

“Servant Who Comes vs. The Servant Who Failed”

Isaiah 42:1 - 43:28

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There had never been anyone like the gentle, Jewish carpenter who would one day come on the scene and captivate the hearts of the people who would listen to Him speak of love for one another, devotion to the one, true God, and promise a future that would outshine anything they knew on earth. This “One whom God upholds,” according to Isaiah 42:1, will stand on trial before the most dominant government on earth and proclaim to Pontius Pilate that there will be a new kind of kingdom that was “not of this world” (John 18:36).

More than seven centuries before this gentle carpenter appeared before Pontius Pilate, our sovereign God proclaimed Him, through His Prophet Isaiah, to be His gentle and perfect Servant in this very Scripture that we are studying right now – Isaiah Chapter 42.

CHAPTER 42 – THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

This chapter has the distinction of containing the first of four Servant Songs in Isaiah. These four songs found in chapters 42 (verses 1-9), 49, 50, and 52-53 provide a detailed prophetic depiction of Jesus Christ’s life, His mission, humility, obedience to the Father, and love for all to emulate. They are widely recognized by scholars as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments and a basis for our Christian faith in a Savior who rules through service and sacrificial love.

Here is my focus in Chapter 42:

1. God’s perfect and gentle Servant Verses 1-17
2. Israel – God’s Servant Who Failed Verses 18-25

I must be honest as I tell you that I felt overwhelmed when I delved into verses 1-4. God spoke through His Prophet Isaiah revealing to all people for the first time His beloved Servant - His Son, the Messiah. God calls to all people – the people of Israel, and the coastlands which is actually a reference to the far-off reaches of the Mediterranean (NKJV Commentary, p. 1221). In fact, I am sure, Isaiah must have bugled the message to **behold** God’s Servant as the One He strengthens through the Holy Spirit and the One in whom He **delights**.

It is worth emphasizing, **not** only is He calling out to His chosen Jewish people, but He is including the Gentiles in this proclamation. He is speaking to you and me. These magnificent Scriptures are God’s personal gift to all people!

Included in this glorious introduction of God’s select One is God’s assignment of His mission. Verse 1 tells us that the Father chose Jesus to be His instrument to establish perfect justice to all nations. I am sure that you will agree with me that the justice systems in our country and in our world are broken. There is an urgent need for God’s righteous judgment right now! And so, we anticipate the kingdom of Jesus Christ, when there will be perfect justice.

Verse 2 tells us, *“He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets.”* This doesn’t mean that Jesus never spoke loudly, but it does refer to His gentleness and humility. In fact, *“Jesus was filled with the Spirit and conducted ministry in the power and flow of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 6:13).

We read, *“A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.”* This word picture in verse 3 leads me to believe that the Servant will treat the fragile and hurting individual with love and care. He will bring comfort and encouragement to the oppressed. The Servant is in the business of restoration.

I am comforted with the thought that while evildoers take advantage of the vulnerable individuals in our society, Jesus builds His kingdom with those who are suffering and broken. He will fan the flame that still exists within a person to spark it into a glowing flame that burns brightly with love for God once that person realizes how much he is loved by God.

To the paralyzed man, Jesus said, *“Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven”* (Matt 9:2). To the bleeding woman (Matt. 9:22), He said, *“Have courage, daughter. . . your faith has saved you.”* To a grieving widow whose only son was being buried that day, he said, *“Don’t weep.”* (Luke 7:13), and then He raised her son from the dead.

In verse 4, we are assured that God’s Servant *“will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching, the islands will put their hope.”* Sometimes we may feel that God is dealing with us harshly. We might even question His love for us when He “allows” trouble to come our way. I would argue that just the opposite is true. Never do we feel closer to God than when we are facing adversity. That is when I draw nearer to Him.

Our Savior will not give up on us even if we become discouraged. We learn from Philippians 1:6: *“He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* Even though we fail in our service to Him, even if we see ourselves as being unworthy, He is not discouraged, because He is faithful and He will not falter. He is our Savior and He is His Father’s Servant.

Isn’t it wonderful that our Savior never gets discouraged or tired of our mistakes and failures? Let me ask you another question. Have you experienced the gentle words of Jesus pouring into your worried soul? Remember, He is the lover of your soul, He is faithful, and He will not falter. Isn’t it just like our Heavenly Father to provide a fail-safe system for us?

The Lord God gives us powerful messages in verses 5-7. Once God establishes His credentials as the Creator of the heavens and as the giver of life to the people on the earth, He speaks directly to His Servant and assures Him of these promises:

1. I called you in righteousness: *“Because there was nothing unholy or unrighteous in my calling, You can be confident that the calling will be fulfilled.”*

2. I will take hold of Your hand: “I am with You always, to love and guide You. I will never leave You.”
3. I will keep You: “You will not get lost or be left behind. I am always there to watch over You and keep You.”
4. I will give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles: “You will fulfill the purpose I have called You to. You will bring salvation, not only to Your people, but also to those afar off, who seem beyond salvation.”
5. To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison: “I will use You to do miraculous works of restoration and healing, both physically and spiritually. You will be used to bring sight and freedom to many.”

These are amazing promises that God the Father has given to His Son as His divine authority to finish what He had started. I truly appreciate the perspective Andrew M. Davis brings to this same message that really brought it home for me . . .

“God the Father doesn’t merely proclaim a new covenant to Israel and to the world – he *is* the new covenant given to us through His blood at the cross. And Jesus doesn’t merely open physical eyes to see physical daylight – he *is* the light of the world by which their souls will be illuminated forever. And though Satan has kept sinners bound in the prison of sin with chains they cannot break, he is impotent to stop Christ from rescuing his people from the dominion of darkness and transferring them into His eternal kingdom (Col. 1:13).”

Each of these promises is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and by the love of the Father and His Son, these promises also belong to us – those who call on His name. In John 17:18, Jesus prayed, “*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*” We are sent as Jesus was sent and can receive these same promises as belonging to us.

In verse 8, God declares that He is the Lord and He will not give His glory to another. He will certainly not give praise to idols! It is important to understand that He does share glory with the Son which means that the Father and the Son are the Lord God. Yahweh is one God in Three persons.

God is the master of the past, present, and the future. He will fulfill His prophetic word and the proper response to all of this is worship. We see this especially in the way God declares new things even before they spring forth.

When Jesus is born, the predictions of His birth will have come to pass and fulfilled prophecies will have given the gospel message credibility. The response of the people of all the earth is worship. In verses 10-12, all the people of the earth are called to sing a song of praise for a great salvation (Rev. 5:9; 14:3). This includes the settlements of Kedar (descendants of Ishmael) and the inhabitants of Sela (the Edomites) (Gen. 25:13). It is amazing that the grace of

God will include peoples who have been hostile to Israel and to God in singing eternal praises for their salvation (Isaiah 42:12).

In verses 13-17, we see that this day of praise is a day of victory for the Lord. He will advance with zeal as a mighty man of war. Unlike His first “quiet” coming, He will shout aloud and prevail against His enemies. Our Lord is a “delightful” Savior, but also a “terrifying” enemy.

No obstacles can stop Him. Mountains and hills, no rivers and pools – not even the blindness of God’s people who thought they were so close to God, but could see so little could stop His kingdom from going forward. And don’t miss the warning in verse 17: *“But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame.”*

In this final section of Chapter 42, Isaiah addresses His writing to God’s “servant” who failed – those in Judah and Jerusalem who would fall into the worship of idols during the reign of Manasseh. This would result in their exile to Babylon.

God would judge this spiritually blind and deaf “servant” Israel even more harshly than He would the Gentiles because God had made His law “great and glorious” to His chosen people (v. 21). They will stay blind and deaf until they admit their condition and their need to repent.

In John 9, Jesus healed a man born blind. He used the moment to address spiritual blindness and how it can be cured. He pointed to the fact that only those who know their need and admit their condition will be healed of their blindness. Jesus said, *“For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”* Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, *“Are we blind also?”* Jesus said to them, *“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore, your sin remains.”* (John 9:39-41)

Have you ever thought about your own level of blindness? Do we choose to ignore the “sins” of our children. Speaking of children, when I was a child, I noticed that my dad brought home some items from the office where he worked. In fact, I still have an artifact from the Gas Company – a 1955 stapler that I hold precious today. My point - I wonder if we are blind to how we “over borrow” office supplies from the places where we are employed. In fact, I noticed a printer went missing from the office that I moved into one time. Perhaps we knowingly abuse HOA rules, or maybe “harmlessly” gossip about others behind their backs.

Personally, I don’t want to miss God’s guidance in my actions, my thoughts, and my service to Him. If the great religious leaders of the Jewish nation could be so wrong about Jesus, the Messiah, I am concerned that I might be on the precipice of using selected blindness in a toxic, self-righteous, or disobedient way. I constantly need to ask the Spirit to search my motives and guide me in the way of righteousness. Unfortunately, there are still times that I fail in my efforts to be more like Jesus. It is then that I must ask for forgiveness.

God was judging Israel. Only the remnant – the humble and faith-filled - would understand the message – and not face God’s burning anger (vs. 25). Let God’s correction burn away the sin in our lives and purify us.

CHAPTER 43 – FEAR NOT

Although chapter 42 ends in a sorrowful note toward the nation of Israel, Chapter 43 holds some of the most amazing promises for the suffering children of Jacob and also for His adopted children and that means us (v. 7).

I will touch upon the four following areas in chapter 43:

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| 1. Assurance that Comes with God’s Promises | Verses 1-7 |
| 2. Our Assignment - To Be His Witnesses | Verses 8-15 |
| 3. God Will Make a New Way | Verses 16-21 |
| 4. God’s People Wear Him Out with Their Sins | Verses 22-25 |

From the beginning of chapter 1, God reminded His chosen people of His love for them. In verses 1 and 2, He actually gives His people a command followed by promises:

*“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
You will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.” (verses 1b-2)*

These verses assure us that when we encounter adversity in our lives, and we all will, that God will never leave us. He will be our faithful protector even during life’s most challenging, chaotic, and fiery trials. The fire may burn, but it won’t consume us. The water may rise, but it won’t overwhelm us. It is comforting to know that God will be with us through any trials or obstacles that will block our way.

Previously in Isaiah 42:19, the Lord spoke of His blind and deaf servants who had closed their eyes and ears to His truth. Now He challenges these same servants to prove Him to be wrong. Of course, they cannot. God makes plain His will that His people should be His witnesses in every generation.

In verses 10 through 13, the Lord commissions His witnesses, His servants who had witnessed His greatness to be His witnesses to the truth that He is the only true God. If Israel would remember that only the Lord has ever rescued them, they would not be so quick to turn

to other gods. We should all be ready to be a witness to the saving, rescuing, and healing work of the Lord at any time.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a current story of a man who was a bruised reed who did just that. It involves a performing musician whose name is Jason Bradly De Ford who was incarcerated at age 17 for robbery and then at 21 for a felony drug conviction. Once released, he came to celebrity status as he successfully turned to a career of music. And one more major change occurred in his life. He asked Jesus Christ into his heart. Just last week, he became the winner of three Grammys and I would like to quote the one acceptance speech that he was allowed to make on national television during the Grammy Awards when he received the Grammy for the Best Country album of the year. You would probably recognize him by his tattoo-covered face that he now says he regrets that he must indelibly wear. Here are the edited words of musician and Christian, Jelly Roll: "There was a time in my life when I was broken.... I thought I was a horrible human...I thought I would end up dead. There was a moment in my life that I only had a Bible this big and a radio the same size in a 6 x 4-foot cell and I believed that those two things could change my life. I believed that music (could) change my life and God had the power to change my life. Anyway, I want to tell you right now – Jesus is for everybody. Jesus is not owned by one political party. Jesus is not owned by one music label. Jesus is Jesus and anybody can have a relationship with Him. I love you, Lord!" And Jelly Roll raised his Grammy in tribute to the Lord as he exited the stage in a room full of power players of the industry – anyone of whom could ruin a Christian performer's career. That man was a courageous witness for the Lord!

Whatever the fire or water that we are passing through, we should cling to the faith that Isaiah writes about in Chapter 43. We must also embrace the challenge in this chapter to be God's witnesses in an idol-saturated world.

In verse 43:16, Isaiah brings to the minds of the people the mighty deliverance God worked for the Israelites at the Red Sea (v. 17), but in the very next verse, He urges them to forget the former things and to not dwell on the past. God is doing a new thing! He tells us, "I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." He unveils amazing news that He will make a way for His people to return to their homeland from their exile in Babylon. He is also telling us to move ahead with Him. I love this quote from Dan Leppo, "Satan looks back and reminds us of what is wrong. Jesus looks forward and offers hope of what is good."

The chapter ends with God's message to the exiled Jews before their restoration. God responds to the neglect of their godly duties which convicts us all. God's commands are not a burden (1 John 5:3). Judah had not called on God in prayer. They had not wearied themselves in their religious services to God, but rather, they had wearied Him with their sins (v. 24). I venture to say that we are probably no different.

God's response to all of this sin is found in our memory verse, Isaiah 43:25: "*I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*"

God's final word for His chosen people is not judgment but grace. We were created for His glory (Isaiah 43:7), and so we will be redeemed for His glory.

You will recall the empowering of Jesus for public ministry by the Holy Spirit which was proclaimed at His baptism, when the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove (Matt. 3:16). The Father declared His love for His Son. I felt God's delight in this announcement. We know from John 5:19 that Jesus did nothing apart from the will of His Father. These words speak loudly to me about the special relationship between God the Father and His Son and Special Servant Jesus.

Throughout history, our God desired His chosen people to choose Him over false gods. Too often they turned their back on their Heavenly Father. God is in the business of restoring relationships with His children. One thing that sticks in my mind from this study is that God's love remained for both His perfect Servant, Jesus, and His imperfect Servant, the nation of Israel.

This week's study has given us a beautiful perspective on the father-son relationship that exists between the Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. God will hold His hand and will support Him always. That is what Father God wants to do for us as well.

As Valentine's Day looms near, it is appropriate to celebrate the love that God has for us. Today I want to thank God for His perfect and gentle Servant, Jesus, our Messiah, who knows us fully and understands us entirely. He loves us more than we love ourselves. He is even more committed to our ultimate joy than we are.

In our pain and confusion, in our weakness and chaos, we come to Him assured that He alone is trustworthy. He has the power and capacity to help us, and the tenderness and care to want to. We can trust Him with our deepest pain and bruises. There is none more fearsome, but none gentler than Jesus Christ, our Savior.

I want to leave you with one last verse from Chapter 43:13b. In it, God tells us, "No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?" Be confident and trust His unfailing ability to save and redeem His people.

As you go out and serve God this week, be sure to serve Him in love remembering His Gentle and Perfect Servant and Jesus' sacrificial love for you! Please pray with me then stand and lift your voice as we sing "Make Me a Servant."