

Our Servant King

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 00] Well, again, I say good morning to those of you.

We have a few people here quite spread out and far away from me, and good morning to those of you who are gathering in your homes and joining with us online. I thank God for the technology that makes that possible, even as I am eager to be back together as soon as possible.

I said in my video update on Friday, for those of you who are on our listserv, that we were going to be looking at Acts chapter 10 today. But yesterday, late afternoon, as I was reading the lectionary passages for this morning in the ACNA lectionary, I was reading Isaiah chapter 42, and to be completely honest, it just really ministered to me.

I felt like it was what I needed to hear. And so out of that conviction, I hope that by changing our focus this morning from Acts chapter 10 to Isaiah 42, perhaps it might minister to you as well.

I'm going to put Acts chapter 10 on the shelf for the moment, even though it's a fantastic passage, and our hope will be to come back to it later on. But right now, we're going to be looking at the first nine verses of Isaiah 42.

[1 : 18] Let me read that for you now. Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.

I have put my spirit upon him, and he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.

He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his law.

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, 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, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

[2 : 30] I am the Lord. That is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare.

Before they spring forth, I tell you of them. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. In light of the events of this past week, I think the thing that I need most, and I believe we all need most, is to be reminded what a king is supposed to be, to be reminded who our king truly is.

In Isaiah 42, God is promising to send the kind of king we truly need. Not just we being Christians, but we being the whole world.

This is the only kind of king who can put the world right again. At this point in Isaiah, 42 chapters in, it's become painfully obvious that two things are true.

Number one, idols are worthless. Anything other than God that we put our hope and trust in will fail us because it is empty. It is impotent.

[3 : 49] It makes false promises. The other thing that has become painfully clear is that even the greatest of us human beings are incapable of solving the deepest, biggest problems in this world.

No human being is sufficient to fix what is broken in the world and in the human heart. These two things have become clear, and so God is saying, I'm going to send the kind of king you need who can actually address these deepest problems.

And so we see two things about this king in these nine verses. We see the mission of this king. Why is this king coming? What is this king coming to do? And then we see the manner of this king.

He comes with a manner, a posture, unlike anything we've seen. So let's pray, and then we'll get started. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for your Holy Spirit.

And we thank you that even when we don't know what to say, even when we struggle, even when we're at a loss of words, your word is true. It is a foundation upon which we stand.

[4 : 57] And we thank you that your spirit knows what to pray, and that your spirit prays for us and intercedes for us and leads us and ministers to us, even when we can't sense it, can't feel it, that you're always there, Lord.

And so we pray that you would be interceding for us, and that your word would be speaking to us even as we seek to hear from you. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, the mission of this king.

There's a word that jumps out when you begin to read this passage right away. It's the main point of the first four verses of this passage, and that word is justice or mishpat.

You see it in verse 1, the servant will bring justice to the nations. You see it in verse 3, he will faithfully bring forth justice. You see it in verse 4, he will establish justice on earth.

This word repeats three times, and that lets us know it's very important. But we need to understand something about the word mishpat. In the book of Isaiah, and really in the Bible in general, the word mishpat, justice, conveys a much broader, bigger, grander, more beautiful sense of justice than what we normally think of when we think of the word justice.

[6 : 09] Because we as human beings in our society tend to think of justice in terms of retributive justice. We think of wrongs being done, and when you do justice, it means you right the wrong, you punish the wrongdoer.

That's one form of justice. But here in Isaiah, when the Bible talks about justice, it has to do with the order that God has given to his universe.

In other words, justice means restoring that order, maintaining that order, putting everything in right relationship with everything else.

And you say, well, why would things being in right relationship be at the core of how we think about justice? And that goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 3 when we see what went wrong with the world.

Right? The reason that we need justice in the first place, we read about in Genesis 3, is because human beings rebelled against God. We rejected God's order, and instead we began seeking to impose our own order, our own reality, our own sense of right and wrong, our own law on the world that God made.

[7 : 19] And when we did that, our relationship with God was broken. We were alienated from him. We were spiritually cut off from God. So that's the first kind of broken relationship that sits at the heart of all of this, is the relationship between human beings and God has been ruptured.

We're alienated. But then that had a ripple effect. Imagine throwing a stone into a pond, and the ripples move outward until the waves are lapping up against the banks of the pond, and all of the water is disturbed.

And that's what we see here. The stone was the rebellion, but the ripples move outward and affect everything in creation. So not only is our relationship with God broken, but our relationship with ourselves is broken.

And the next time we have an opportunity to look at Genesis 3, we'll look at this in a lot more detail. But you essentially see that as a result of this, our relationship with ourselves is broken. We are fragmented internally now.

We don't always understand why we do the things that we do. We feel tremendous shame. We want to hide ourselves from other people.

[8 : 29] There are parts of ourselves that we hate or deny. There are parts of ourselves that we don't even have access to. There are unconscious drives and motivations where we say and do things, and we have no idea why we do them.

We have a tremendous capacity for self-deception. We can be woefully out of touch with the truth about who we really are because we're alienated from ourselves.

A third ripple of this is that our relationship with others is broken. This is why we have conflict and loneliness and poverty and violence.

This is why we still deal with racism at every level in our society, individually and institutionally. This is why people are so divided by politics that they literally see the other side as subhuman.

People on the left see people on the right as ignorant racists and heap contempt on them. People on the right see people on the left as immoral Marxists, and they heap contempt on them.

[9 : 43] And the more we devalue or dehumanize a group of people, the easier it is to completely write them off as subhuman. So that's the third ripple is our relationship with God is broken.

Our relationship with ourselves is broken. Our relationship with others is broken. Fourthly, our relationship with the world itself is broken. Instead of caring for and stewarding the beautiful world that God gave us, human beings engage in exploitation and degradation of the world around us. We also have natural disasters. We have viruses. We have cancer. We have decay. We have death. All of this is a result of these broken relationships.

And so when Isaiah 42 says that God's anointed king is going to establish justice on earth, it means he's going to completely restore all of these relationships.

Our relationship with the world, our relationship with one another, our relationship with ourselves, but most fundamentally, our relationship with God. Our relationship with God.

[10 : 55] That's where it all begins. That's where it has to begin. This is why God's anointed king is not simply going to bring political deliverance. Right? In the context of Isaiah, Cyrus could do that.

This immoral pagan could do that. God can use any political leader. He wants to do that because he's sovereign. Right? But this king is going to bring a deeper kind of deliverance.

A spiritual deliverance. That's why it says in verse 7, This servant king will open the eyes that are blind, bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

This is the language of spiritual deliverance. Only God's anointed messianic king could do that.

Horizontal justice on earth is only possible after there is vertical justice between human beings and God.

It's only possible when the hearts of human beings have turned back to the God who made us.

Václav Havel was the first president of the Czech Republic.

[12 : 02] He was an incredibly thoughtful leader and Christian man. And he, over the course of his extensive experience, saw both socialism and capitalism right up close.

And unlike many of his contemporaries, he had become convinced from experience that neither could solve the biggest problems facing humanity. He had seen that solving issues like nuclear conflict or racism or ethnic nationalism or environmental degradation takes more than just changing policies.

It requires changing people. Right? He would say things like this. He would say, you know, it's all well and good for politicians to reiterate a thousand times how important it is for leaders to respect universal human rights.

But those mean nothing if we reject the God who endowed us with those rights. Right? That's the kind of thing that he would say. And again and again and again, even though he was ridiculed for it, he spoke and wrote that the only hope for this world is for human beings to turn toward God again. That's our only hope. He says this, and I'll quote him, As I reflect on the events of this past week, I want to reiterate what I said in the email that I sent out on, On Wednesday evening, I believe that we as a nation have become so convinced of our own benevolence, That we are good news for the world.

[14 : 03] That we are God's good news for the world. We've become so convinced of our own moral excellence, Our own enlightenment, Our own limitless technological potential.

We have forgotten that we are not God. We are not God's gift. The events of this past week, however you interpret the details, have humiliated us.

Before a watching world. God can use humiliation. God's gift. And I'm praying. And I'm praying, of all the things that I'm praying for, I'm praying that God uses these events to humble us, To bring us to our knees.

And I pray that on our knees, The hearts of our nation will be turned toward God once more. Not our version of God. The true God.

God. So this is the king's mission. Justice on earth. In a way that we can't even imagine a human being accomplishing. But then we see something, I think, that is even more unexpected.

[15 : 14] Look at the manner of this king. Look at the way in which he enacts his rule. This is the thing that really sets this servant king apart. When we look at the scope of the justice that is promised in Isaiah, We imagine, we assume, that a king like this is going to need an enormous amount of power And influence to bring it about.

We're talking a global transformation here. But as one Old Testament commentator says, The real wonder of this king's mission, however, Lies not so much in its breathtaking scope, As in the manner in which it will be accomplished.

Now look at what it tells us here. He's not going to bring a great army. The source of his strength is not military might. It's the spirit of God.

Verse 1. The instrument of his rule will be the word of God. Verse 4. Verse 2 says, He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street.

You know what that means? He's not going to be the kind of leader who shouts others down. He's not going to try to dominate the public discourse. He's not going to try to control the narrative.

[16:30] Right? He's not going to try to promote himself and his personal brand. He's not going to try to base his decisions on focus groups or seek after public approval or humiliate his opponents.

Verse 3 says, Who are the bruised reeds and the faintly burning wicks in our society?

These are the people who are barely hanging on by a thread. These are the people who are vulnerable, unprotected.

They've been downtrodden. They've been oppressed. They've been mistreated. They've been overlooked. They've been marginalized. They've been ignored. And they're barely hanging on. They're barely hanging on. Right? Western civilization is full of stories of great charismatic leaders who come along and promise justice. They promise to make the world the way it should be.

[17:49] But there are always casualties. Right? Leaders come along and they promise great things. Right? And yet these great things often come at the cost of countless lives.

And often the poorest in society, the most vulnerable in society, are the people who suffer the most from these righteous crusades. Right?

They are those who have to be sacrificed for the greater good. So the bruised reeds of society get crushed. And the faintly burning wicks get snuffed out.

And everybody keeps marching forward because we say it's for the greater good. But with this king, there will be no collateral damage. There will be no casualties of war.

No one has to be sacrificed for the greater good. And yet, this king will bring forth justice. But he will do it with such gentleness, such surgical precision, such unfathomable care, that even the most fragile, vulnerable, weakest members of society will be preserved.

[19:02] They will be nurtured. They will be cared for. He's that kind of king. This king is a living paradox. In our experience, leaders tend to be one or the other.

Either they are strong and powerful, but they tend to bulldoze and trample people in their wake.

They leave a wake of destruction. I think many in our country prefer that kind of strong leader.

But then we see leaders who are gentle and meek. And they tend to lack the strength and the backbone and the force that they need when it's called for. So in our experience, you're one or the other.

This king is both. Perfect gentleness. Awesome strength. Together in the same person. Enough power to bring justice to the whole world.

But without even harming the bruised reed. And you ask, well, how is this possible? How is a king like this even... How can we even imagine somebody like this?

[20:08] The following chapters of Isaiah draw this out in much more detail. But we get a little glimpse of how this king is going to bring justice in verse 4.

It says, of this king, he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth. And the coastlands wait for his law. And first pass, I read that.

And I thought, okay, well, that just means he's got a lot of endurance. And he's just going to hang in there until the job is done. But then I read the Old Testament commentary by Alec Mateer. And it really opened my eyes to what this is actually saying.

The English translation doesn't make it as clear as the Hebrew does. If you read it in the Hebrew, which I see in Alec Mateer, the Hebrew words for grow faint and discouraged are the exact same words from verse 3.

Which talk about the burning wick getting quenched and the bruised reed being broken. It's the same exact two words. In other words, when this king brings justice, there is only one person who's going to suffer.

[21:14] There's only one bruised reed who's going to be broken. There's only one faintly burning wick that's going to be quenched. And it's the king himself. It's the king himself.

For centuries, this was baffling to readers of Isaiah. These chapters didn't seem to make any sense. Who is this king who is both all-powerful, capable of bringing global justice, and also willing to suffer and die to bring justice to the world?

How can you have such power and such weakness coexisting in one king? And in Mark chapter 1, verse 11, one of our lectionary epiphany readings, when Jesus is baptized, we read that a voice from heaven speaks.

And God's voice says, you are my beloved son. Now that comes from Psalm 2. You're my beloved son. And then it goes on to say, with you I am well pleased.

With you I am delighted. You know where that comes from? Isaiah chapter 42, verse 1. Behold my servant in whom my soul delights.

[22 : 23] That's what the voice says when Jesus is baptized. Behold the one in whom my soul delights. So God is saying there that Jesus is God's chosen king.

He's the only one who can bring justice to the whole world. But to do that, he has to become the servant of all. He has to become the bruised reed.

The one who is vulnerable. The one who is fragile. The one who is going to be broken. On the cross to reconcile all humanity to God.

To reconcile all humanity to ourselves. To reconcile all humanity to one another. To reconcile all humanity to the world. That we were made to steward.

The point of this, and for us this morning, is that we have one true king. His name is Jesus Christ. He sits on the throne of heaven.

[23 : 22] And he is sovereign. And the reason this matters so much at this particular time is this. The more we keep our eyes focused on the true king, the more it enables us to keep our earthly leaders in perspective.

Right? We can maintain the right perspective. We can vote for a candidate without worshiping them unconditionally. We can vote against a candidate without demonizing them and wanting to purge society of their supporters.

Everything that we do as God's people should reflect the heart of our servant king. Not just a king. Not just a king. Not just a servant. A servant king. The more we lose sight of our servant king. The more we take our eyes off of him.

And we begin to only look at our surroundings. Our immediate flesh and blood reality. The more things begin to become distorted. We start behaving more and more and more like the world that needs saving.

[24 : 34] We begin to take on those qualities and we forget the heart of our servant king. And I think that what we saw on Wednesday was in part a reflection of that. Distortions.

Distortions. Particularly among Christians. Right? When you see Christians holding up Christian symbols alongside racist symbols, that's a contradiction.

That's antithetical to the heart of the servant king. When it comes to patriotism, I do believe that we should be patriots. I believe that we should love our country.

I love our country. I think it's fashionable for people in my generation and younger to hate our country. I reject that. I love our country. I think it's an amazing country. I think that we should serve our country.

I think that we should pray for our leaders. I think that's biblical. But when we lose sight of Jesus, that becomes distorted. It becomes twisted.

[25 : 32] We take our eyes off the servant king and we see the rise of Christian nationalism. Where our identities as Christians and our identities as Americans start to merge and blend and twist together.

Like this unholy political smoothie. And then you see people assuming that there is some central important role that America has to play in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

We, as in the words of Havel, we forget that we are not God. We start to think that we are God's chosen vessel. Storming the Capitol building and marching the Christian flag onto the Senate floor is not the way of the servant king.

When Jesus is arrested, he tells Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting. Surest sign of all that your kingdom is of this world is when you're fighting like that.

Like we saw. But Jesus says my kingdom is not from the world. I think Christians in our society, some Christians, have a very distorted relationship with power.

[26 : 41] Many want as much power as possible so that we can regain control of the culture. The servant king is one who uses his power to serve and to minister to those who are most powerless.

The only way to regain perspective is to fix our eyes on the servant king. Jesus Christ. The one who came not to harm but to heal.

The one who came not to conquer but to serve. The one who came not to cause suffering but to suffer. And to give his life for the sake of the world.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for our king. We know that his sovereignty is unshakable.

We pray for the courage now as we confess together to confess honestly and boldly. And we do this because we know that what we most need right now, Lord, is grace.

[27 : 52] And that the more we repent, the more grace you give us. That the cross means that repentance is our vehicle, our gateway into your limitless grace.

And we need to be people of grace right now. We need to be people of grace with ourselves and one another. We need to be filled with grace in your Holy Spirit.

And so I pray that you would enable us to do that through this time of prayer. In your son's name, amen. So now, friends, as promised, we are going to have an opportunity to join together.

I invite you, if there's a few people here, if you want to be on your knees, you can do that. Certainly for those of you joining us from home, if you're able and want to pray this on your knees, that would be appropriate.

Dan and I are going to stand as we lead this for the sake of the cameras so that you can see us. But we're going to join in this time of prayer. And I will say the first part of the prayer, and then you will see words in italics.

[28 : 49] Those are the responses. Dan is going to be leading those responses. I invite you to join in and pray those responses as well. Let's pray.

Let's pray. O God, the Father, creator of heaven and earth, have mercy on us. O God, the Son, redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.

O God, the Holy Spirit, sanctifier of the faithful, have mercy on us. O God, blessed and glorious Trinity, one God, have mercy on us. Remember not, Lord Christ, our offenses nor the offenses of our forebears, neither reward us according to our sins.

Spare us, good Lord. Spare your people, whom you have redeemed with your most precious blood, and by your mercy preserve us forever. Spare us, good Lord. From all evil and wickedness, from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, and from everlasting damnation.

Good Lord, deliver us. From all blindness of heart, from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy, from envy, hatred, and malice, and from all want of charity. Good Lord, deliver us.

[30 : 03] From all inordinate and sinful affections, and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Good Lord, deliver us. From all false doctrine, heresy, and schism, from hardness of heart, and contempt of your word and commandment.

Good Lord, deliver us. From ungodly attitudes, actions, or words that demean and devalue other image bearers because of ethnicity or race.

Good Lord, deliver us. From lightning and tempest, from earthquake, fire, and flood, from plague, pestilence, and famine. Good Lord, deliver us.

From all oppression, conspiracy, and rebellion, from violence, battle, and murder, and from dying suddenly and unprepared.

Good Lord, deliver us. By the mystery of your holy incarnation, by your holy nativity and submission to the law, by your baptism, fasting, and temptation.

[31 : 04] Good Lord, deliver us. By your agony and bloody sweat, by your cross and passion, by your precious death and burial, by your glorious resurrection and ascension, and by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Good Lord, deliver us. In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our prosperity, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

Good Lord, deliver us. We sinners do beseech you to hear us, O Lord God, and that it may please you to rule and govern your holy, your church universal in the right way.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to illumine all bishops, priests, and deacons with true knowledge and understanding of your word, and that both by their preaching and living, they may set it forth and show it accordingly.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to bless and keep all of your people.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to send forth laborers into your harvest and to draw all humankind into your kingdom.

[32 : 16] We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to give to all people increase of grace to hear and receive your word and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to give us a heart to love and fear you and diligently to live after your commandments.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you so to rule the hearts of your servant, the President of the United States, and all others in authority, that they may do justice and love mercy and walk in the ways of truth.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to make wars to cease in all the world, to give to all nations unity, peace, and concord, and to bestow freedom on all peoples.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to show your pity on all prisoners and captives, the homeless and the hungry, and all who are desolate and oppressed. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

[33 : 19] That it may please you to give and preserve to our use the bountiful fruits of the earth, so that in due time all may enjoy them. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to inspire us in our several callings to do the work which you give us to do with singleness of heart as your servants and for the common good.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to preserve all who are in danger by reason of their labor or their travel. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to preserve and provide for all women in childbirth, young children and orphans, the widowed, and all whose homes are broken or torn by strife.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to visit the lonely, to strengthen all who suffer in mind, body, and spirit, and to comfort with your presence those who are failing and infirm.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to support, help, and comfort all who are in danger, necessity, and tribulation. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to have mercy on all humankind. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to give us true repentance, to forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances, and to endue us with the grace of your Holy Spirit to amend our lives according to your holy word.

[34 : 41] We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted, to raise up those who fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to grant to all the faithful departed eternal life and peace. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That it may please you to grant that in the fellowship of all the saints we may attain to your heavenly kingdom.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. Son of God, we beseech you to hear us. Son of God, we beseech you to hear us.