

Our Savior, the Servant of the Lord, Isaiah 42:1-9

Sometimes the nation of Israel is referred to as God's servant. But, here in our text, we know that the Servant is the Son of God. Among the reasons for this conclusion (He is an individual) is the fact that our passage in **Isaiah 42:1-9** is quoted in **Matthew 12:18-20** as descriptive of Christ in His earthly ministry. The "Servant" here is uniquely the Lord Jesus Christ; God's chosen one, on whom He places His Spirit without measure, the One will make Israel glorious, and through whom justice will prevail, and who will rule over a global Kingdom.

"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations" (42:1). As God speaks of His blessed Son, we are to **'behold Him'** as it says in verse one. To **behold Him** is to look to Him with the eye of faith, observe Him, admire, adore Him—consider His fitness to deal with your case as one who is a guilty sinner (He is the very Savior you need). And, as Calvin says, looking to Him in faith and trust so as not to be despairing in your present circumstances.

I. God speaks to the seed about His Servant

V. 1 – The Servant's credentials. The eternal Son of God, co-equal in glory, power, and divinity with the Father, takes on the form of a Servant that He might learn obedience as our merciful High Priest. God 'upholds' Him (**v, 1, upholds**, also containing the meaning of *leans upon* or *depends upon* Him) for the mighty work of redemption. God's Servant is His 'elect One' His 'chosen one'—and is described here as employed for God.

The second half of verse one looks beyond the first coming of Christ to the His glorious return when He will usher in (brings forth) justice. For, then He will set up religion in the world around the worship of the Trinity so that there will be wisdom, equity, and holiness and the Gentile nations will be blessed. (This is the 'rod of iron' rule—see **Ps 2:7-9** and **Rev 2:26-27**.) Christ is sent to bring the whole world under the authority of God and obedience to Him. Without Christ, God's elect Servant, all is disordered and confused—corrupted and in need of newness of life (Calvin).

V. 2 – The Servant's character. "He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street" (42:2). We see that His ministry will be quiet, and unassuming. He comes to obey God as the meek and lowly One—claiming that He did not come to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through

Him (Jn 3:17). But, at His second coming, He will return as Judge of the living and the dead (saw last time that His second coming is the 'Lion program').

His earthly ministry at His first coming will not be characterized by pomp, splendor, and disturbance—He would not be commanding a royal militia to do His bidding. For, His Kingdom was not of this world He said, otherwise His servants would have taken up arms and be fighting (Jn 18:36-37). His Kingdom is spiritual, therefore His weapons are spiritual and not carnal (2 Cor 10).

In His meekness, He would patiently endure opposition and persecution without striving; and without uttering threats, “... and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet 2:23-24). “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:3). His sheep would hear His voice and cheerfully submit to Him—giving up their self-reliance, and their own judgment of things, and welcoming God’s instruction from the gospel (Jn 10:3-5, 27).

V. 3 – The Servant’s compassion. “A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice” (42:3).

Christ’s ministry will be characterized by compassion and mercy. Notice the metaphors here for broken persons with little life and strength, and with little heat and light: a bruised or crushed reed He will not break, and a dimly burning, smoking wick He will not extinguish. How tender and loving He is. A bruised reed is useless for a staff or measuring rod; one cannot lean on it, it supports no weight. And, smoldering flax gives no light, only acrid irritating smoke (note smoke as an offense and our depraved natures).

Yet, our Savior graciously considers our helpless frame. He shows tenderness to avoid crushing a bruised reed (i.e. a contrite sinner); or extinguishing the feeble testimony of the weakest believer (EX. lamb and barbed wire). Christ Jesus, as God’s Servant, has the power to make a bruised reed into a stately cedar in God’s house, and to make a smudge pot of smoldering flax into a brilliant light to the glory of God. Christ Jesus is very tender to those who have true grace, though they are very weak in it. He accepts the willingness of the spirit—pardoning and passing by the weakness of the flesh (Matthew Henry).

Remember in **Isaiah 42** we are reading the Father’s infallible testimony

concerning the Son. Through Christ, His Servant, He will reorder human existence in a beautiful way according to God's blueprint for humanity. The present human condition (problem) is not merely a lack of ideal justice in governance seen in slums, crime-filled ghettos, violence, corruption, greed. No, the problem is far deeper; it is the human heart: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Mt 15:19). Only the gentle Servant of the Lord, our Savior, can deliver us from the idolatries that enslave and imprison us.

V. 4 – *The Servant's commission.* "He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law" (42:4). Christ is the source of human flourishing. God the Father is the 'preacher' in this passage, the Father is proclaiming His Son's qualifications and His work on behalf of His people. How we need an Almighty Savior who can deal victoriously with the world, sin, and Satan.

He will not fail or be discouraged (*disheartened or crushed*), though the service is difficult and much opposed in His first coming. He will bring forth justice and truth. And, He will ultimately (at His second coming) erect His government in the earth—totally reforming society so that the citizens of the earth become His disciples who gladly sit at His feet. The furthest coastlands (population centers) will not dread His approach, but will eagerly wait (for the instruction of, and the enforcement of) His law. "**Justice**" (Heb. *Mishpat*) means 'arrangements', and commentators K & D indicates that *justice* in this context means 'true religion (true worship) as the rule and authority for life in all of its relations' (not, 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' as you might happen to define them).

But, this transformation of the earth and its citizens comes only because of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. Of His atoning work, our Lord says in His high-priestly prayer in **John 17**, just hours before His crucifixion, our Lord prays to His Father, in a spirit of complete resolve: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (Jn 17:4). For, in His bloody death, Christ absorbs the crushing weight of sins' miseries into Himself—so that His people in every age might be cleansed, set free, and reconciled to God. My friends, do not be deceived, it takes a forgiven people, ruled by a perfect Savior to make a truly just society (history has shown, without changed hearts, every utopian plan ends in disaster).

II. God speaks to His Servant about His seed

V. 5 – “Thus says God the LORD, 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 . . .” (45:5). The Author of life is speaking, He who is the very fountain of all being promises that His Servant shall be the source of life and light and liberty to the nations. God who gave birth to all things as Creator shall surely give birth to the promises He makes (He has joined His glory and honor to His promise to perform them. He who created all things out of nothing by His infinite power, and Who is upholding all things, requires that we humbly bow before His power and authority, convinced of the promised reign of Christ.

Vv. 6-7 – *The covenant belonging to the seed.* “I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison” (42:6-7).

In our text we see that the Servant will have a ministry to all the nations. He will fulfill the covenant promises to Israel, and He will bring the light of the revelation of God to the Gentiles. **V. 6** – The Servant is *‘called in righteousness’*; there is no will-to-power here in Jesus, for He is called by God and is not self-appointed. But, Christ, the Servant does not volunteer reluctantly; He is eager to do His Father’s will—that is what He comes to earth to do. “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work’” (Jn 4:34) (see **Heb 10:9**).

The Creator and sustainer of life *undertakes to uphold* the Servant in His earthly mission (*‘hold You by the hand’* v. 6)—to strengthen Him in His agonies (even enabling Him to withstand the 6 hours of wrath-bearing in His crucifixion).

V. 7 – *The salvation experienced by the seed.* The Servant is *sent to open blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the dungeon.* The Servant’s gospel would operate to free all believers from the ‘prison house’ of sin. When the apostle Paul was in chains, giving his salvation testimony before King Agrippa, this is what he related: “And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ‘But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God,

that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me'" (Acts 26:15-18).

Dear friend, has God opened your eyes? Have you seen what you owe God by way of love to Him and perfect obedience to His law? Have you seen something of the utter ruin of your sin, your own depravity? Have you seen that the righteousness God requires of you, you are unable to render to Him? Only if your eyes have been opened to these things will the gospel be glorious good news to you. For, those whose eyes have been opened marvel daily that Christ has been given to be the believer's righteousness and right-standing before God.

Now, for the very heart of **verse 6**. Observe what God says about His Servant: *I will appoint You as a covenant to the people.* What is involved in Him being our covenant? He would bear the sins of His people; their transgressions would be charged to Him. That is the price of releasing the 'captives'—the sacrifice of Himself (offered to God). Christ came to fulfill an everlasting, inter-trinitarian covenant made before time. He is that covenant's 'surety'; as the One who ratifies it, its messenger, its spokesman, its mediator—and, He Himself IS the covenant in this sense: Namely that the covenant consists of His obedience on behalf of all who would ever believe. In other words, the effectiveness of the covenant rests upon the sufficiency and perfection of Christ's work as our Substitute. "How wonderful, Christ stood before God as if He were you, that you might stand before God as if you were Christ" (Spurgeon).

Now, why do we need to hear these things and hear them frequently? It is because the gospel is counter-intuitive. We tend to mistakenly reason from what we are in ourselves—up to God, rather than reasoning from the standpoint of who God is toward us in Christ. Many times I have heard church-goers remark, "Oh, I have always loved God since I have been a very little child." Do not rest in this error, Scripture says that before a person is in Christ, that individual hates God and His enemy. Friends, God is a consuming fire, He dwells in burning holiness and unapproachable light. People don't really know who He is, so they make a sentimental benign image of a god in their minds, and then pronounce themselves 'fine', OK with God.

The gospel is very clear, you can't go to God on your own, except through Christ Jesus, the appointed Mediator. You desperately need the appointed One to go to God for you—to negotiate on your behalf. He is the Servant of the Lord who came into the world for this purpose; for, He is ordained to be *the covenant of His*

people in the things pertaining to God. The believing sinner goes to God by going to Christ.

Because of the work of Christ, our Substitute, His people have blessing, life, favor, acceptance, forgiveness, justification, adoption, inheritance, and glorification. These blessings of the covenant come through Christ alone. Now our text states that Christ, the Servant was given as a covenant of the people. Now the very name, Jesus (savior, deliverer, rescuer, God saves) is assigned to the Son of God because He is sent to do what? **Matthew 1:21** reveals what the angel of the Lord declared to Joseph: “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” He is going to save ‘His people’. So in our Isaiah text God is speaking to His Son in reference to His Son’s people (**v. 6**). God called His Servant in righteousness, and appointed Him as a covenant to the people, for a light to the Gentiles.

The Father is speaking to His Son in regard to the salvation of a specific group of people. These people are His seed (offspring) (**Is 53**), His sheep (**Jn 10**), His bride (**Eph 5**), those given to the Son out of the world (**Jn 6; 17**), His chosen ones (**Eph 1**), those predestined from eternity (**Rom 8**), those made willing in the day of His power (**Ps 110**).

These people are given spiritual ‘eyes’ to see, and spiritual ‘ears’ to hear that they might hear the call of Christ in the gospel, and then give all the praise and glory to God for their salvation. This is why Jesus could say to His disciples: “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear” (**Mt 13:16**). How we ought to bless the Name of our God for giving us ears to hear what God is speaking to us about His Son in **verses 1-4 of Isaiah 42**, and what God is speaking to His Son about us in **verses 5-9 of Isaiah 42**.

Vv. 8-9 – The assurances given to the seed. “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images. ‘Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim them to you” (**42:8-9**). Here is Yahweh’s pledge that He would put an end to idolatry (essential for deliverance). The redemptive work of His Servant (as Prophet, Priest, and King) would overthrow idolatry, restore Israel, and convert the Gentiles. The ‘new things’ prophesied in **verse 9** speak of the defeat of Israel’s oppressors as preparation for the conversion of the Gentiles. God glorifies Himself in His people—so they look to Him and away from human mediation as their help.

What God says would happen (the ‘former things’), did happen—these clear

proofs are designed for us to place our confidence in the future in God's hands—before they 'spring forth'. Yahweh was faithful in the Cyrus prophecy (this heathen king provided significant help in underwriting Israel's repatriation) (**Is 45**); God will also be faithful in the salvation prophecy. God attaches His honor and glory to the fulfillment of His Word—He is a jealous God, He will not give away His glory to idols. Idol worshippers are shamefully deceived in their satanically imposed delusions—they richly deserve eternal perdition. Dump your idols and trust Me!

Christ, our God-given covenant is the reason why the true believer is secure in his status and standing before God. For, in His great love for His people, Christ took their liabilities and transgressions upon Himself. In a massive guilt exchange planned in eternity past, the Son took upon Himself, the legal guilt of His people—He bore their infirmities up to the cross that they might be carried away. Therefore, the genuine believer is accepted by God because of the merits of Christ and not our own merits (or religious works). "But, Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:24-25).

He makes His wrath-bearing and the bearing of the penalty of our legal guilt the cause of our release from sin. In the well-known hymn, "O for a Thousand Tongues," in the fourth stanza it says, He breaks the power of cancell'd sin, He sets the prisoner free: His blood can make the foulest clean: His blood avail'd for me.

Listen, sin's *guilt* must be cancelled in order for sin's *grip* to be cancelled. Therefore, salvation means extraction out of darkness, rescue from the power of idolatries, deliverance from sin; from its rule, enslavement, corruption, alienation, condemnation—ultimately from all of its presence and effects. We have no ability in ourselves to gain this deliverance, it must come from the Lord (**Jonah 2:9**).

I would ask you this morning, do you know Christ, the merciful Servant of the Lord—so that all of your hope is in Him and not yourself? Have you gone to Christ in faith and repentance, and received from Him a God-approved righteousness? A new heart, a new nature able to love and trust God?