, Here is my servant.

Here is the one that I promised in Isaiah 42. And then what happened next? God the Spirit descended upon Jesus and remained upon him. Preparing him for his public ministry.

And in that public ministry, in the Spirit, Jesus went and proclaimed the glory of the Lord to those in Israel. And he drew from the unbelieving nation a true remnant of faith.

But also, time and again through the gospel accounts, Jesus went to those who by birth were far off. He went to Gentiles. Those who were stuck in idol worship.

And he proclaimed to them the Father perfectly in his law and his instruction. And they turned to him to come into covenant relationship with the real God. And after his death, resurrection, and after he had descended in power into heaven, This Jesus poured out his Spirit upon his church.

[31 : 06] Empowering them to go and proclaim his law. And that's what we see through the book of Acts, isn't it? You see at the day of Pentecost, the risen, victorious Lord Jesus continuing his ministry.

Pouring out his Spirit to equip his people. They proclaim the light of his revelation in Jerusalem. And then to Judea and Samaria. And then where? To the nations.

To the Gentiles. Proclaiming the light of God's revelation across the whole globe. And friends, if you want tangible proof of this, You can look back through history and see the way in which the light of his revelation Has worked its wonders throughout history to us today.

Just think about this. Look around at people in this hall. Most of us, I'm guessing by birth, are Gentiles. We by nature, when we were born, we were far off.

Strangers and aliens to God's covenant promises. But now, most of us in this hall confess that Jesus is Lord. Why? Well because the servant of Isaiah 42 is carrying on his ministry this day and this age.

[32 : 14] But friends, in this present age, as those who are joined to the servant by his Spirit, We must realize how privileged we are.

The servant has called us into union with him by his Spirit, So that as a church, we can join in his mission this day. I wonder if you ever think about this.

One of the reasons that the Lord Jesus has saved you, He has saved you for many reasons. But one of the main reasons is that you will join his global business, Which is the global idolatry destruction business.

That is one of the many things that you are for as a Christian, As you share the gospel. That is what the Lord wants us to do in this city.

He wants us to fill this city of darkness, Full of people who are lost in idolatry, Who are to fill it with the light of his gospel. That's what is so wonderful about this resource.

[33 : 16] That's why I'm so excited that Mark Campbell is joining the staff team tomorrow. It's his first day. I'll leave a present on his desk to welcome him. But Mark's coming to train up people And how to get the light of the Lord's revelation.

This, the message of the servant, Out into the city. If you can read, You can use this resource. Wonderful. And so I think that should encourage us, should it not?

That is what we are for. To get out into the city. Think about all the people that you know who aren't Christians. They are dead in idolatry currently. And you have at your resource, The thing that will set them free.

The light of Christ's revelation. The good news of the servant. So as I close, Let me ask you these questions, And I'll ask them of my own heart. Are you doing all that you can to get behind the Lord's mission to destroy idol worship in Glasgow?

Are you doing all that you can to help the church reach its goal of filling the city, And indeed the nations, With the light of the servant's law? If you're a Christian, Then that is what you are for.

[34 : 30] You are to be an idol destroyer, By sharing the gospel. Well, amen. Let's be quiet for a moment. Let's bow our heads. And then I'll pray for us.

Let's bow our heads.

By the power of his spirit, Bringing them into covenant relationship with you. Father, we are so thankful for all that he has done for us, And reaching out in mercy to us.
We do not deserve to be part of your people. If we think we deserve to be part of your people, We're deceiving ourselves. By nature, We don't.
But we thank you that in Christ, We've been brought into your people. So please help us, In light of that, To use all that we have, And all that we are, To fill the city of Glasgow, With the servant's law, The law of light, So that he will use it to rescue lost souls from idol worship.
[35 : 57] Please use our efforts as a church, To add many to your kingdom. We pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.