

God's Servant: A Savior for Every Age

(Isaiah 42:1-7) "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. {2} He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. {3} A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; {4} he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." {5} This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: {6} "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, {7} to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Question for you. If you wanted to share your faith with someone, if you wanted to tell them who Jesus is and what he's done for you, could you do that using only what can know from the Old Testament? In other words, you can't be quoting John 3:16..."For God so loved the world..." No, you can only point to Old Testament passages. You can only refer to what was written before Jesus was born. Could you find enough in the Old Testament to paint a clear picture of who Jesus is and what he came to do?

Now, maybe you're thinking to yourself, "Yeah, like when would I ever need to tell someone about Jesus using only the Old Testament?" Well, if your next-door neighbor happens to be a Jew, who accepts only the first 39 books of the Bible as God's word, then you're going to need to find Jesus in the Old Testament. In fact, wouldn't the same thing be true for anyone who lived before Jesus? I mean, if there were any believers in Old Testament times, it was because they found a message about a coming Messiah. In fact, didn't Jesus say about the Old Testament Scriptures. "*These are the Scriptures that testify about me*" (John 5:39)?

So, back to my original question. If all you had to go on was the Old Testament, could you paint a clear picture of the Savior for all the world? I hope that you could. But just in case you're thinking you could use a little refresher, you are in luck. For today we turn our attention to one of those Old Testament pictures of Christ. It's found in the book of Isaiah—which by the way, if you are looking for pictures of Jesus, Isaiah is a great place to start. Isaiah is sometimes referred to as the Evangelist of the Old Testament, for how clearly he describes the coming Messiah.

Our text is often referred to as one of the four "Servant Songs" in Isaiah. What we want to do today is, first, see how God describes his Servant in the Old Testament; secondly, how Jesus fulfilled that description in the New Testament. And finally, what application that has for our lives today. In the end we will see, by the Spirit's direction, that

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Our text begins with God speaking to the nation of Israel through the Prophet Isaiah. God had just finished telling the Israelites that all their false gods were good for nothing. And then he offers them a much better option. God says, "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.*" Hmmm. Do those words sound familiar to you? God pointing out someone

he delights in? Someone he is well-pleased with? We heard that in our gospel lesson today, when at the time of Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven said, "*This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17). Or how about God's words on the Mount of Transfiguration when again God says, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 17:5) Do you see the connection? Prophecy in the Old Testament; fulfillment in the New Testament—fulfillment in Christ.

But that's not the only connection between this Old Testament prophecy and the fulfillment in Jesus. God goes on to say, "*I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.*" I will put my Spirit on him. Again, does that sound familiar? Isn't that also what happened at Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit of God descending like a dove and landed on Jesus? Or you think of our second reading today, where the Apostle Peter recounted to Cornelius...*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. (Acts 10:38).* Again, that's a reference to Jesus' baptism and ultimately a fulfillment of the words of Isaiah that God would put his Spirit on the coming Messiah.

But notice that God's description of his servant doesn't end there. God says that his servant "*will bring justice to the nations.*" In fact, he says that several times. God says, "*In faithfulness, he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.*" Now, when you hear that the Lord's servant will bring justice to the earth, what does that mean to you? For a lot of people, bringing justice means making things right. Making things fair. Making the bad guys pay for their crimes. There are a lot of people who want justice in this world, be it social justice, or racial justice or economic justice. They're willing to march in the streets to get it. They want someone to, in the words of Isaiah, "*bring justice to the nations.*"

If you think about it, isn't that what a lot of the Jews in Jesus' day were looking for in the Messiah? They wanted someone to bring them some justice. Someone who could throw off the yoke of the oppressive Roman government. They wanted someone who could lead them into battle, someone who could shout out, "Let's make our nation great again!" That's what many were looking for the Messiah to do for them.

But that's not what God said his chosen servant would do for the people. No, God promised that his chosen servant would do just the opposite. What does God say about his servant here in our text? *He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.* In other words, God's servant was not going to be a social activist. He was not going to rile up the crowds. He was not going to throw his weight around. No rather, in the words of the Old Testament Prophet Zechariah, "*See your king comes to you...gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*" (Zechariah 9:9).

Again, who better to fulfil those words of the prophets than Jesus? Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus spent more time trying to avoid the crowds than he did trying to gather them. Think of how often Jesus told his disciples, "Don't tell anyone that I am the Christ." Why? Because he didn't want them to see him as some kind of earthly king, some kind of political reformer, someone who was going to use force to make things right, someone who was going to...well, someone who is going to finally bring some justice to our world.

But now maybe you're thinking, "Wait a minute, Pastor. You're saying that Jesus did not come to bring justice for our world? Didn't Isaiah just say that God's chosen servant would bring justice to the nations?" Well, maybe we should define what is meant by "bring justice to the nations." You see, when most people hear that word justice, they think of a courtroom, the place where a judge administers justice. Justice means that if you do the crime, you'd better be ready

to do the time. Justice means making sure that people get what they deserve. And that's what a lot of people want from God. When they see all these terrible crimes being committed, they say, "God why aren't you doing something about that? Where's the justice?" If I'm a victim of a crime, if I get cheated out of a job, if I get slandered on social media, I'm tempted to say, "God, where's the justice here? C'mon, are you going to let them get away with that? Bring me some justice!"

Wait a minute. Are you sure about that? Are you sure you want God to bring you some justice? Are you sure you want God to punish all those who have done you wrong, all those who have disobeyed God's commands? Are you sure you want God to unleash his fury on everyone who has given into the dark side that lives within each one of us? If we're honest with ourselves, the last thing that sinners like us want from God is his justice. At least not the kind of justice that is an expression of God's holy law. The justice that demands that every sin be punished.

There is however another kind of justice. A justice that stems not from God's law, but from God's grace. A justice that allows someone else to be punished in our place. It's the justice described in another Old Testament prophecy, recorded in Isaiah, 53: *"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)"*

You realize, those words find their complete fulfillment only in Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross allowed a just God to punish every sin, while at the same time allow him to forgive every sin. That's the "justice" which here in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, God says his chosen servant would "bring to the nations, that is to people of every race, and language and nation.

And really, this is what made God's chosen Servant so unique. God's servant was not coming to destroy sinners. He was coming to redeem them, restore them, make them alive. In fact, that's why God can say about his chosen servant, *"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."*

Again, is there anyone that those words apply to more accurately than Jesus? You think of the tender loving care that Jesus showed to people who are struggling with their sins. He asked for a cup of water from a woman living in adultery, so he could in turn offer here the water of life. He went to the home of a crooked tax collector named Zacchaeus. After Peter denied knowing the Lord, Jesus didn't skewer Peter. Instead he forgave Him. He restored him to discipleship. Even as Judas was plotting to betray Jesus, the Lord still tried to draw Judas closer to himself, to call him to repentance.

My friends isn't the same thing still true today? There are so many times when we are the ones who are battered and bruised by our own sins and the sins of others. There are times when we feel like our flame of faith is just barely smoldering. Times when we just hate ourselves for the sinful things we keep thinking and saying and doing. At times like these, does Jesus come to us and say, "Listen when you get your act together, come and see me. When you start living like a Christian, then I'll call you my own. No, just the opposite. Jesus says, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29)."*

You realize, that's the Savior we all need. A savior for every generation. A Savior for every age. A savior who did not come to fix what's broken in our world. But rather a savior who came to fix what's broken in us. To fix the relationship that we broke with God. By his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus Christ has brought us justice. He has made things right.

He's made things right between a holy God and sinful man. And for that we can only say,
"Thank you, dear Jesus! Thank you for the peace you have brought to our hearts—a peace we
can't wait to share with others, in Jesus' name. Amen.