

The Servant of Isaiah: The Divine Plan for His Servant
Isaiah 42:1-7
February 10, 2016
Ash Wednesday

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. 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.

One of the great themes of the Bible is the theme of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. The Servant is a prophetic image for the Messiah, the Savior. In his prophecies, Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of the Savior and of the Gospel he is charged with bringing. It's this Old Testament Gospel we are going to examine in our Lenten services with this year. Our Lenten Theme is the Servant of Isaiah.

Modern Christians often see the Gospel in a rather one-dimensional light. It is often viewed as a simple thing, easily detailed on a single sheet of paper with very few paragraphs. But God took centuries, and wrote an entire book about it.

In addition to that, we people of today tend to look at everything from our time and our prejudices and overlook the fact that the Gospel is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The prophets taught everything we can teach, only they did it without knowing the name "Jesus", and without having a cross in view.

Those prophets had the back-story, as it is called on television today. They talked about the rationale of God and the fulness of the promises. We don't have time to review every prophecy during Lent, but we will take a closer look at those Servant passages to gather some of the Old Testament flavor of the Gospel as they knew it. Hopefully it will deepen your understanding of the Gospel and strengthen your confidence in God, who did all this for you.

Tonight we begin with something of an overview. Tonight's sermon theme is, "The Divine Plan for His Servant".

In these prophecies, you find that Isaiah switches from God speaking directly to us to Isaiah speaking about what God says. At times, God's revelations sound like He is talking to His people, and other times it sounds as if He is talking directly to Jesus, the Servant. All of it is meant for our learning. All of it was meant for Jesus as He served and worked out the plan of God for our salvation.

We begin by noting that the Servant is pleasing to God. This is where the ministry of Jesus begins as well, with God declaring that He is well-pleased with Jesus at His Baptism – and again at the Transfiguration. Isaiah writes: *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* (Is 42:1 ESV). Now compare this prophecy with the baptism of Jesus. The Father announces his pleasure with Jesus, and the Spirit comes down and lands on Jesus in the form of a dove (Mt 3:16-17).

This is the plan of God being laid out before the people somewhere between seven hundred and eight hundred years before any of this plan comes to pass. In this prophecy, we even learn that the mission of the Servant is to be *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* (Is 42:6-7 ESV).

Now, listen to the words of Isaiah 61:1: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.* After Jesus read these words in the synagogue in Nazareth, he announced to the people that they were witnesses to the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Isaiah even describes the character of both the Servant and of his Gospel. *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* (Is 42:2-4 ESV).

Jesus didn't cry out when he was taken and crucified. He was humble, and he allowed everything that happened to Him according to the plan of God. He actively stood in the way of any effort to stop what was happening to him. When Peter took up arms against those who came to arrest Jesus, he stopped Peter and healed the ear of Malchus.

Jesus often refused to speak in his trials, even though his speech would have set Him free. When he did speak, he spoke the truth, which usually offended those who heard it. He spoke the truth knowing it would increase the hatred of those who had taken him captive. He was not disheartened or crushed until he accomplished his mission. Instead, he steadily worked to accomplish what the plan of his Father set out before him.

That same passage also describes the Gospel, *a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.* Jesus established a Gospel which did not depend on us or the quality of our faith, but on him. Jesus turns away no one who hears his invitation and believes the promise.

God does not look for a great faith with a dynamic, aggressive spirit. He knows the strength of people, so faith is his gift to us, not something we must work up in ourselves. We are asked to simply trust him and take him at His Word. The power and glory are all

his.

What the Servant establishes is truly justice. He paid the penalty. He took our place. We are not merely excused for the sins we have committed. We are redeemed. Jesus made atonement. God didn't brush our sins under the rug, he punished them according to his wrath. He laid that punishment on his Servant, Jesus.

Our forgiveness is not injustice, but divine justice, bought at terrible price by the suffering and death of the very Son of God. Your sins are forgiven, and you are given everlasting life in connection with Jesus Christ. That is the justice that the Servant was charged with establishing.

The rest of the prophecy identifies whose plan this is, and whose work is being done: *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:* (Is 42:5 ESV).

What we have in Jesus Christ is the careful working out of the divine plan, established before the foundation of the world. God could have named the Savior in the prophecies, told us precisely when and where it would happen, and given us all the details we know from the New Testament. He could have, but he didn't. If he had, it would not have changed a thing about the way the world receives the Gospel. The problem of the world is that it is God's plan, and the world is ruled by - dominated by - the devil, who is the enemy of God and of all mankind.

If we had the details any clearer, the world would simply ignore them, the way they ignore what they already have. They would tell us that no one could have known the future from the past, especially with such precision. The world would have called it a counterfeit. How do I know? Because that is what they do today.

They say it's not true. They say that the church invented the stories and details of Christ's life to align with the words of the Prophets. They say the prophecies don't mean what they clearly say. The world rejects it out of hand, and instead chooses any fiction or fable because it insulates them from dealing with the true God and the reality of what they are, slaves of sin and Satan.

Besides, the Bible does tell us where. The Magi got that information from the scribes in Jerusalem when they searched for the one who was born to be King of the Jews. The Bible tells us who - it doesn't give us the name Jesus until Matthew, but it says that he will be called Immanuel, which means God with us, which is what and who Jesus was.

It tells us about how people will treat him. It describes in detail his death. It tells us that the issue is righteousness and justice, and about the tender, gentle mercies of our God. It's all there and the world refuses it. They deny it means what it says. They deny that God could have been speaking about Jesus. Then they even deny that there is a God at all.

But the truth is there, plainly in prophecy and plainly in history. Isaiah laid it all out for us. It wasn't his idea. God inspired him. And he wrote down for us, the divine plan for his Servant; and for us.