

The Light of Justice

Isaiah 42:1-9; December 1, 2019

Introduce the “The New Horizon” advent series

- For the next 4 weeks, we’re going to be looking at the four “Servant Songs” of Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).
- They are called the “Servant Songs” because they are poems that reference a special, ideal “servant” who accomplishes God’s purposes for Israel and the entire world.
- We’re calling this series “The New Horizon.”
 - Literally, the *horizon* is the line at which the earth's surface and the sky appear to meet. You can see this most clearly at the beach and there are very few things as majestic as the sun rising on a new day.
 - But we also use *horizon* metaphorically. “There’s a snowstorm on the horizon.” What do we mean? It’s going to snow. It’s imminent. It’s going to happen soon.
 - That’s why me and the kids spent a few hours Friday bagging all of the leaves in our yard. We don’t want any leaves messing with our snowman!
 - Why do we need a “new” horizon? Why did Israel need a “new” horizon?

What was on Israel’s horizon?

- Before we answer that question, let’s briefly look back at where Israel had been. In fact, I want to take us back to the very beginning to set the context for Isaiah.
- **Act 1: Creation (Gen. 1-2):** the people of God in the place and presence of God enjoying the blessing and rest of God. God’s original design: No brokenness. Perfect justice. The way the world was meant to be.
- **Act 2: The Fall (Gen.3):** Adam and Eve rebel against God and as a result are exiled out of God’s place and presence and instead of blessing face his curse.
 - But death and curse are not the end of the story. God promises to reverse the effects of the fall through the offspring of the woman.
 - Adam to Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob (who’s name was changed to Israel).
- **Act 3: Israel:** God chose Israel as his special people to be the means by which the nations able to return to the place and presence of God and enjoy his blessing and rest.
 - The horizon of Israel starts very bright. God brings them out of slavery in Egypt, gives them his law and he has plans to bring them into his Promised Land. This land represented the place of God’s presence, blessing and rest.
 - But the story of the OT is that Israel, over and over and over again, fails to keep God’s commands. They often turn away to idols and worship created things over the creator.
 - As a result, they, just like Adam and Eve, are being exiled out of the land to face God’s judgment and curse.
 - This is the context for the Book of Isaiah.

Why did Israel need a *New Horizon*?

- Isaiah is a prophet addressing a people in despair. The immediate horizon for Israel is judgment and exile (Israel in 722 BC and Judah in 586 BC).

- They are wrestling with these questions:
 - Has God been defeated by the Babylonian gods?
 - Had their sin made a mockery of God's promises?
 - Would they ever return to the land and would the temple ever be restored?
 - Was there any hope on the horizon?
- Isaiah's answer is "Yes." There is hope on the horizon.
 - But he makes one thing clear: merely returning from exile to the Promised Land will not automatically produce different behavior.
 - There's hope of a new horizon because I'm going to send my "servant."
- This is why we're going to look at these four servant songs during the advent season. It is with this "servant" that Israel has the hope of a new horizon which also becomes my hope and your hope for a new horizon. This servant is the one who will make it possible for us to return to the garden, the place of God's presence, blessing and rest.

Read Isaiah 42:1-9

I. Who is this Servant?

A few initial observations:

1. In 42:1-4, God *presents* his servant ("he"). In 42:6-7, God *directly addresses* his servant ("you" - singular).

2. "Behold my servant"

- The servant of Isa. 42 is being set in contrast with the idols of chapter 41.

41:24: "Behold, you [idols] are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you."

41:29: "Behold, they [idol-worshipping nations] are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind."

In contrast to these idols that the nations are putting their hope in, God's "servant" and "chosen one" are their only hope. Who is this "servant" and "chosen" one?

Descriptions of this servant:

- "My servant"
- "Whom I uphold"
 - The servant's success will be the result of God's strength
- "My chosen"
- "In whom my soul delights"
 - God delights in this servant in contrast with the "abomination" of idols (41:24).
- "I have put my Spirit upon him"

- God will put his Spirit, his power in this servant. This is in contrast with the “empty wind” of idols (41:29).
- This servant is *designated* and *equipped* for his mission.

1. Israel as God’s “servant.”

- Initially, we’re meant to identify this servant with Israel. Isaiah often refers to Israel as God’s “servant.”

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off”; 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. (Isa. 41:8-10 ESV; cf. 42:19; 43:10; 44:1-2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3)

- But while it is true that Israel is often referred to as God’s servant, there are clues that Isaiah gives us to suggest that this servant is not just Israel as a whole, but a specific person within Israel who is distinct from the whole.
 - The next three servant songs make this more explicit (49:5-6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11).
 - The biggest issue is that Israel was not a blameless servant.
 - Israel is identified as blind (42:19).
 - Israel failed to keep God’s law (43:20-25).
 - Israel has done much injustice (ch. 1). Will she now be the one who brings justice?
 - Israel is the one being exiled because of disobedience. How can Israel save herself?
- In the past, God has raised up individual servants like Moses and David who have represented, led and saved the nation as a whole and this servant will do the same.
- “The servant in 42:1-7(9) seems, then, to reflect what Israel was meant to be as well as characteristics of the nation’s representative deliver, through whom that ideal will be attained” (NT use of the OT).

2. Jesus as God’s “servant.”

- There are two other key texts that refer to the “Spirit” of the Lord being upon someone in Isaiah.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:1-2 ESV)

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; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; (Isa. 61:1-2 ESV)

- The servant is being referred to is not rebellious and corrupt, but obedient and pure. In fact, later on in chapter 53, we'll see he's not self-protective, but self-giving and self-surrendering.
- The servant who fulfilled these great promises is Jesus.

The NT makes this clear for us:

- Jesus' baptism:

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:15-17 ESV; cf. Mark 1:11)

- Jesus' transfiguration

And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" (Lk. 9:35 ESV)

- Descriptions of his life and mission

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:45 ESV; cf. Phil. 2:5-8; Acts 3:26; 4:27)

- Matthew quotes Isa. 42:1-4 in Matthew 12:18-20 and explicitly says Jesus fulfilled this.

Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: (Matt. 12:15-17 ESV).

Jesus is the one who offers Israel and the world hope for a new horizon. He is the one who will usher in the true return from exile and lead us into the new creation where all who trust him can enjoy God's presence, blessing and rest.

II. What is his mission?

The mission of the servant is repeated three times (1, 3, 4).

- "He will bring forth justice to the nations"
- "He will faithfully bring forth justice"
- "Till he has established justice in the earth"

What is justice?

- Biblical justice refers to the world as it was meant to be.
 - A right relationship between creation and its creator
 - Spiritual forgiveness and health.
 - Punishment for evil doers.
 - Right relationships with each other, including the proper distribution of goods and honor.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. (Isa. 1:16-18 ESV; cf. Deut. 10:17-18)

How does the servant bring about justice?

- He won't come forcefully, but in gentleness (v. 2).
 - He is cast in contrast with ruthless human conquerors
 - In Matthew 12:15-21, Jesus heals many people and then orders them not to make him known. Matthew says this was to fulfill what was spoken by Isaiah in 42:1-4. Matthew quotes Isaiah to show that contrary to the typical 1st century rabbinical expectations, the Messiah would not arrive with political agendas, military campaigns, and great fanfare, but with gentleness and meekness.
- He won't crush the weak, but defend them (v. 3)
 - "Bruised Reed": used by shepherds to fashion a small musical instrument. If it was cracked or torn, it was useless.
 - "Faintly burning wick": this was useless for giving light
 - The above two represent the weak and oppressed, people deemed useless by the world.
 - "Christ's work was to restore and rekindle such people, not to 'break' them. This speaks of his tender compassion toward the lowliest of the lost" (John MacArthur).
 - The Lord's servant will not crush but defend the weak.
- He won't give up (v. 4), but will accomplish his mission.
 - Already the element of suffering is gently suggested in v. 4 which finds a fuller expression in the 4th servant song (Is. 52:13-53:12).
 - This mission won't be an easy mission. He will face resistance, but even in spite of this, he will be unweakened by the demands of his mission.
- As a covenant and the light, he will bring salvation and deliverance (6-7)
 - Light suggests the widening of the scope of this revelation.
 - The weak (3), blind (7; captives in dark prisons), prisoner (7; political prisoners or victims of social injustice), Israel (6) and the nations (1, 4, 6).
 - The Coastlands (42:4): this refers to the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and these represent the remotest peoples of the earth.

- Jesus, the messianic servant, is the only hope for a truly just world. Note, his salvation isn't just for Israel. It's for the world. All the families of the earth (cf. Gen. 12:1-3) will be blessed through this servant.
 - Paul quotes Is. 42:6 in Acts 13:47 as mandate for going to the Gentiles.
 - He came as the Messiah of Israel yet was the Savior of the World.
 - He commanded the gospel to be preached to the ends of the earth.
- Their physical oppression and bondage is an image for the spiritual liberation and freedom that Jesus will bring.

The Point: Jesus is the promised Servant who brings justice to the world.

III. How should we respond?

If Israel, God's chosen people, needed God's servant, how much more you and I? As they were challenged to look *forward* and believe in the servant that God would one day send, we look *back* and believe in the one who has come. The new horizon for Israel and for us is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

After Jesus was born, his parents brought him to the temple to present him to the Lord. That day there was a man there named Simeon, which the texts says he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." He saw Jesus that day and praised God saying,

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel. (Lk. 2:29-32 ESV)

Would you be like Simeon who longed to see the light of justice come. When you believe and embrace Jesus, his mission becomes our mission. The sent one turns sender. We go in gentleness, we display and declare the gospel to all, but especially the weak, the oppressed, the fatherless, the rejected. Our mission isn't easy, but God will strengthen and sustain us. Christmas is a time to draw near to the light of justice and let that light shine through you as you wait for his return again soon. There's a new horizon that has been inaugurated and it's consummation isn't far away.