

The Coming of the Servant-King

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[0 : 0 0] And good morning everybody it is so great to be together. I can't see you right now but a few minutes ago I could see a whole bunch of the Watermark family I saw Mimi and Huilin and Oscar and the Lao family and a whole bunch of others it's really great to in a small way be able to see people face to face even through this technological medium. And just to say thank you so much for your grace and your flexibility. I wish in some ways we could communicate these things weeks in advance and have a well organized communication a strategy weeks and months ahead but just your flexibility your grace thank you so much we appreciate it and thank you for that. Now this morning we are starting as Chris said our Advent series and the word Advent comes from the Latin word Adventus which means coming and it's the period in the Christian calendar when we celebrate the coming of Christ. And we're going to be doing that over the next couple of weeks by looking at the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

Now that may sound strange because if you know much about the Bible it's the New Testament that really talks about Jesus and his coming. Why would we look at the Old Testament book? This book that is written 700 years before Jesus came. Well Augustine who lived in the fourth century was one of the first to say that the book of Isaiah is the fifth gospel along with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John because it's just so full and rich of the story of the good news of the gospel of Jesus. And so stick with us of the couple of next couple of weeks as we work through Isaiah together. Today we're going to be looking at this amazing passage in Isaiah chapter 42 and the main passages verses 1 to 9. We're going to focus on verses 1 to 4. If you have your Bible open with you grab Isaiah chapter 42. If you've got the bulletin open up there and we're going to work through this passage together. But I wonder if you can just join me in a moment of prayer. Let's ask God to speak to us from his word now. So let's pray together. Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, we come before you this morning and we come before your word not just to learn some advice, not just to share someone's opinion. We want to come and meet with you in your word. God we want to be astounded by the beauty of Jesus. As we look at this Old Testament message of

Isaiah, hundreds of years before you came Jesus, we want to have our eyes open to see you freshly for who you are, to understand what your coming was all about. And so God I pray for myself, I pray for us in the room, I pray for those of us spread across Hong Kong.

Won't you minister to us? Won't you open the eyes of our heart? God won't you help us to see in your word what you want us to see. We pray these things in your powerful, your majestic and your gentle name. Amen. Amen. Now, as we dive into Isaiah 42, let me give you just a little bit of context about what's going on here. The first half of the book of Isaiah can be quite difficult reading. And it's because it's detailing or chronicling the rampant problems that the nation of Israel are facing. Israel is on a downward spiral and things are going from bad to worse. There is social unrest, there is injustice and corruption. The strong are taking advantage of the weak, the rich are abusing the poor, the leaders, both civic leaders and religious leaders are just thinking about themselves, not caring about the people. And where the nation of Israel was meant to be a light of hope to the nations around them, actually Israel has become just like the nations around them. They've become just as corrupt, just as unjust. There's no distinction between Israel and the surrounding nations around them. And so Isaiah comes with this message, but he doesn't come with a message that just says, pull your socks up or sort yourselves out.

He doesn't even come with a moral message or a message of how to improve their behavior. Isaiah, he tells them that what they're going through is actually the consequences of a far deeper problem. Isaiah diagnoses the root cause of what's going on in the nation of Israel.

[4 : 14] And he says that the root cause is actually the abandoning of their faithfulness to God. The fact that they've run after and hope and trusted in foreign gods and foreign idols.

And the scriptures all throughout the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament tell us again, and again, that fundamentally what's wrong with the world and what's wrong with ourselves. It's just not just what we see on the surface, but it's actually the condition of our hearts, that those who trust in worthless idols become worthless themselves. Those who trust in false gods become false themselves. And so for centuries, God has been speaking to the people of Israel, warning them, calling them, beckoning them, summing them back to himself, but all to no avail.

And so eventually God brings upon Israel this final act of discipline, this final mechanism to bring them back to himself, which is that he brings this army, the Babylonian army from the north. They come down and they conquer Jerusalem. They destroy the temple. They destroy the city of Jerusalem, and they take most of the nation of Israel back to Babylon as forced exiles.

And that's really what the first half of Isaiah is all about, about this warning that the Babylonians are coming, this ruthless nation is coming unless Israel repents. But then in Isaiah chapter 40, things change. There's a shift. And the second half of the book of Isaiah is all about, is written to those in exile, those who are stuck in Babylon. And it's written to tell them that though they feel abandoned, though they feel forsaken, God has not forgotten them. God is going to bring healing and redemption and restoration. God is going to restore them and revive them. And so remember how Isaiah chapter 40 starts, it starts with these famous words. We should have it on the slide here. It says, comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned. And so the second half of Isaiah is all about God's message of hope and redemption and restoration. Except God is going to do it through a very unusual means.

He's going to do it through the work or the ministry of some agent, some agent that he calls his servant. And the rest of Isaiah describes the work of the servant. And in the book of Isaiah, there are four passages that describe the redemptive healing work of this servant agent of God and how it is that this servant is going to bring the redemption, the restoration that Israel, in fact, the world needs.

[6 : 58] And so the first of those passages is Isaiah 42 and we get to look at it today. And so look at how it starts off. Verse one, God says, behold, my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. This servant that God is sending is not self-appointed. He has been destined, almost predestined by God. And he's one that he says, my soul delights in him. It speaks of this intimate relationship that God has with this servant agent of his that's going to bring healing to his people. He says, 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. Now, as we said, God's people are in serious trouble. They need a deliverer. They need a rescuer. But what they don't need is someone who's just going to bring them some good advice. What they need is someone who's going to put what's wrong right again.

In other words, what they need is a king. In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel were those that would lead God's people to flourishing and to abundance. God always spoke about his people, his kings as his servants. Those who were empowered by the Holy Spirit, who led in the power and dependence on the Spirit, would lead his people from death to life, from difficulty to wellness as they rested on God. And the reason is because as Israel's kings went, so went the nation.

When Israel's kings were faithful, God's people flourished and prospered. When Israel's kings were corrupt and unjust, the nation felt the consequences and the pain and the heartache correspondingly.

In fact, the very reason that Israel's in trouble is because their kings are such a mess. And so that's what this passage is about, that God is promising this servant king, one who is going to walk in the power of the Spirit, who's going to lead God's people, one about whom God can finally say, with you my servant, am I well pleased. But look what the servant will do. Look at verse 1. It says, he will bring forth justice to the nations. Verse 3 says, he will faithfully bring forth justice. Verse 4 says, he will not grow faint or be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth. Central to his message, central to his mission, is the fact that this servant king is going to be one who brings some kind of justice to his broken and hurting people. Now the Hebrew word for justice is the word mishpah. And it's a notoriously difficult word to translate because it's used in so many varied ways and different contexts. But broadly speaking, theologians tell us that the Hebrew word mishpah means to restore or to put right again what is wrong. To take something that's not right and to make it right again. Some scholars tell us that the word mishpah means for things to operate according to

[10 : 08] God's right order, how he planned them to be. And so it's to take things that are out of sync with God's order and to restore them to his original plan. There's one famous example in the book of Exodus where God gives these instructions to Moses for how his temple is to be built. And he gives him a plan, a blueprint. He gives him a mishpah, a plan for what God has intended design is for his temple.

Well friends, God has a plan, a blueprint for humanity, for society, how he wants things to run that people may flourish, that we may prosper and enjoy the blessing and the happiness that God plans for us. And it was Israel's abandoning of this blueprint, the plan that had led to their current state. And not only their exile in Babylon, but the injustice, the corruption, the brokenness of their society. And this is the message of Isaiah, that God is going to send a servant king, one who would put right what is wrong again. For those who would receive him, God would restore the brokenness of the world. God's blueprint plan will be for one to come who will undo the horrendous and the degrading effects of sin in the world, who will restore the dignity and the freedom that God's children are meant to enjoy as his sons and his daughters of God. This is the JD, the job description of God's servant king. Friends, as we think about our own world and our own lives, don't we all long for such a king? In the Bible, the result of God's justice is this other beautiful Hebrew word, God's shalom. Shalom means so much more than just peace. It means wholeness or well-being. That God, when he brings his justice, leads to shalom. Friends, don't we long for a shalom in our world, in our city, in our own hearts, where the anger and the mistrust that divide families and churches and societies will subside, with the disappointment and the resentment and the bitterness and the unforgiveness, where a breakdown of relationship can fade away and restoration can come. This is what God's servant king was to bring, a kingdom of justice. Now, in the ancient world, kings were establishing their kingdoms all the time.

And the way that kings would establish their kingdom is through the defeat of their enemies. And in the ancient world, the more ruthless a king and his army were, the more successful they were in establishing their kingdom. Now, at the time of Isaiah, there's two kind of predominant kingdoms.

There's the Assyrian kingdom first, which was overthrown by the Babylonian kingdom. And the Babylonians, if you remember the book of Habakkuk, he describes them as that bitter and hasty nation. Those who seize dwellings that are not their own. Those who, the dreaded and fearsome nation who come only for violence.

That's how the Babylonians are described. And the Babylonians became the world's superpower of the day by smashing the Assyrian empire. They marched into Nineveh, overthrew the capital, killed the Assyrian king and established their power. The Egyptian army then thought, well, this isn't very good. So they marched up north to challenge the Babylonians and the Babylonians crushed the Egyptians at the battle of Qashemesh in around 608 BC. And then Babylon wasn't satisfied with them. They marched further south and destroyed Jerusalem and overtook Judea and took all the Israelites as exiles back to Babylon.

[13 : 46] This is how it worked in the ancient world. This is how kings established their kingdom. But look at this servant king. There's something different about him. There's something unique about him.

Here is a king, a servant king, who's going to liberate Israel from his enemies. One who's going to defeat their foes and bring freedom and justice to the oppressed. Who's going to restore God's people back and bring them dignity and freedom that they had hoped and longed for. But he does it in a way that no other king does it.

Rather than coming with war and might, rather than summoning an army, here's a king who's going to come in gentleness. He's going to come full of mercy. Here's a king that rather than bringing war horses, he's going to come with grace. Look at what verse 2 says. He says, he will not cry aloud or lift up his voice. He will not make it heard in the streets. In other words, he's not going to come with a big fuss. A bruised reed he will not break.

A faintly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. This word from Isaiah is getting stranger and stranger because this coming servant king is going to be one who's going to liberate God's people. He's going to push back darkness. He's going to restore justice and righteousness to the nation. And yet he's going to do so not by way of revolution, but as we said, by mercy. A bruised reed he will not break. It's the image of a plant or maybe a branch, maybe a tree branch that has been broken and has been trampled, maybe in a typhoon or somebody walked in and broke this branch or this flower. But at first you pick it up and as you pick it up, you recognize it just falls over. It's flat. It has no power. And what you're tempted to do is you pick up this flower or this branch that you think is going to be sturdy instead and stable, and yet it's crushed and broken. You cast it aside. You throw it away. It has no use. But here's going to come a servant king. He's going to come to the broken, those that feel abused, those that feel forsaken and abandoned, those who feel broken and downtrodden. And he's not going to cast them aside. He's going to nurse them back to health. He's going to restore them. He's going to bring healing.

Isaiah talks about this faintly burning wick, and it's the image of a candle that has burnt itself down. It's got no resources to replenish itself. And the wick is smoldering. It's flickering. It's about to go out because it cannot replenish itself. Here will come a servant king. Rather than just blowing it out and throwing it away, he will pour himself into it. He will replenish itself by pouring his own very self and restoring it that it can burn brightly again. Friends, just think about the way that our world works. We live in a city that is dog-eat-dog. We live in a city in which if you don't trample others, they'll trample you. I remember when I first moved to Hong Kong, somebody said to me, in this city, second sucks. There's no place for being second or third best. If you're not best, you get left behind. Friend, here is a king who's going to establish a kingdom. Here is a king who's going to bring justice and righteousness to the world. But he's going to do it by coming after those that feel abandoned. He's not going to do it in the way that other kingdoms do it. He's going to revitalize this nation. He's going to come to those that have no strength and he's going to bring and incorporate those that have got nothing to add to his kingdom. Those that have no strength to bring. He does not cast them aside. He doesn't throw them out. He restores them to health.

[17 : 33] And he has the time and the care and the compassion to bring those that the world considers as forgotten and useless and meaningless. And he breathes fresh life into them.

Friends, imagine what our world would look like, what our city would look like, what our own homes and hearts would look like if we were to encounter such a king. But there's something else that's unusual about this king. It seems that somehow this servant king's mission will involve some kind of suffering. Because Isaiah in verse 4 is using a play on words here. And what he's going to say is he's suggesting that this servant king is going to experience the very brokenness that he's come to heal in his people. Look at how he says here. He says, a bruised reed he will not break, a faintly burning or a flickering wick he will not quench till he is faintly brought forth justice. And then he says, he himself will not flicker, it's the same word, he himself will not be bruised until he has established justice on the earth and the coastlands wait for his law. Now do you see what Isaiah is saying here?

He's using this clever plain words to communicate that as he looks into the future, somehow, somewhere, at some point in the future, God is going to send this servant king who is going to establish justice on the earth. He's going to bring shalom to the weary. He's going to bring wholeness to those that feel outcast. He's going to lift up and build up and bring healing to the weary and justice to the oppressed, freedom to the enslaved. He's not going to do it through revolutionary power. He's going to do it by taking upon himself the very brokenness, the very bruising that his people are experiencing. That's causing his people to languish and suffer. He's going to take that upon himself. He says, he will heal their bruising by allowing himself to be bruised.

He will restore their flickering light by allowing himself, his own light to flicker, even to be snuffed out. And yet, that won't hinder his mission. It won't stop what he's come to do, because look at what it says. It says, he will not grow faint or flicker. He will not be completely destroyed, discouraged or bruised until he has established justice on earth, until he has accomplished what he's come to do.

It won't stop his mission. In fact, it seems that his suffering, his bruising, will be the very means by which he accomplishes his mission. His very bruising will be the means by which he brings healing to those that are bruised and discouraged and hurt and broken. His very injustice that he bears upon himself will be the means by which he brings justice and wholeness and shalom to those that need it most.

[20 : 26] Friends, this servant king, this compassionate, glorious, majestic, sovereign, tender servant king, is what Isaiah promises to his people and what we so desperately need.

Friends, who is this king? And where on earth are we going to find such a king? Well, in Isaiah chapter 41, the nation of Israel is described as God's servant. And so some people say maybe Israel is the servant. Israel are going to be those who are going to be a light to the nations.

They're going to restore justice to the earth. But as we read the book of Isaiah, actually Israel is the one that is the bruised and broken reed. Israel is the one that needs restoration and healing themselves.

Israel themselves are pretty broken. Maybe it's a son of David, one of the kings that's going to sit on the throne who will restore justice to the earth. But friends, when you read the Old Testament, you see that the very problem with Israel is their kings. The kings are the most unjust. They're the ones that have brought all the problems upon Israel. Some people say maybe it's Cyrus. Cyrus was the king of Persia that eventually overthrew the Babylonian army and liberated Israel and brought them back to the promised land. Maybe Cyrus is the king. When you read the history book, Cyrus was not a gentle king.

He overthrew Babylon. He overthrew the army. He wasn't someone who came and gently and tenderly healed this broken reed. He was a vanquishing military leader. Some people say maybe it's the church.

[22 : 00] The church is the light of the nations. The one who's going to bring healing to the world. The church is the hope of the world. Friends, if we look at ourselves, are we not just as need of this redeeming, saving king? Are we a light to the nations? Are we ourselves perfect? No friends, we are need. We ourselves need this ministry. And so who is this rescuing redeeming king? Well, look at what the text says.

It says this servant king's influence, his ministry will extend to the ends of the earth. You see, this servant king won't just rescue Israel. His mission is to bring heaven's true justice, shalom, to the whole world, to those who will receive him. Look at verse 1. He says, I put my spirit upon him and he will bring forth justice to the nations. Verse 4, he will not grow faint, will be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth. Verse 6, I will give you as a covenant for my people, a light to the nations. Friends, the reason for this is because that as we read the scriptures, indeed the rest of Isaiah, one of the things we learn is that the problem Israel faced is actually the problem that all of us face. The problem of Israel faced, the reason that Israel was broken and the reason that their society and their homes were broken was because of their drift from the one true God. And friends, don't we find ourselves doing the same, loving, trusting, false idols, false gods? Friends, the problem that Israel faced is the problem that we all face.

Ray Ortlund said it like this. He says, the problem of idolatry was not just a problem for ancient Israel, it's a modern problem as well. In fact, it's a human problem. We inevitably gravitate towards hoping and trusting what we believe will make us happy. Idolatry is the reason why we struggle with the same old persistent enslaving sins. Our root problem is not social, it's not just intellectual, or even moral as we usually think about it. Our root problem is that in all of life, we keep going back to false gods for their false salvations. Friends, as we read the scriptures again and again, we see that the real enemy of God's people is not out there, it's in here. Friends, that the injustice and the brokenness of our world is not just on the streets, it's in our own hearts.

Friends, the injustice of this world is not just in the corridors of power and the political realm, it's actually within our own selves. Friends, where on earth are we going to find such a servant king?

One who's going to not just push back darkness out there, but is going to do so here. One who's not going to just dismantle the injustice on the streets, but dismantle in our own hearts and selves. Friends, where are we going to find one who will bring back captivity and set free those who are oppressed, not just politically or economically, but spiritually, who will establish a heavenly shalom, not just on the streets, but in our hearts. Friends, where are we going to find the servant king who will undo all the horrendous and degrading effects of sin in our world, who will restore the true freedom and dignity that God's children are meant to experience? Friends, where are we going to find one who will bring back together justice and mercy, who will bring justice to our world without crushing those that have been unjust? Friends, where are we going to find a king whose reign is so magnificent, so glorious, so supreme, so universal that all the nations of the world will be able to find refuge and healing and wholeness in him. Friends, where are we going to find a king whose reign is so magnificent that it doesn't just last a generation or two, but millennia, so that even those of us that live in Hong Kong, thousands of miles away from Israel, thousands of years after he came can still find peace, redemption, healing, restoration, freedom, justice, under his rule and reign.

[26 : 14] Friends, where are we going to find such a king? Friends, the good news of Christmas is that such a king has come, that God sent a servant king in the person of Jesus Christ, that God sent his king. He didn't come with pompous here and he wasn't born in a palace. He didn't raise his voice or cry aloud in the streets.

He came humbly, came born in a stable, laying in a manger, surrounded not by palace attendance and royalty, surrounded by shepherds and lonely animals. Friends, the story of Christmas is that God really did send such a servant king, one who would allow himself to be bruised, broken, who would allow even his life to be snuffed out, that he would pour himself out for those of us that are broken and bruised, that he would bring justice, that he would bring healing, that he would restore God's blueprint and plan for our lives and for humanity, that God would put right what has been wrong with the world. Friends, God sent such a son, such a servant king, one in whom his soul delighted. Friends, this is the good news of Christmas.

This is the good news of the gospel, that Jesus has come, heaven and earth's true servant king. Let's pray together. Oh Lord Jesus, we are so grateful for you. We are so grateful for Christmas. God, we are so grateful, as Chris reminded us, that Christmas is not just about feasting and food and presents and holidays.

Christmas is the good news of great joy, that you, heaven's true king, has come to us to restore justice and healing, to bring the shalom that our hearts long for and so desperately need. God, we celebrate you. We long for more of you. God, come and have your way in our city, but more importantly, in our hearts. Jesus, we need you. We long for you. We love you. Jesus, thank you for coming.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for coming, taking upon our sin upon yourself. Thank you for coming to rescue us and redeem us. God, we worship you this morning. We adore you. All praise and glory to your magnificent name. We love you, Lord. Amen. Amen.