

Servant Song 1 05-27-01

Isaiah 42:1-9

In the last third of Isaiah are recorded several Servant Songs. These are songs that were written hundreds of years before Christ. They were written for those in exile in Babylon to encourage them to look forward to redemption of God. If we were to place ourselves in the time of the first readers of these prophecies, a second generation of Jews in captivity, a group who had never seen Jerusalem, we can sense what a ray of hope they were to them. Those exiles knew their forefathers had failed God, had not kept their covenant with Him. They knew they were in a foreign land because of God's punishment on their forefathers' unfaithfulness. As they read the Law they must have wondered how they could be right with God, since there was no way to sacrifice in the manner prescribed by the Law in the Temple of God. Can you picture the encouragement the promise of a Redeemer would be to a people in exile wondering if there was any hope?

In the preceding chapters 40 and 41 God is reminding them what He means to them. He reminds them that He is incomparable, and that they can find strength in Him. Even though they are in exile He reminds them that they are His and that He is Sovereign over nations. He uses a very powerful argument that He has used before. Idols cannot tell the future. But God tells us of things before they happen that we may know He is the God who inhabits eternity. Fulfilled prophecy is a powerful witness that He alone is God.

In chapter 41 He promises Living Water for those who seek: ¹⁷ "The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.¹⁸ I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. Jesus said that if any man was thirsty, he should come to Him and drink. Indeed the people were thirsty for life giving water.

So this then is the setting: The exiles are wondering how they can be right with God, God declares He is Sovereign – the Redeemer – the Holy One, that He himself will help them, that He knows and plans the future. He promises to pour out living water. Warns that idols are not the way and will only confuse them and then says,

Isaiah 42:1-4 (NIV)¹ "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."

Here is God himself helping them, making them right with God. Here is the sacrifice they need. Matthew 12:15-21 declares this servant to be Jesus. God is telling his people in exile, and those that would come after them, even all who would read this prophecy that Hope was coming. He was sending His servant.

Jesus has been one with the Father throughout eternity and yet He took upon Himself our humanity to be a servant. Phil 2:6-8 (NIV)⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

We have a hard time grasping this (Jesus as a servant) because we too readily think like the world. Jesus had the same problem with his disciples who argued about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Listen to Jesus' perspective: Mark 9:35 "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." Matt 20:26-28 (NIV)²⁶ "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

You say, "Yes he served while on earth but now He reigns and all serve Him." Think about that. It is true that He reigns and all His enemies will be made his footstool but does He ever change? His heart is to serve. The greatest is the servant of all. Jesus will ever be the greatest servant and you can never out serve Him! He serves you right this moment in the heavenly Holy of Holies, interceding for you before the Father. Heb 7:25 (NIV)²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them... Heb 8:1,2 (NIV) We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Great love serves! And Jesus loved you enough to die for you. His service to you should cause you to long to serve Him out of response to that love seen in his service. Listen to mutual service in this parable that Jesus spoke. Luke 12:35-37 (NIV)³⁵ "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,³⁶ like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.

The old nature is always ready to exert itself, place itself over others and be served. But Jesus gave us a different example. First and foremost He served his Father. Secondly He served those who his Father loves. Should we do any less? We have a

great need to allow ourselves to be humbled by his mighty hand, by his great love, by his service to us. Then we can serve without balking. We can let go of our desire to be served.

At that Last Supper Jesus gave his disciples an example of serving as He washed their feet. Then He told them that they should follow that example. The world is touched when it sees genuine service like Christ's. Doug Nichols tells the following story.

"While serving with Operation Mobilization in India in 1967, tuberculosis forced me into a sanitarium for several months. I did not yet speak the language, but I tried to give Christian literature written in their language to the patients, doctors, and nurses. Everyone politely refused. I sensed many weren't happy about a rich American (to them all Americans are rich) being in a free, government-run sanitarium. (They didn't know I was just as broke as they were!)

The first few nights I woke around 2:00 A.M. coughing. One morning during my coughing spell, I noticed one of the older and sicker patients across the aisle trying to get out of bed. He would sit up on the edge of the bed and try to stand, but in weakness would fall back into bed. I didn't understand what he was trying to do. He finally fell back into bed exhausted. I heard him crying softly.

The next morning I realized what the man had been trying to do. He had been trying to get up and walk to the bathroom! The stench in our ward was awful. Other patients yelled insults at the man. Angry nurses moved him roughly from side to side as they cleaned up the mess. One nurse even slapped him. The old man curled into a ball and wept. The next night I again woke up coughing. I noticed the man across the aisle sit up and again try to stand. Like the night before, he fell back whimpering.

I don't like bad smells, and I didn't want to become involved, but I got out of bed and went over to him. When I touched his shoulder, his eyes opened wide with fear. I smiled, put my arms under him, and picked him up. He was very light due to old age and advanced TB. I carried him to the washroom, which was just a filthy, small room with a hole in the floor. I stood behind him with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. After he finished, I picked him up, and carried him back to his bed. As I laid him down, he kissed me on the cheek, smiled, and said something I couldn't understand.

The next morning another patient woke me and handed me a steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hands that he wanted a tract. As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted the booklets I had tried to distribute before. Throughout the day nurses, interns, and doctors asked for literature.

Weeks later an evangelist who spoke the language visited me, and as he talked to others he discovered that several had put their trust in Christ as Savior as a result of reading the literature. What did it take to reach these people with the gospel? It

wasn't health, the ability to speak their language, or a persuasive talk. I simply took a trip to the bathroom."

Well we went quite a ways on the thought that Jesus was "my Servant" but those first four verses describe a gentle servant of God. It goes on to say He is upheld by God and that God delights in Him. The voice that came from heaven said He was well pleased in Him. Whenever you are concerned about whether you are pleasing God – I ask you to remind yourself that God is pleased with Jesus, and you are in Jesus. He delights in Jesus, and when you are in Jesus He delights in you. Now that is encouraging! If you think you can please Him, delight Him, outside of Jesus... think again.

I will put my Spirit on Him. See 11:1,2 These are about the same person. John was waiting to see this sign to be assured that Jesus was the Messiah. Judgement has come to the nations – in that on the cross the sins of all nations was dealt with. That does not mean there will not be a Day of Judgement. The Day of Judgement will be to determine what you have done with Jesus – God's servant.

Jesus was not a showman – verses 2,3 paint him as gentle as a lamb. The only time we see Him exerting his will on others is in the cleansing of the Temple. The symbolic meaning in that act we have discussed before. His ministry on the whole was the quiet expression of the will and words of the Father. How often we stray from the ways of Jesus and push the truth at people. The Spirit draws. Sheep are led, not driven. Lift up Jesus and people will be drawn to Him. Jesus described himself as "gentle and humble in heart". Matthew 11:29 Do you suppose that is why the Apostle Paul said, "the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct..." 2 Tim 2:24,25 (NIV) Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. Jesus is always gentle with us. No other master is so kind, so careful.

He will not falter or be discouraged until He establishes justice in the earth. Jesus knew his mission and He knew the whims of man. The rejection by men did not discourage Him for He was set on pleasing the Father. As long as He pleased the Father He could not get discouraged. We too often desire the acceptance and approval of men instead of that of the Father. We need hearts like Jesus, desiring just to please the Father.

In his law the islands will place their hope. Amazing how even the islands of the sea have heard the gospel. I don't know if you have heard Polynesian praise music. It is wonderful. The ends of the earth are placing their hope in Him. I can't imagine the first readers of this prophecy seeing its implications today. How far beyond our comprehension is the wonder of God's plans.

Isaiah 42:5-6 (NIV)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,

The Father – the Creator – called Jesus in righteousness and held his hand through his ministry. That was a Hebrew term that implied strengthening Him. He kept Him and made Him a covenant for the people. The old covenant had failed because the people were too weak in nature to keep their part. Jesus became the New Covenant, a covenant based on his blood, not the blood of bulls and goats. This blood was the sinless blood, the perfect sacrifice, shed in our place. This new covenant is more like a marriage covenant than a contract of formality. He gave Himself for us and we give ourselves to Him. We Gentiles have seen a great light. Our eyes have been opened and truth is illuminated in the light of Jesus, the exact representation of God's being. We understand when Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father that Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." We have come out of the darkness and into his marvelous light!

Isaiah 42:7 (NIV)⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." Isaiah prophesied there was none so blind as his servant Israel. The eyes of many of those who saw only the letter and not the Spirit were opened. We were slaves, captives of sin. We sat in darkness of pleasing self, but He brought us out and showed us how to serve, how to love, how to listen to and obey the Father. Thank God his Servant has led us out of darkness!

Isaiah 42:8-9 (NIV)⁸ "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.⁹ See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." Praise belongs to Him – to His Servant, and so He revealed Him to us, that we might give Him what is due. What an encouraging word to a second generation in a strange land, wondering about their standing with God, wondering if there was hope to be right with God. Now we look back and say, "every word of God is true. He plans the end from the beginning. He is the Eternal One." And we thank Him for his service to us out of love. In response we surrender ourselves in service to the Servant. We too are exiles, away from our heavenly home like they were from Jerusalem. The Kingdom is within us but we long to behold with our eyes God's Servant. And we have a promise just like the exiles did that will be fulfilled in a greater way than we can imagine. Ready? Rev 22:3-5 (NIV)³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. AMEN?

Lord willing we will continue looking at Isaiah's Servant Songs in the weeks to come.