

The Hope of the World is a Servant

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[0 : 0 0] Let me just say before we begin, I can begin by saying Isaiah, but I can't keep it up. I'll fall away. So when I go back to Isaiah, as Americans usually do, just cut me some slack if you would.

It was about 1863 and General Ulysses S. Grant was coming to the north in the states to receive a command to go down to Chattanooga being reassigned.

And Secretary of War Edmund Stanton went out to meet him at the train station in Indianapolis. He walked onto the train. He grabbed the hand of a man there and he said, How do you do, General Grant?

I knew you at once from your pictures. As a matter of fact, he was shaking the hand of Dr. Kitto, who was the staff surgeon. Maybe the pictures weren't too good.

I don't know. But it was a problem with identity. And you have that problem with identity with this figure called the servant in the latter chapters of Isaiah the prophet.

[1 : 1 4] There is an intense debate over the identity of this servant figure. Because you see in chapter 41, verses 8 and 9, Israel is addressed as Yahweh or the Lord's servant and so on.

And so is the servant then, when you get here to chapter 42, verses 1 to 4, corporate? Is it a reference to Israel? On the other hand, there are those who say, No, the servant here is an individual.

And you have to look at the context in each case to see if it's an individual or if it's a corporate body like Israel and so on.

So we must take all of this into account, of course. And as you read, if we were sweeping from chapter 41 into chapter 42, verses 1 to 4, you would see that this servant in chapter 42, verses 1 to 4, is presented as the hope of the world.

And if this servant is the hope of the world, and if he's your only hope, then it's very crucial that you know about this servant then. Unless you end up thinking you're shaking a general's hand and be shaking a surgeon's hand.

[2 : 2 9] So, the whole passage in Isaiah 42, really verses 1 to 9 is the whole chunk of material. And in verses 1 to 4, Yahweh, or the Lord, speaks of his servant.

In verses 5 to 7, he speaks to his servant. And in verses 8 to 9, he speaks to his people, Israel.

And we want to just take the first chunk here. Isaiah 42, verses 1 to 4, where the Lord speaks of his servant. And picking up on that keynote right at the beginning, Look, my servant.

So, what do we just say about this servant? Well, it's as if the Lord says here, Look, in the first place, how sufficient he is. The first part of verse 1.

Look, my servant. I keep him in my grip, my chosen. Now, you need to notice a connection here. And sorry to keep going back and forth, But it's important to see the connection here.

[3 : 28] Most of our modern English versions, at least some like the NIV, don't make it so obvious. And you have to get one of the older translations, like the RSV or the King James.

Well, the English Standard Version does it as well. To get the consistency of translation, In chapter 41, verse 24, you have that word, Behold.

Or it's, as I would translate it, Look. Let's just keep Behold. And you can see it there in verse 24. And then in verse 29, you see it again, Behold. And then when you get to 42, verse 1, you see it again, Behold.

So, Behold, Behold, Behold. Or look, look, look, as we would say in today's parlance. Not all translations make that obvious. And so, I think it's important to see that.

And what's going on there? Well, the Lord is speaking in 41-24, about, or He's really addressing the non-gods, the idle deities.

[4 : 29] And He says, Behold. Look. You're nothing. You're of no account. And then in 41-29, He speaks about them.

He says, Behold, they're all a delusion. And then, Behold, my servant. 42-1. I hope you can see that. The way He's painting, getting a contrast there.

Look. You're nothing, you false deities. Look. They're all a delusion. But look. My servant. You see the contrast that He's drawing there.

Now, the background of this. What's going on in the background? Well, why is everyone so religious? Why is everyone so bent on idols? And so on.

Well, it's because the world is in a crisis. Does that sound familiar? There's a new emergency that's going to be coming on the world that Isaiah is predicting.

[5 : 31] It's going to be King Cyrus and the Persian Empire. You see him depicted in chapter 41, verses 2 through 4, as he conquers kingdoms and runs over nations and goes forth conquering and to conquer.

And it doesn't tell us his name there, but it does mention his name at the end of chapter 44. And this is a picture of the scourge that was to come. And when he goes running over the world and so on, what are people going to do?

Well, they're going to intensify their manufacture of gods. Chapter 41, verses 5 to 7. They look at their fear and their terror and their panic as they see Cyrus running over the ancient Near East and they will turn to religion or as the media might say, they will rediscover their spirituality and they start making images in the face of that.

So you get the picture. Here are the peoples of the world as they face this new world scourge of Cyrus conquest and in their emptiness and in their stupidity they turn to religion, to their own self-manufactured religion and they're producing images.

And the Lord says, these helpless pagan gods are of no use as you face your crumbling world.

[7 : 14] Look, look, my servant. He's your only sufficient, solid hope. Now, you have to ask a question here.

If the servant in 42, verse 1 is set over against these false idols, these non-gods, then who is the servant?

It's not a big argument that's made here, but by contrast, if those are non-deities, then the servant must be a divine figure. By contrast, it's just a hint.

But it seems to be there. Now, what do you do? The reason this may leave us cold as we look at this is that we don't practice the same kind of paganism generally as their eastern peoples in turning to make more images of their deities and so on.

Our paganism is more sophisticated as we face the terrors and the crises of our own day and so on. For example, here we have the scourge of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa and so on.

[8 : 24] What do we think in terms of the solution? And I'm not downplaying actual concrete help and that sort of thing, but oftentimes, isn't our attitude, well, we need to have more research, we need to have more money for research, and if we have the technology, the guys in the white coats will fix this problem.

It's very easy to get into the idolatry of scientism, a kind of a misplaced hope. Or sometimes our idolatry or our paganism can be very evangelical.

You remember how Peter did it on the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke chapter 9 about verse 35 or so, and I know the passage teaches more than this, etc. But at least, Peter wanted to maintain that experience, and he said to Jesus, Lord, it's good to be here.

Why don't we make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. This is a neat thing. This is a mountaintop experience. Let's keep this going.

Let's kind of make this semi-permanent. And God's voice out of the clouds says, this is my Son, Isaiah 42, 1, the Chosen.

[9 : 42] Listen to Him. Don't try to cling to a certain spiritual experience no matter how ecstatic and marvelous. Here's my servant.

Pay attention to Him. And we have to do that, don't we? How often are there times when we can perhaps look back at a warm fellowship that we had in a church maybe 15 years ago?

And after all these years and our moving around, we've never quite been able to duplicate that again. And we look back with longing and memory to that time.

Oh, if we could just... And what are we doing? Look, here's my servant. Listen to Him. Don't make an idol out of a certain gift that He gave you at a certain time.

Our idolatry can be so sophisticated. Look, my servant. See how sufficient He is. Now secondly, He says, look how delightful He is.

[10 : 42] The last of verse 1. He's my chosen. My soul delights in Him. I've placed my spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. Notice especially my chosen.

My soul delights in Him. Now, again, I was trying to lay the groundwork. We won't always do this, but notice, make a certain distinction here.

If you look at chapter 41 verses 8 through 10, you'll see some of the same terminology is used of Israel as is used here of this servant. The chosen, being kept in God's grip and that sort of thing.

But you get the picture as you come to 42, 1 to 4, and you see the servant described here and you keep reading on and when you get to chapter 42 verses 18 to 25, you realize that Israel cannot be this servant.

Because in 42, 18 to 25, the Lord describes Israel as she is, as spiritually deaf and blind, spiritually dense.

[11 : 50] and you say, Israel cannot be the servant described in 42, 1. They just can't fulfill what he says of the servant here.

And so it brings a little clarification. Let me try to add another piece of clarification here. Let me take you on a slight tangent here. The difference between sometimes other people and myself is that when I go on a tangent, I know I'm going on a tangent.

You have it written in my notes, so I don't forget. But notice in this verse, 42, 1, that Yahweh says, I have placed my spirit upon him.

He will bring forth justice to the nations. You see that there. Now you notice that justice is mentioned three times in this short text in verses 1, 3, and 4. And some think that this term justice is almost the equivalent of true religion.

But I don't think you can empty this term as it's used here. That's why I keep translating it justice. You can't empty it of that judicial element that it has in it. So what are we to think about this?

[12 : 58] Well, justice is what you get when one judges rightly. And when one judges rightly, you get a right or a just regime.

And you notice that this justice is going to be universal. He will bring forth justice to the nations worldwide. I do not see how Israel, given their description in chapter 42, verses 18 and following, can fulfill and bring that off.

But Isaiah has already told us of a figure just like this. You see, our problem is we often jump in and nothing wrong with it, but we don't read books from the beginning to the end.

You know, biblical books. Lots of times we take chunks of them. But if we were reading Isaiah from beginning to end, we would remember as we get to chapter 42, I've read something like this before.

And we had. We would have read Isaiah 11, verses 1 to 5, where there was another. We're told there of a messianic king who has the spirit put upon him by God and who will judge with righteousness the afflicted of the earth.

[14 : 11] So if you have your head screwed on right, as you come to Isaiah 42, 1, you can remember what you read in Isaiah 11, 1 to 5. You say, that must be the same figure.

God put his spirit upon him. He brings forth justice. He judges with righteousness, etc. I think that's what Isaiah wants you to say. He wants you, as you read 42, 1, to say, I've already read about that person.

And lo and behold, in Isaiah 11, he's the messianic king who is to come. And now you see that he is this king, but he is also described as a servant as Isaiah wants to deepen your understanding of that coming messianic king.

All of that, simply to say, what you have here, I think, is pointing directly to our Lord Jesus Christ as the one who fulfills this, an individual, messianic king who is also the servant of Yahweh.

Now what difference is it? Let's get back to the keynote. Because the keynote is the Lord saying, look how delightful he is. He is my chosen, my soul delights in him.

[15 : 22] That's a special relationship that he has with Yahweh or with the Lord. And when you read that, can you catch how ecstatic God is over this servant?

My soul delights in him. Now is that just an observation of the text? Do you just say that, you see that there and you say, well, the Lord takes great delight in his servant and so on.

Or is there something more there? I think there's something more. Let's get at it by the back door. J.C. Ryle once told of George Whitefield, the evangelist of the 1700s, and on one occasion he was describing the condition, the miserable condition of a lost, unconverted sinner.

And he described him in terms of a blind beggar who was nearing a precipice and he had but his stick and he had a dog with him.

But as he neared the precipice, his dog abandoned him so he only had his walking stick as he poked around trying to get and feel his way and so on.

[16 : 35] And Whitefield apparently did this with immense intensity and tension and so on. So he brought it to such a crescendo as he was just about to take that final feel with his stick and he would have plunged over the edge and so on.

Just at that point, Lord Chesterfield came forward as it were from his seat just almost by impulse at that point and said, He's gone!

He's gone! But you see what he did. He pulled him. He sucked him right in. So he just didn't say, oh, he's describing a miserable sinner and he's doing it under the image of this blind beggar.

No, no. He was so caught up in it. He was taken in. That's what Yahweh wants to do with you as he describes his feeling and sense and delight in his servant.

He wants you to have that as well. He wants to suck you in as if the servant should be our delight. So whether you stand at Isaiah 42.1 or whether you stand at Jesus' baptism in Mark 1.11 and you hear the Father's voice to the Son saying, you're my Son, the One I love.

[17 : 54] I'm delighted in you. And how can you help but say, I want to be delighted in him as well. How can you help but say, Jesus, you are God's Son, and I delight in you too.

You see what the Father is doing here. You see what the Lord is doing. And what he was doing at Jesus' baptism, he's saying, this is my Son. I think the world of him.

And he wants you to respond, yes, Jesus is all the world to me. Look how delightful he is. Now then, not only is he sufficient and delightful, but he is saying thirdly to you, look how unusual he is.

Verses 2 and 3. Now, Isaiah now tells us what the servant will not do. And here you see a contrast with what we saw when we didn't actually look at it, but it's there, trust me, in chapter 41, verses 2-4, where it describes Cyrus and his coming conquest.

There's a contrast now between that conqueror that will be in years to come, wrapping up the ancient Near East under his domain, and the servant of Yahweh.

[19 : 19] You wonder, as you look at verses 2 and 3, he will not cry out, and he will not lift up his voice, or make it heard in the streets, a crushed reed he will not break, and a flickering flax or wick he will not snuff out.

And you say, how can the servant bring forth justice to the nations if he doesn't mash and smash like Cyrus will?

How can you have that kind of style in verses 2 and 3, and still establish justice throughout the earth? Paradox, mystery.

The best thing to do with paradoxes and mysteries, if you can't make them out right at the beginning, if they're taught in the word of God, you just accept them and wait for more light. But you do have two characteristics of how unusual the servant is that Isaiah gives you here.

One is his quietness, verse 2. He will not cry out, he will not lift up his voice, or make it heard in the streets, which means what? Well, he doesn't blow off about himself. He won't call attention to himself, he won't toot his own horn as we say, he won't be promoting himself in his ministry.

[20 : 30] There's something self-effacing about this servant. You see that, by the way, in Matthew 12, verses 15 to 21, where this passage is quoted in the New Testament, kind of bears that out, of the lack of self-promotion that Jesus would do for himself.

And I wonder, doesn't that serve as a rebuke for us? How often, despite our obscurity and so on, we love to promote ourselves.

One of Calvin's biographers tells of the time of Calvin's death, and how they carried out there in Geneva his instructions for his funeral to the T.

He was to be sewn into a white linen shroud, like every other person that died there, and his body was to be placed in a plain pine coffin.

At the grave, there was to be no music, nor any words, and his instructions were carried out.

[21 : 45] One thing Calvin couldn't prevent was the great throng of people that followed the entourage to the burial. And this man, as biographer says, who was a miss to oppose to all ambition, did not even want a tombstone.

The result was that several months after Calvin was buried, some former foreign students came to Geneva and wanted to see the final earthly resting place of the great reformer. When they went out to the cemetery, they couldn't find Calvin's grave among all the other fresh mounds of dirt.

Not bad. We don't really need a Calvin grotto, do we? It's not about Calvin anyway, is it? How much like the Lord Jesus, this quietness about him, this lack of self-promotion.

And then Isaiah indicates, or the Lord indicates, that there's another characteristic of this servant, this unusual servant, and that is his gentleness in verse 3.

A crushed reed he will not break, and a flickering flax or flickering wick he will not snuff out. Or you have a crushed reed, and the very fact that you handle it may break it.

[23 : 08] And if you have a flickering wick and a little oil lamp and so on, this servant is one who could take something like that and they wouldn't extinguish it by using it.

But you get a crushed reed, a flickering wick. Alec Motier puts it nicely, I think. He said, to this servant, nothing is useless, even the bruised reed, which is useless as a support or for anything else.

Neither is anything like a smoldering wick too far gone towards extinction. The servant can deal with things that are useless and hopeless and not harm them.

I don't want to overly spiritualize this, and I don't think I am, but isn't a crushed reed and flickering wick, isn't that a pretty accurate description of Christ's people in any number of days?

But they're safe in Jesus' hands. He can deal with them and not destroy them. And on any Lord's Day, what do you see but a true description of Jesus' church here?

[24 : 23] Crushed reeds and flickering wicks. I know what you see when you come into any gathering of worship among the Lord's people, as you see people in perhaps greater or lesser degrees of formality of dress or whatever, but beyond that there's so much more.

Because even when we know people among us, we don't often know. We don't always have a clue to the depth of the heartaches that they bear.

And the burdens they come dragging into the pews or the chairs as the case may be on any given Lord's Day. They're often such a fearful, fragile, shivering kind of people.

They're bruised reeds and flickering wicks and Jesus can deal with them without destroying them. Look how unusual your Savior is.

I wonder, should this not be, in terms of application, our way with Christ's people? Shouldn't there be a gentleness and a tenderness with us, with other believers then?

[25 : 32] Now please understand, I'm not saying that you never confront another believer. I'm not saying that there's never a place for discipline in the church.

There are not only broken folks among Christ's people, there are some nasty ones too. And there are times, you know, I happen to know, there are times when you have to say to someone in a congregation, you have to confront them.

And you have to say, you know, I don't think you're happy here. And you're making some other people pretty miserable. And, you know, the doors of the church open to let people in and they open to let people out and I think you should take the latter option and go help another church somewhere.

Sometimes, sometimes you have to say that to some folks. So please understand, I'm not saying that we're always trying to fall all over ourselves just to be nice to people, which is what we have a problem with in the American South.

But there is this. And our concern ought to be that we not have a kind of a sledgehammer ministry among one another, but that we try to imitate the servant of the Lord in his gentleness and his tenderness toward hurting believers.

[26 : 55] I had an uncle who, well, they called him Bruno at work. I don't know exactly why. He was kind of a tough fellow, I guess, but he wasn't actually all that big.

He just had that way about him. But my uncle, according to the lure of our family, once moved my aunt's china cupboard. And he got it just about into the place where it needed to be.

But you know when you move something in a house, how sometimes it doesn't exactly fit just right. And so my uncle got his sledgehammer out and he whacked the leg of that thing to get it into place and the china fell out and broke and it was quite a nasty sort of a thing.

We can do that sometimes among the Lord's people. We can have that sledgehammer type of ministry with one another in which we just try to blow each other away occasionally.

you need to watch that. You see what you have here. What a servant for a beaten and a battered people.

[28 : 00] Jesus does not despise you for your weakness. He does not mock you in your fears. He does not crush you in your despair.

It reminds me of Calvin's hymn, I greet thee who my sure redeemer art. And about stanza four of that hymn, the hymn says, thou hast a true or the true and perfect gentleness.

No harshness hast thou and no bitterness. Look how unusual he is.

Don't you want him for your own? Now, fourthly, you notice that the Lord says, look how successful he is. Verse four, he will not flicker out and he will not get crushed until he sets justice throughout the earth and the coastlands wait for his law.

Look how successful he is. The Lord says, he will do it. He will meet discouragements and apparent setbacks. That seems to me he's playing on the words from verse three when he says, he will, that is the servant, will not flicker out and he will not get crushed.

[29 : 20] There's a little implication there that he may have reason to be discouraged and in despair, but he will not flicker out and he will not get crushed until he sets justice throughout the earth.

Now, as one writer says, that's not a possibility. That's not an ideal. He does it. He sets, he imposes justice, his just and righteous reign throughout the earth.

That's the keynote. We can't go into this in a lot of detail. But you see, the point is, no matter what obstacles the servant will face, the servant will establish his regime throughout the earth.

the certainty of that and the inevitability of it. I wonder, you know, saying nothing is going to stop my servant plan.

I wonder if you have a sense of that inevitability and certainty of Christ's coming kingdom. You know, how that gets when you have a certain sense that something can't be stopped.

[30 : 29] And that's sort of the point here, the unstopability of Christ's kingdom. You have a marvelous story in your years ago here.

I think it was in the Highlands. There was a very interesting pastor, an evangelical pastor by the name of Aeneas Sage. Maybe about the 1740s.

Don't hold me to the date. But Aeneas Sage went to a community and they didn't care too much about worship. Didn't want to go to church on the Sabbath. Didn't want to worship on the Sabbath.

They had their sports lined up and they played their sports and so on. I suppose there are 10Ks and that sort of thing on the Lord's Day. And the most beseeching kind of invitations that Mr.

Sage might give were not heeded. And so Mr. Sage, Aeneas Sage was a powerfully built man. And so he decided that he would challenge the champion of the parish, a fellow by the name of Big Rory.

[31 : 33] So he challenged him to a wrestling match and Mr. Sage threw him. And so Big Rory was a good sport and took his loss well. And he developed a real respect for the minister.

And so Mr. Sage took Big Rory aside one day and he said he had a certain plan for kind of, well, building up the church, let's say. And so next Lord's Day, people were out at their games and their sports and so on.

And here Aeneas Sage and Big Rory went out among them and they grabbed each of them, two men apiece. They were said to be Samson's in strength. They dragged them to the church, threw them in the church, locked the door and went back and got two more apiece, dragged them in.

You get the idea, I think, the trend. And so on. And then Big Rory stood at the back with a cudgel just in case anyone thought they didn't want to worship that day. And Mr. Sage ascended the steps to conduct the worship.

It is said that Mr. Sage made the people very orthodox. I'm sure he did. But, you know, there's a sense, do you get the sense of inevitability there?

[32 : 43] We are going to have a church planted here. We are going to have people here. And there's nothing, any of you can do to stop it, he was saying.

It was just a done deal, as we sometimes say. That's the sense here in verse 4. He will set justice throughout the earth.

I hope you have that sense of the inevitability of Jesus' final reign. And I hope it infects your faith. If that sense of dogmatism, and I know dogmatism is out today, but if that sense of dogmatism about the triumph of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth doesn't infect your insides, then why do you put the supper dishes into the dishwasher, and why do you walk out your front door to work in the morning?

Look how successful he is. So, in all the panic of the disaster ridden evening news, Yahweh turns to you and says, behold, my servant.

He is sufficient. He's delightful. He's gentle. He's successful. What more can you want?

[34 : 09] Let us pray. now, O Lord, we have come full circle in our worship service.

We began by singing a hymn in which we said, giving thanks, receiving mercy. Now, we have received mercy.

In fact, you have wrapped all your mercy up in Jesus Christ. And you have pointed us to him, and you have said, look, here is my servant.

O Lord, grant that we might crave him, and grant that we might have him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.