

As we begin this important passage we should remember the setting and a few points in the preceding chapters. Isaiah is prophetically speaking to the future people of Judah in captivity. He has told them that they should take comfort for God will raise up a ruler who will return them to their homeland (Isaiah 40:1-2). God will also send a Redeemer (Isaiah 41:14).

In this passage, just as we have seen with previous prophecies, we can see an intermediate fulfillment or foreshadowing of an ultimate fulfillment. It very well may have been taken one way when the captives read it, but a deeper and more complete way by those who returned. The captives may have thought this servant that God was speaking of was the ruler that would come from the east and allow them to return to Jerusalem. While those who returned read it as speaking of the Messiah who was to come. Today we may even see another application.

¹ 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. Isaiah 42:1 While Cyrus may have been God's servant in financing the return of the Jews to Jerusalem (2Chronicles 36:23), and may have had the Spirit of God upon him to do so, we can't say he brought justice to the world. The rest of the passage goes on to describe someone much greater than Cyrus. The only one to bring justice to the nations, the only one in whom the soul of God delights is Jesus. As God said two different times in an audible voice from heaven, ^{17b} *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* Matthew 3:17b (Matthew 17:5) Jews and Christians call this the first of the Suffering Servant Songs. While later Jews interpret this as referring to the Jewish people, the early rabbis and the Aramaic notes on these passages declare this to be about the Messiah.¹ The other Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah make this quite clear, but to avoid losing adherents by conversion to Christianity, Jewish rabbis began to point to several verses to show the servant is the Jewish nation. ¹ *"But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!"* Isaiah 44:1 (Also see 41:8)

I remember overhearing a Christian and some young Jewish boys talking about Isaiah 53, which is another Suffering Servant Song, while on an El Al flight. The Christian tried to tell them it was about Jesus. The boys showed him several verses that declare God's servant is Israel. Both sides were fully convinced. Both sides were unaware of the multiple use of the same term being used in different ways. For example in Malachi 3:1 there are two distinct persons called "messenger." One was John the Baptist preparing the way. The other was Jesus, the messenger of the New Covenant. The servant in the passage we are looking at, can't be the servant of the second half of the chapter who is blind and deaf to the things of God (Isaiah 42:19). **There are two messengers and two servants.** If you press a Jewish person about the prophetic details of the servant in the Suffering Servant Songs, they would find difficulty holding to the opinion that it is about

Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 40:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 41:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

Commented [PW3]: 2 Chronicles 36:23 (ESV)

²³ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"

Commented [PW4]: Matthew 17:5 (ESV)

⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Commented [PW5]: Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b

Commented [PW6]: Isaiah 41:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;

Commented [PW7]: Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

¹ "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Commented [PW8]: Isaiah 42:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD?

the Jewish people. Would they agree that the Spirit of God is upon them, that they have brought justice to the world, or that they don't lift up their voice in the streets? You'll smile at that one if you've been to Israel. Looking at the details of the songs show the servant must be a righteous individual who suffers for the sins of the world making many righteous (Isaiah 53:11). In addition, Matthew quotes these verses saying they were fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 12:18-20).

Understanding this servant is Jesus of Nazareth, let's see what God has said about Him in this first verse. God **upholds** Him as He does all those who trust in Him (Isaiah 41:10). God has **chosen** Him, as He has chosen all who come to Him by faith (John 15:16). God's soul **delights in** Him, as He does all who fear Him and hope in His steadfast love (Psalm 147:11). God **puts His Spirit on** Him as He does with His servants (Joel 2:29). But **bringing justice to the world** is an act of God alone (Isaiah 2:4). All these descriptions together point us to the ultimate servant of God.

² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; Isaiah 42:2 Jesus was a teacher. He wasn't a rabble rouser or the kind of leader who incites people. He invites people. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. The way of the world is pushy and forceful. But Jesus just leads and invites us to follow. He blazed a trail of holiness with the scent of heaven as he loved the sinner and healed the leper. Unselfish love was never demonstrated so graciously as in the life of Jesus.

³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. Isaiah 42:3 The bruised and broken were embraced by His words and actions. The isolated woman at the well found a love that wouldn't use her (John 4:28). The widow who lost her son found compassionate power that raised the dead (Luke 7:15). The berated tax collector found the acceptance that transformed his life (Luke 19:9). It reminds me of a line from the song, Untitled Hymn. "Weak and wounded sinner, lost and left to die, come raise your head for love is passing by. Come to Jesus and live."

He is not only mercy and grace, for that would mean injustice would reign. He will faithfully bring forth justice. Injustice is more than a political dysfunction. "It is a spiritual evil, a denial of God."⁴ The user and abuser will answer to Him. The selfish and merciless will give an account. Justice will be meted out upon Jesus or should they refuse Him, on them. If it were not so, heaven would be no different from this sick world.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Isaiah 42:4 Chapter 40 told us that those who wait on the LORD will walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31). In His steady plodding toward worldwide justice He will not stop until every wrong is righted and every debt is paid. I can't imagine how discouraging it would be to face unrepentant soul after soul and recount all their sins and the righteous justice upon each one. What all the worldly judges have to hear and decide in a lifetime of service is miniscule compared to the justice that Jesus will deal out upon mankind at the Great White Throne (Revelation

Commented [PW9]: Isaiah 53:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Commented [PW10]: Matthew 12:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;

²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory;

Commented [PW11]: Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Commented [PW12]: John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Commented [PW13]: Psalm 147:11 (ESV)

¹¹ but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Commented [PW14]: Joel 2:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Commented [PW15]: Isaiah 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Commented [PW16]: John 4:26 (ESV)

²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Commented [PW17]: Luke 7:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Commented [PW18]: Luke 19:9 (ESV)

⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

Commented [PW19]: - Preaching the Word - Isaiah: God Saves Sinners

Commented [PW20]: Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)

³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

20:11-12). But if that never was to take place, how hopelessly wrong would our existence be? ²² *The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son*, John 5:22

The world will wait for His law. His law is love (John 15:12). Until justice is meted out, His law will not prevail in the world. The Hebrew word for law is "torah." It can also mean "instruction." The coastlands speak of the people of the world that long for this broken world to be fixed. Man hasn't come up with the answer in his thousands of years of history. All we have proven is that we don't have the ability to fix the mess we created when we turned from God and decided to play gods (Genesis 3:17). That is why we wait for Jesus to come and give us His law.

Around the world today the broken hearts of men and women are made whole when they hear and receive the law of Jesus. Hope is renewed and guilt is removed. Joy and peace are experienced for the first time. Imagine the expectation when Christ comes to reign on the earth.

⁵ *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:* Isaiah 42:5 The One speaking through Isaiah introduces Himself. He is *El*. The Creator of heaven and earth. He is *YHWH*, the eternal God. God reminds us He stretched out the incredible universe with its incomprehensible size, and is still stretching it out (40:22). He made this amazing planet and everything in it, animal and plant life. The verse ends with a parallelism. He gives breath to people on the earth which is repeated in different terms as "spirit to those who walk in it." This is Genesis one abbreviated. God created the heavens and the earth, the plant life, the animal life, and the crowning of His creation was man and breathing into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). God is telling Isaiah's readers that He is the God of Genesis chapter one, from whom and to whom and for whom all things exist (Romans 11:36).

⁶ *"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,* Isaiah 42:6 Who is the one who is called? Once again we can read this as the mission of the Jewish people to bring the laws of God to the world through the Torah. Those in the captivity may have read it that way. But they would not come close to completing that mission. However, through the lineage of Abraham, Judah, and David would come the One Jewish person who would live a life of righteousness (Isaiah 53:11). The Father would keep Him from Satan's attempt to destroy Him at His birth (Matthew 2:16) and Herod's attempts on His life, that is, until His time came to become a covenant for the people.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted the days of a new covenant that was unlike the Mosaic covenant written in stone (Ezekiel 36:26). This new one would be written in our hearts. That is what Jesus proclaimed Himself to be at the Last Supper (1Corinthians 11:25). He made a new covenant with His own blood that fulfilled the old. It is He, who became the light of the world, as Jesus proclaimed Himself to be (John 8:12).

Commented [PW21]: Revelation 20:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Commented [PW22]: John 15:12 (ESV)

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Commented [PW23]: Genesis 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

Commented [PW24]: Isaiah 40:22 (ESV)

²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;

Commented [PW25]: Genesis 2:7 (ESV)

⁷ then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Commented [PW26]: Romans 11:36 (ESV)

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Commented [PW27]: Isaiah 53:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Commented [PW28]: Matthew 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Commented [PW29]: Matthew 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Commented [PW30]: 1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Commented [PW31]: John 8:12 (ESV)

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus' life and words have made the greatest impact on the world for good. **No one comes close to affecting the world like Jesus.** While our culture keeps pointing to the wrongs done using the name of Jesus, few will acknowledge the great good done by Christianity. Books have been written on the way Christianity was the chief cause for the end of the serfdom and feudal lords. It was the chief cause of the end of slavery. Capitalism with private property ownership can be traced back to Christian influence. That alone has done more to raise the quality of life than any other single factor. Personal responsibility and an honorable work ethic stem from the Christian faith. Our legal system and its effort to see that right prevails is traced to Jewish roots.

Jesus is a light in a practical sense but even more so in a spiritual sense. It is by His power alone that we are freed from guilt and enslaving patterns of sin (John 8:32). It is through Jesus alone that we have the hope of heaven (John 14:6).

Jesus is a light to the nations, ⁷ *to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.* Isaiah 42:7 Without Jesus and His teaching we are blind to spiritual reality. "Our salvation will never come from our own self-assertion; it will only come from the gentle servant of the Lord. Our idolatries can do nothing but corrupt, because they're the magnification of our proud self-salvation. That's why our good intentions end up unleashing more evil. Everything we do is laced with poisons we cannot detect in time."² The upside-down way of the world has us chasing after our own destruction, but Jesus illuminates our understanding so that we can see where sin actually leads (John 3:20-21). Our eyes are opened to what is worthy of our attention and what is vanity. We were blind to what was of real value, but now in His light we can see.

This is one reason Jesus healed the blind. The man that was born blind illustrated for us our spiritual condition (John 9:30). We were all born spiritually blind. Jesus did what was impossible in the physical realm to show us He can and does do what is impossible for us to do without Him in the spiritual realm. The man's physical blindness was not nearly as consequential as our spiritual blindness.

Bringing out the prisoners from their dungeons and those in prison who sit in darkness is saying the same thing in a different way. Sin enslaves. It isolates us. It keeps us in darkness so that we can't see. The chains the sinner wears are forged by his or her own fallen desires. In Christ our chains are gone and we are free to live to righteousness (Romans 6:22).

⁸ *I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.* Isaiah 42:8 *YHWH* is the name of the eternal God. He doesn't give His glory to an image. There is nothing to compare Him. The only way we could see that glory was the incarnation. We have seen His glory in the only begotten of the Father (John 1:14). He didn't have to share His glory with another for He is one with the Son. (John 10:30).

⁹ *Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.*" Isaiah 42:9 God is reminding Judah that their idols don't know the past and can't predict the future. God can because He is *YHWH*. He lives

Commented [PW32]: John 8:32 (ESV)

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Commented [PW33]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [PW34]: John Ortberg, Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners

Commented [PW35]: John 3:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Commented [PW36]: John 9:30 (ESV)

³⁰ The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

Commented [PW37]: Romans 6:22 (ESV)

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Commented [PW38]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [PW39]: John 10:30 (ESV)

³⁰ I and the Father are one."

in eternity. He is in the past and the future right now. He is declaring to them their Messiah is coming. He will be the new covenant, not bring an agreement but be the agreement. He will bring light into the darkness. He will cause the physically and spiritually blind to see. He will release us from our bondage to sin. This is the glory that will come to Judah, to the city of Jerusalem, the very glory of God. And He did come. As Matthew declared, these verses came to pass in Jesus.

I want you to look at this passage again in a way that I have already been hinting. If you abide in Christ and He abides in you, then you will represent Him wherever you go. His prayer is that you be one with Him and with the Father. *21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* John 17:21 Remember that Paul declared it was no longer he that lived but Christ who lived in Him. That is the desire of the born-again believer, that the life of Christ be manifest in our mortal bodies (2Corinthians 4:10).

Just as the Father called the Son the One He upholds, the chosen, on whom He puts His Spirit, so are we to be His chosen ones, His servants in the world, upheld by Him, with His Spirit in us. Just as He was gentle and gracious, befriending the hurting, loving the needy, so are we, by His grace, to be the friend of sinners, gently leading them to wholeness and spiritual life in Him. While we cannot bring justice like He will, we can seek justice in the society in which we live. We can bring His law of love to the coastlands, to the hungry souls who see there is more than this world.

He has called us in righteousness and will take us by the hand. We saw that in the previous chapter (Isaiah 41:13). He will even make us a light to the nations, as Jesus said, "You are the light of the world!" (Matthew 5:14)

As we bring the new covenant in Jesus' blood to the world, we open the eyes of the blind and loose prisoners from their chains. Through the Gospel we bring them up out of the dungeons of despair and into the promises of God in Christ Jesus.

In Christ, this Suffering Servant Song is our song too. Jesus declared as much when He said, *"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* (John 20:21) You can sing this song in praise to Jesus, and you can sing it as a reminder of your calling in this fallen world.

Questions

- 1 What are several ways to read this passage?
- 2 Why can't the servant be Cyrus?
- 3 Who do Jews think the servant is? Why do Christians think He is Jesus?
- 4 How does God describe the servant?
- 5 How did Jesus demonstrate verse 3?
- 6 What is God's self-description?
- 7 How does Jesus open blind eyes?
- 8 Why can't an idol represent God?
- 9 Why can we apply some of this passage?

Commented [PW40]: 2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Commented [PW41]: Isaiah 41:13 (ESV)

¹³ For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you."

Commented [PW42]: Matthew 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Commented [PW43]: John 20:21 (ESV)

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

10 What specifically does this tell us to about our calling?