

1. A new kind of politics - The rule of the Servant: He rules strongly and gently

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[0 : 00] If you have the Bibles there, if you would please turn to page 602. As I said, we're going to be looking at this chapter about God's servant in Isaiah 42 over the next few weeks.

Today we are going to look at verses 1 to 4, but I want to read verses 1 to 9, first of all. That's Isaiah 42, verses 1 to 9.

And the Lord God himself 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. The faintly burning wick he will not quench.

[0 : 57] 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, 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 the carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare.

Before they spring forth, I will tell you of them. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts, and build it into our lives.

[2 : 09] Now, you don't have to be a political enthusiast like me, who sat up till 5am on the morning of the election, to know that one of the common phrases around at the moment is a new kind of politics.

So my subject is for these four sessions, a new kind of politics. Now, I'm not making a political point. Christians and others have the right to vote for whom they believe in, and indeed I believe Christian people have the duty to vote, since we live in a democracy, and elect our rulers.

But truly what we have here is a new kind of politics. Politics of the rule of the servant. Because at heart, politics is about how society and nations can live in peace and justice.

And this is a major concern of the biblical prophets. How can people live together? How can the nations know peace? How in an uncertain world can we know stability?

Now, Isaiah the prophet lived in 8th century BC in Jerusalem, in a time of great crisis, a time of great insecurity, when the Assyrian armies were threatening to destroy the nation, destroy Jerusalem itself, and take the people away.

[3 : 31] And Isaiah was with his people through that crisis. He saw Jerusalem saved, he saw the people restored, but now he's looking beyond it. He's looking beyond that time to when Israel will be taken into exile, into Babylon, and beyond that to their return, to the overthrow of Babylon by Persia.

And indeed, he's taking a panoramic view of the whole of history. Indeed, he is speaking to us who live in the 21st century. This is the word of the Lord, not just for Jerusalem in the 8th century BC, it's the word of God for Britain and for the nations in the 21st century.

Seeing the world as God sees it. That's the last time I did these lunchtime services. That's what we looked at in chapter 41. Some time before, we looked at chapter 40, asking if we had a big enough God to cope with the problems of creation, problems of history, and our own problems.

And now this chapter, chapter 42, and the chapters that follow is, granted he's a big enough God, granted we must see the world as he sees it, how is he actually going to bring about his kingdom?

How is this new kind of politics going to be established? And the answer is given here. He is going to do that by his servant. Because in the next chapters, there are many of us are called the servant songs, where this figure, who is going to step into history, coming from God himself, to rule the world.

[5 : 03] Now who is this servant? Now, first of all, it is Israel and Jacob. Look at the nation of Israel itself, chapter 41, verse 8.

You, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen. Because God chose Israel to be a light to the nations, and to model his kingdom. That's why Israel was chosen.

And back in chapter 2, Isaiah has talked about the day when the nations will come to Zion, when they will come to worship the God of Zion, to learn the word of God, and to live in peace and justice.

But Israel failed. Israel failed badly. But God's plan did not fail, because God had a supreme servant, one who was to come from Israel, an Israelite himself, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was born into the nation of Israel, and became the servant that Israel failed to be.

And even today, his kingdom is already ruling in hearts and lives. He realized that when someone comes to Christ, when someone gives their life to the Lord Jesus Christ, the kingdom begins to grow in their heart, and in their lives.

[6 : 20] And throughout the world, the kingdom is growing. And yet, as we pray, we pray for your kingdom to come. And when he comes again, the kingdom will come fully.

That's what the new kind of politics is about. It's about the establishment of the kingdom ruled by the servant in justice and peace. And just two things I want to say.

First of all, this servant is God's good faith in human form. In other words, God isn't just standing remote, and decreeing this will happen.

God sends his servant, who is more than his servant, because God sends himself. He is the one who is God, and also the one who comes from God.

Behold, my servant, look at him. This is who it is, God is saying. And he just glanced back a verse, verse 29, Behold, they are all a delusion. The idols that the nations worship, look at them.

[7 : 21] What have they ever done? What have they achieved? He says back in chapter 41, verse 23, Do good or do harm. Do anything at all.

To show that you are a God, that you can do anything. So as we look at the idols, and as we look at the servant, we move from delusion to reality. We move from darkness to light.

We move from projections of our own fantasies and fears, which is what the pagan gods are and were. We move to a leader who will open eyes, and who will set people free.

We move, in fact, to the word made flesh. God comes down among us. He becomes Jesus Christ, one with God, who became one of us, and is one of us still.

Notice what he says about him. My chosen in whom my soul delights. It's not just the servant's ability, not just his capacity to carry out the job, it's his character as well.

[8 : 25] Now we very well know you can appoint someone to a job who is very good at it, but they're actually not a very pleasant individual. They get the work done, but they are pretty difficult to work with, and pretty perverse.

On the other hand, you can be soft and appoint some useless individual to a job whom you happen to like. Both are recipes for disaster, and both happen in human institutions and communities.

We know that very well. But here, this servant is a true servant. Not only will he do the job, not only will he carry out the task, but he is a person, as was said of David, and uniquely of Jesus Christ, a man after God's own heart.

His character and his abilities match together. And this is the kind of authority that God upholds. I will put my spirit upon him.

He will bring forth justice to the nations. You see, this is a supernatural kingdom. But it's a supernatural kingdom that actually is going to work out here on earth.

[9 : 36] This is not la-la land. This is not fantasy. This is something that's actually going to happen. He will bring forth justice to the nations. All governments promise, and mostly sincerely, to bring about justice, economic prosperity.

But of course, more of all this, governments are driven off track by events which they have not foreseen. Former Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, was once asked, what's the most difficult thing about being Prime Minister?

And he replied, events, dear boy, events. And politicians are always driven off course by events, unexpected things which they had not foreseen.

This servant will, of course, not be driven back by any events. After all, the God of Isaiah, as we saw in chapter 41, as we saw, I'm not kidding myself, any who remember what I said about chapter 41, it makes me feel better.

In chapter 41, he is the God who knows the future. Because not only does he know it, he controls it. There will never be an event that will take him by surprise.

[10 : 53] So, this servant, first of all, is God's good faith in human form. The Word made flesh was both the character and the ability to carry out God's rule.

But secondly, he shows God's way of ruling in verses 2 to 4. What is it like when we are ruled by Jesus Christ? What happens?

Now, notice first of all, the word bring forth. He will bring forth justice. Now, the word bring forth suggests this is a kind of revelation to the world.

This is not the kind of politics we expect. This is not the kind of government we expect. And the essence of what he will bring forth is justice. Now, later on in chapter 53, this servant is said to justify many, to make people just.

Ultimately, true justice will come when the earth is filled with people who have been justified, who have been made just by the servant.

[11 : 59] a radically converted and Christ-like human heart and lives. That's what will ultimately bring about justice. That doesn't mean, of course, it's not people's responsibility now to strive for justice, but it does mean we'll never do it by our own efforts.

So, you see, he's not going to do it by brute force. Verse 3, a bruised reed he will not break and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. The battered and the outcast will be remade.

They'll not be further damaged, they'll not be further disadvantaged by this servant. Now, on earth, it so often happens the other way round, isn't it? The depressed, the downcast, those who for generations have been subject to multiple deprivations.

No money, no education, no jobs, no prospects. And, of course, as the time goes on, it gets worse and worse and worse. The bruised reeds are not only broken but trampled underfoot.

The faintly burning wick is not only not set alight but is actually extinguished. This servant will rekindle hope for those whose purpose in life seems to have gone.

[13 : 14] God's answer is not more oppression but grace. Now, this is on two levels. First of all, this is what God offers now to the downcast and to the oppressed.

God's not interested in your background. God's not interested in whether you come from a mansion born with a silk purse and so on or whether you come from a run-down council estate.

God is interested in you. He loves you, he made you, and he wants to remake you. That's what the gospel is about and that's how the gospel kingdom comes now in people's lives.

But also, it is the gospel for the whole world. The more and more that happens, the more and more society becomes permeated by it.

John Wesley tells in his journals about a visit to a place in Cornwall. John Wesley did a great deal of ministering in the West Country.

[14 : 16] He went to a place that was a desperate place, a place of debauchery, of wife-beating, of poverty, and of ignorance to a terrible degree.

As he preached, the word of God touched many hearts and lives. And 20 years later, when he revisited the same village, he discovered a transformation.

Oh, don't let's live in fantasy land. Not everyone was converted. Not every problem was solved. But because the gospel had changed hearts and lives, the problems of that community were also addressed.

You see, that's what happens when the gospel changes hearts and lives. It's not an alternative gospel. It's not got the choice either of preaching the gospel or helping the poor and so on. By the preaching of the gospel, hearts are changed and lives are changed and people are moved to help in that kind of situation.

This is a new way of ruling. This is a different kind, a new kind of politics. So we'll not rule by brute force. But more than that, verse 4, he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law.

[15 : 33] In other words, he's going to finish the task. He will not grow faint or be discouraged. Back in chapter 40, the great words, have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, he does not grow faint or weary.

Governments run out of steam. People get tired. All kinds of good projects fall by the wayside because people are weary. This servant will not grow faint or weary.

This servant will carry out the work. When we look at the church today, it is frankly a depressing picture often. There's a fair number of people here in this room where thousands and thousands more who never enter this kind of place, never listen to the gospel.

We might well feel the gospel is on a hiding to nothing. This chapter is telling us and the whole of scripture tells us that this kingdom is going to come.

That the gospel will succeed. The word of God, as chapter 55 says, will succeed in the purpose which is sent. One day the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

[16 : 47] Look at that. Till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law. It's where coastlands common in Isaiah, sometimes translated islands, perspective moving westward as he looks out to the Mediterranean and the great new empires of Greece and Rome, already stirring and giving some indication of what was going to happen.

And of course, it points to us as well. An area that Isaiah had never heard of, never known existed. because this is a gospel for the whole earth.

A worldwide perspective. If we truly believe in the ministry and in the work of this servant, then we're going to have a worldwide perspective as well.

Because we believe that the Lord has a future for the whole world. Let's refinish two things. First of all, as I said, this is not fantasy.

This is not a kind of lyrical, it is a great lyrical poem. Isaiah is a tremendous poet. I love Isaiah. I love reading him aloud. I recommend it to you.

[17 : 55] Roll the words over in your mouth, savour them. It's a tremendous poetry. Better still learn Hebrew and read him in the original. That's another story. But this is not just a fantasy.

This is not science fiction. This is actually going to happen. It will happen both in general terms and in detail. It will, the king will reign.

The nations will come to Zion. The Lord will see his earthly heritage and he'll rejoice as he sees it. That's encouragement.

There's also challenge, isn't there? We need to be ready today to be members of that kingdom which will come. If we're already members of that kingdom, if we already know the Lord Jesus Christ, then it's our task to live as citizens of that kingdom, shining the light of that gospel into the dark places of the world.

If we are not, then today, then let today be the day when we open our hearts and lives and we accept the king as our reigning king and so anticipate that day when he will rule over the whole world, when he will establish justice and bring forth justice to all the nations.

[19 : 11] That is a gospel worth believing. That is a gospel worth proclaiming. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Until that glad day dawns, we pray that that rain may shine ever more brightly in the lives of those of us who are already citizens of that kingdom and that many who are not yet citizens of that kingdom, that light may shine into their hearts and that they may spread that same glad message to others.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.