

The suffering servant

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[0:00] Thank you very much. So my plan this morning, or my purpose this morning, is really what Steve was praying to show you a person.

! And he's here in the Bible, and I want to show this person to you and sort of unveil him in the way the Bible does in this passage of ancient prophecy.

And for some of you, this is exactly what you need. You don't need to be taught to try harder.

You don't need to be shown how terrible you are. You don't need to be convinced that the church is a nice, cozy place. Because what you do need is to meet this person, a living person, a real person. And a relationship with him is exactly what you need. It's exactly what we all need. That is what it is to be the people that we're supposed to be, to know the Father and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

[1:16] So let me try and introduce this passage in the prophet Isaiah chapter 42. And let me ask this question. How do you think God accomplishes his plans?

What is his characteristic method for getting things done? So in some ways of thinking, magic would be the answer.

So if you've ever watched Aladdin, or Al-Aden, as our Moroccan student told us was the correct way to pronounce it. The genie with the magic lamp.

Do you remember that? And what was that? Robin Williams saying, 2,000 years gives you such a crick in the neck. Do you remember that one? By magic.

So magic is when you take inanimate objects, and you use the right spell, and there's a supernatural power in that way of working. And characteristically, the Bible does not, God does not work by magic.

[2:20] By brute force. So there is such a thing as brute force, and God, if he wanted to, could use a lot of brute force. Using many or big objects and power.

So if you ever watch Iron Man, Avengers Assemble, all that sort of thing. High culture we're talking here. Anybody know who Iron Man is? Okay, there's the four of us, yes.

Well, he's not a superhero, I have to tell you that. He's not a superhero, but he's got a lot about technology going for him, hasn't he? Brute force. And God does not, by and large, use brute force. Strong agents. So God has at his disposal angels, archangels, seraphim, cherubim. He doesn't tell us all the names of all the powerful beings he has at his disposal.

But again, characteristically, God does not choose to use angels and archangels. He does sometimes, but most of the time. It doesn't do it that way.

[3:23] Does God just do things with no intermediary between himself and the end result? Sometimes he does that.

But usually he likes to use means. He likes to use something or somebody in between himself and the end result.

Which brings us to human beings. Does God work through people? And if you think about it, God often works through people.

He seems to like doing that. And today we're going to look at a particular person. It is a person. Described as my servant. It says, here is my servant.

Or perhaps more literally, see my servant. And we're going to think about him. But let's, first of all, give us a little bit of historical context.

[4:25] So I've drawn a timeline here. So we're going back to the beginning. We're going forward towards the end there. So here's an important person in God's plan.

His name was A. So you've got two guesses at that one. Well, it could be Adam, but I meant Abraham in this case. So Abraham and his family. And that goes forward in time in terms of a family.

And then here's somebody with M. And things take a big step change there. Moses. He's the servant of the Lord, actually. Moses, isn't he? And then we go forward in time.

And there's another big step change here. Here's somebody with D and a crown. So this would be King David. And then we go forward with the kingdom. And then things take a huge dip because the kingdom doesn't work.

The people were told, if you don't worship me, if you don't follow me, you'll go into exile. Kick you out. And God was very patient, very patient for centuries.

[5:30] But in the end, he said, enough is enough. And he kicked them out. And they went into exile. And then the Bible, so that they went into a foreign country, were enslaved there or prisoners there.

And then there is coming back, homecoming. And I would link that with this great event of Jesus Christ. So that's the time scale.

And the book of Isaiah looks at the downfall of the kingdom. It thinks about this bit here. It looks into the abyss of exile, that bit there.

And it looks forward to the homecoming. So Isaiah, who's writing sort of in this period, is looking at backwards, downwards, and forwards, if you like.

And that's the context in which this passage fits. And incidentally, the homecoming is us. When Isaiah looked forward to God putting everything right again, he was talking about us.

[6:35] I want to say four things that just put us in the right realm of thought for coming to Isaiah 42. So this is sort of context. Thought number one is Israel and her failure, which I've already mentioned a little bit.

Israel was supposed to be a witness or a light to the nations. So you've got these surrounding nations. There they are. Some of them are Swiss. Some of them are Italian.

I don't know which one's which. But they would be all the countries. Well, really, it would be the countries immediately surrounding Israel, in fact. But it includes all the other nations in principle.

And she was supposed to be a witness, a light to the nations. And that's how Israel is set up. She's supposed to have such wise laws, such good ways of doing things, such a prayer answering God, that the other nations would look on and say, Do you see how they do that?

That's fantastic. Wish we could be like that. Wish our God was like their God. And that's how Israel was set up as a witness, a light to the nations.

[7:44] But when we come to Isaiah 42, we find that Israel was not illuminating. And she was not attractive.

So I'll make that bright circle dim. So number one thought, Israel and her failure. Number two thought, Israel and the nations, which is sort of an extension of the first thought.

Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations. They're the nations. But she became, well, in exile, she became, well, she became worse than the nations, because she's accused of that.

You're worse. I've given you so much. I've shown you so much. I've helped you so much. And you actually throw that back in ingratitude. And you're worse than the nations.

Israel was captured by the nations. So here are the nations with their spears. And here are people of Israel who are in chains, in a pit, perhaps, or in a prison.

[8:52] And it's a dark place to be. And so I move again to that darkness where there could have been light. Third thought to set us on the right track.

In Isaiah, there's a sort of competition, a dialogue between who God is and who the gods of the nations are.

And who the gods of the nations are. The idols. There's a constant theme. To whom can you compare me, says the Lord? Who really is God?

There are the nations. Who can do God things? Who gets the God glory? Who gets the worship? Is it the idols?

The elephant God. I looked up a picture. There is an elephant God, isn't there, in Hinduism? I looked up a picture. And it was so horrible. I was going to copy it and put it there. It was so horrible.

I thought, I'll just do an elephant. Elephant God.

[9:53] And all the different idols that the different nations worship, there's a sort of Baal person. Who gets the glory? Because the nations are worshipping their own idols.

And is it those who should get the glory? Or is it the creator God who made elephants and stones and people?

Thought number four, which comes up in the context of this. Think of what God has been doing. The former things and how they've failed.

Think of what God will do in the future. Think of new things. And how that will not fail. But God's promises will triumph.

And so that leads us to the question in Isaiah 42. How is he going to do this? That's what we're going to find out. Here is my servant whom I uphold.

[10:57] See my servant. So there he is. We can't quite see him very clearly. But let's listen as God explains him and introduces him to us.

Who is this servant? There he is. Is it? Well, I'm just thinking a little bit. There are servants of God who do his work unwittingly. So in fact, after 70 years, a king is going to have a foreign policy to bring back exiles and put them back in their homelands.

His name is King Cyrus. And in a sense, he's God's servant. I wonder if that's who we're talking about here. Moses was the servant of the Lord, wasn't he?

David served the Lord. Is it that sort of person that's going to be described to us? Or even, as I've described it, Israel was meant to be God's servant.

Is this really about the nation of Israel? Or is it someone else? Now, actually, you know the answer, don't you?

[12:08] It's like a Sunday school question. The answer is Jesus. But I'm not going to tell you that because that would spoil the surprise. So let's see how this person is introduced.

And I'll just take us through the text, really. I don't think I'm going to achieve more than that. Let's listen to the words. See my servant. It's a great invitation, isn't it?

See my servant. Whom I uphold. I uphold this servant.

My chosen one. A sense in which God doesn't just have to put up with whatever person volunteers or look through a list and don't really fancy any of them but has to take the least worst one.

He says, no, this is my chosen one. This is the one I've exactly got in mind. This is the one who perfectly fits my idea of a servant.

[13:21] He is the chosen one. In whom I delight. I'll tell you what it says in Hebrew. It says, in him my soul delights.

And you might think, I didn't realize God had a soul. And I'm not going to say that the text teaches that God has a soul. But what it does say, like you would say, if there's something that you really, really, really from the bottom of your heart delighted in, you'd say, my soul delights.

Well, you might do if you were Hebrew. He would say, my soul delights in that. So, I don't know. Strawberry ice cream with pistachio nuts on a really hot day.

Yes! Just what? You might even say, my soul delights in this. I have a friend who says, my soul delighteth in beef burgers, I think he says, but he says that as a joke.

But, get the strength of what is said here about this servant. I've chosen him. I, God is saying, from the bottom of everything that I am, which you'll never understand, but let me put it in these terms, from my very self, I delight in this person.

[14:50] He is just brilliant, excellent, fantastic, perfect, in every way. Do you get the point of that phrase? My soul, in him my soul delights. I will put spirit on him.

Now, a little bit later, God is described as giving spirit to people. But there is a difference. Did you notice the word I missed out? I said, I will put spirit on him.

And what I missed out was, my. I will put my spirit on him. So, it's just not that he has a spirit that God has given to him, but my spirit, says the Lord.

The spirit of the Lord is on this person. I think that's a very strong statement. The spirit who knows the inside of God.

The spirit who is so deep and profound as to know the depths and profundity of God himself. The spirit who hovered over the face of the waters in creation.

[16:06] this spirit is on this person. I will give my spirit on him. It's a very strong statement. He will bring justice to the nations.

We'll come back to that thought in a moment because it links with some other thoughts. But let me, this is a bit of an unfair thing to do. I've put the Hebrew word there, mishpat, because justice in this context is not quite what you might be thinking, criminal justice.

You might be thinking police and crime commissioner and justice like that. You might be thinking social justice. But put those thoughts to one side. If I use the word mishpat and we'll explain what the mishpat is later, he's going to bring mishpat, justice, to the nations.

We'll come back to that. But see that this servant is not just doing what God wants done. He isn't sort of a subcontracted laborer.

You know, God's saying, you know, plaster that wall, would you? And the servant says, yeah, I'll do that. And that's about as far as it goes. This person is so precious to God. My chosen one, I uphold him.

[17:19] My soul delights in him. It's very, very special. He engages God's total support, deliberate endorsement, and deep inner affection.

Who is this person? Who could fulfill all this? And I would say, in supernatural communion with God, my spirit is on him.

So, you know, there's a, it's even deeper than heart to heart, isn't it? If you say, my heart is with somebody, that would imply some sort of closeness. But to say, I put my spirit on him, I'm saying there's a communion, an interchange, a personal connection, between the Lord and this mysterious person who still has the question mark, so we're still asking, who is this?

Let's move on. How does the, this servant of the Lord operate? Verse two. He will, would you like to count the knots?

Just follow it through with me. I'll put all the knots in that are in the original. You want to count them. He will not shout, not cry out, not raise his voice in the streets, a bruised reed he will not break, a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

[18:38] How many knots did you count? Five. I think, I think that's fine. I think that's correct. Five. Interesting that he's described here in what he doesn't do. Do you not find that an interesting thing?

If you were describing somebody you probably wouldn't say what they don't do. But, this person is so special that the only real adequate way of describing this side of him is to say what he won't do. And what doesn't he do? Well, he doesn't shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. What sort of person is he?

Well, he's, he's the sort of, he's not the sort of person who makes a big show, makes a, a big fuss, makes a big agitation.

That's not the sort of person he is. And it's interesting to try and focus on what the writer is saying, what God is saying through this about the sort of person this servant is.

[19:47] He doesn't, he's not that. He's not, oh, I don't know, I'm not quite sure how to describe it. He's not like a bull in a china shop. Do you know of you, have you heard this expression? A bull, animal, cow, in a china shop, a shop full of ceramics.

Barging round, knocking things over, making a nuisance. He's not that. And he's not. a bruised reed, he will not break.

So, a reed, stalk, and it's just been clipped or bumped into and it's sort of falling over. And some people would just say, oh, get that out of the way, pull that up, tear that down.

But this person wouldn't do that. I think that's an extraordinary description of gentleness, isn't it? Gentle, gentle, gentle. A bruised reed, he will not break.

The sort of person he is, what it's saying positively is he's so gentle and it's expressed negatively, he wouldn't break a bruised reed. And it goes on to say, maybe Israel was feeling like a bruised reed.

[21:11] Maybe Israel said, you know, we've just made such a mess of this. I would be surprised if God just would snap us off, break us, send us out of his sight. And this is a bruised reed he wouldn't break.

And nor will he quench a smoking wick, a smouldering wick in the New International Version. He will not snuff out. So here's a candle. It was supposed to be producing light and it was burning and now it's almost gone out.

And you'd think the kindest thing for this candle would just go throw it in the bin. It's hardly lit at all. And it says this sort of person wouldn't quench a smoking wick.

He'd be so gentle and so caring and so solicitous and so thoughtful he wouldn't quench that but I suppose he would look after it and try and get it burning again.

It talks about his gentleness doesn't it? I don't know whether Israel would have felt she was like that. You know we're supposed to be giving light but we're I mean we're hardly hardly smouldering and this servant says that's okay I won't crush you I won't quench you I won't stamp on you I won't I'll tend you.

[22:36] I guess some of us sometimes feel like that don't we? A bruised reed a smoking wick and it's great to know that God has a servant who will come to us and not just say the superlative nature of his gentleness is expressed entirely in negatives and this is such good news for the weak and the vulnerable and the downcast.

We're allowed to feel like that the servant allows you to feel like that you haven't got to put on a brave face and say to the servant oh I'm fine thank you the bruised reed he won't break and the smoking wick he won't snuff out.

Let's come back to what he will do because the verse brings us to that in faithfulness he will bring forth justice that same word mishpat he will not falter or be discouraged and those two words fit with the bruising and the smouldering he won't get bruised he won't smoulder he won't falter or be discouraged until he establishes justice on earth and in his law the islands will put their hope.

Now let me just see whether I'm going to get ahead of myself here. There's the nations there they are look at them worshipping elephant gods full of military activity marching all over the world killing people or just living an ordinary life there are the nations and in some ways the nations well they've captured Israel haven't they?

So you might think they were the enemy but it says actually the servant has got a task bigger than just restoring Israel and getting that light going again and getting that bruised reed sort of nice and strong again the servant has a mission to the nations he's got something in store for all the nations and what it is is mishpat he's going to bring mishpat so justice he's going to bring law Torah instruction and he's going to bring it in faithfulness which just in case I haven't completely overdone the Hebrew thing I don't do that I don't do this every week but that happens to be emet which just means faithfulness they're really brilliant words that the Old Testament comes back to again and again and what does this mean for the nations well I would like to suggest to you it doesn't just mean he'll reform their criminal justice system

[25:36] I think what it means is that where the the nations have been wrong random chaotic unprincipled that the servant is going to bring to the nations all those wholesome things that make them what God wants them to be so I think a right internal order he's going to bring to the nations respect fairness a sort of social structure I mean one of the things that would happen in the nations would probably be their sexual morality would be all over the place their family structure would be all over the place oppression of the poor would be all over the place and the the servant is going to bring mishpat he's going to bring order he's going to bring rightness to the nations one thing that he has to deal with is the way they worship they've been worshipping elephants and squirrels and statues and emperors and cars social success they've been worshipping all sorts of things and you become like the God you worship

I think is a fair observation he's going to if he brings back mishpat to the nations he will change what they worship he will change who they who they really belong to who they really look up to and he will bring them Torah which is usually what Israel has law but he will bring this to the nations he will bring the servant's word and in fact because he is the servant of the Lord God of Israel he'll be teaching them what Israel was taught how to live so in a sense when the servant does his work the nations will become like Israel was always intended to a group of people relating to God showing his glory living in his blessing and walking with him the nations become what

Israel was meant to be that's the sort of thing that's in view in this passage he will bring this mishpat to the nations let's follow the passage on it goes into verse five now who says this is going to happen please can we try and get the hang of these next few words because it says in verse five this is what God the Lord says so he isn't saying here's a reasonable plan we're putting it out for consultation he says actually this is determined deliberate definite this is what God the Lord says Yahweh God the word in capital letters L-O-R-D in capital letters is the particular it doesn't mean Lord as in master it's the particular it's the way English translations translate the particular name of God the God of Israel in the

Bible it probably pronounced Yahweh in the original but put Lord in capital letters this God says so who created the heavens and stretched them out who spread out the earth and all that comes from it that's who I am says God you've got all these people worshipping frogs and elephants and trees and all that well actually I made all this stuff that's who I am let's just get what order of magnitude we're talking about I made all this stuff and I stretched it out like you might stretch out a sheet if you're putting it on the washing line that's what I did with the entire cosmos I stretched it out and I spread out the earth and all the stuff that comes from it well I did that too he who created the heavens and stretched them out who spread out the earth and all that comes from it that's me says the Lord God there's only one of me there aren't multiple different versions

I am the Lord and you guys who are singing your songs to Ganash the elephant God and these trees and all this stuff I gave you the breath to do that this is the Lord who gives breath to its people and life or spirit to those who walk on it so that's who I am says the Lord just get clear whose plan this is who is at work here you get the sense of the emphasis of that me says God I'm doing this the creator of everything and this is how I work says the Lord this is how I roll my servant and this is what he says to his servant and there's an emphasis on

[31:13] I I I the Lord have called you servant in righteousness and I will take hold of your hand it's a remarkably tender thought isn't it so those of you who are dads or granddads know what it's like to take the hand of a little child to hold the hand to have your hand held and God says to his servant I will hold your hand I will keep you verse six and I will make you something well I'm still trying to get my head around this particular phrase but this is what it says I will make you a covenant for the people so a covenant is a sort of relationship that is bonded in words and promises and undertakings and sealed in various ways usually by blood and in

Hebrew not in English and he says I'm going to make you this for the people presumably the people of Israel and more than that I'm going to make you a light for the nations so the nations will see the light that comes from you and be drawn to that light you will be a light Gentiles nations same thing and so that's the servant is going to be that light there's the nations and they're going to come to that light and hopefully turn from worshipping frogs and snakes and cats and dogs to worshipping the living God and more than that you will open blind eyes and you will release prisoners and let's think of those prisoners because that's the situation they were in weren't they some of them were chained up in exile in some dark room and you servant will release from the dungeon or literally the house of constraint the dark pit that you've been put in you will be released from that he will liberate you let's follow the text on verse 8 and see how this is linked with who

God is and the servant whom he deploys for his purposes in verse 8 he says just let me remind you again who is talking let me remind you again where this is all coming from because I am the Lord he says that is my name that's who I am and let's get this quite clear I do not give my glory to another and you nations have been giving glory to the elephant god and the trees and everything else you've been giving the glory that belongs to me you've been giving that to those that stuff I don't do that says God I don't share that I am the Lord that is my name I do not give my glory to another I do not give my praise to idols and now I am determined on this says the Lord as he introduces this servant to us

I'm determined on this there's old stuff that's how it was there's new stuff coming because I'm not giving up on this says God I haven't been defeated by your sin and your unfaithfulness I have not been defeated sin does not stop my plans from happening I'm going to do it anew afresh make your ears tingle and your eyes water to hear what I'm going to do through my servant I am doing a new thing and I'll tell you this I will tell you before it happens so that when it happens you'll say God said

that would happen it must be him and I'm telling you before it happens because I'm going to do it I predict it that's a matter of knowledge and I declare it that's his intention it's not just that I foresee this is oh look this is how it's going to work out well that's rather nice God's not just saying I can foresee it he's saying I'm going to make it happen there's another place where it says the zeal of the Lord will accomplish this it's not saying the zeal of all the people we're sort of rather apathetic but God says I'm not going to let your apathy stop me doing what I want to do well we've worked through the nine verses of this prophecy and you might be!

[36:20] what happened to it then it's rather radical promise from God what happened to that what happened to this delightful servant that was prophesied this gentle servant who was prophesied this nation's changing servant who was prophesied this one who is the creator's right hand man who holds hands with the creator the exile reversing servant who brings people out of prison the Israel fulfilling servant who does all the things that ancient Israel never managed to do but he does it himself in person the God honoring servant through whom the praise that belongs to God goes to God what happened to that then so a good question wouldn't it did anything did it fizzle out is it like an election manifesto you look back really they promised that completely forgotten that ever fulfilled well it was and the marvel of it is that it was not fulfilled in an emperor or a multinational corporation

Bill Gates it was fulfilled in the son of a carpenter who lived 2000 years ago in Nazareth who led a very secluded sort of life to begin with although his birth was surrounded by very bizarre occurrences and he went on to be baptized under John the Baptist and when he was baptized a voice came from heaven which didn't say this is my chosen one in whom my soul delights but it did say something very close to it when Jesus was baptized a voice came from heaven you are my son whom I love with you I am well pleased it seems to me although the wording is different the meaning is exactly the same that God is saying of Jesus watch this one he's the one I spoke of he's the one in whom my soul delights and was he gentle in that sense would you like to turn to Matthew chapter 12 verse 15 and around there Matthew gospel chapter 12 Jesus had been healing people and he had been looking after his disciples when they were criticized by the Pharisees he did lots of wonderful things and in Matthew 12 15 it says Jesus withdrew from the place many followed him he healed all their sick warning them not to tell who he was this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah here is my servant whom I have chosen the one I love in whom I delight I will put my spirit on him he will proclaim justice to the nations he will not quarrel or cry out no one will hear his voice in the streets a bruised reed he will not break a smoldering wick he will not snuff out till he leads justice to victory and in his name the nations will put their hope and Matthew saying in case you hadn't twigged that was Jesus the servant of the Lord was Jesus he did all that stuff would you like to look at Acts 26 17 in which the risen saviour is reported to have spoken to the apostle Paul when he was converted and this is very interesting because it leads us on into another aspect of this which I'll try not to get bogged down in but in Acts 26 verse 17 this is the report of what Jesus said to Paul I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles I am sending you to them to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and the power to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me and the risen Jesus is saying to Paul you are now going to open people's eyes you are going to be a light to the nations it's interesting the way that the servant his mission is passed on to those who serve the servant he says to his followers you now are a light in the world you are the light of the world you are the light of the world I'm announcing peace to the nations I'm going to do it through you was that fulfilled about holding his right hand I will hold your hand and I was thinking there's one place where it makes me puzzle about that and there's one place where the servant like the son who had always held his father's hand gets to a position where he says my [42:21] God why have you forsaken me why can't I feel your hand in mine at this particular moment you know where that was don't you when he died on the cross and I don't I don't know how to plumb the depths of that but for Jesus who had walked hand in hand with God to suddenly find that God was treating him as if he was a sinner like us and saying I have nothing to do with you what a terrible thing that must have been for him but he

did it for us he took what our sins deserved there are many other quotes that reference this section and the topics of this section let me tell you what happened when Jesus went into a synagogue right at the beginning of his ministry he took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah the same book that we're looking at it slightly different chapter but he said this he read it out the spirit of the

Lord is on me those are familiar words he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor he sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners that's familiar too and recovery of sight for the blind and that's familiar too to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and Jesus stood in the synagogue and read this out rolled up the scroll gave it back and everybody said what's he going to say now and what Jesus said was today this hearing well as I say there's lots of scriptures that reference the things that we've been looking at this morning Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and said I've seen your salvation which you prepared in the sight of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people

Israel that's Jesus and Jesus is the one who said concerning the honour of God God has honoured me and I honour him and ladies and gentlemen this morning the only way for us to honour the creator of the world to honour the father is to honour Jesus whom he sent what we're to do is to see him and know him have you worked it out then who is the servant it's Jesus he's the servant of the Lord God does his plans through Jesus has he let me ask a few questions is he working his plans in you has he given you sight has he begun to put your life into order to bring mishpat to you has he shown you how not to be worshipping idols but to be worshipping the creator has he given you light do you have the light of the

Lord Jesus in your life has he set you free I don't think any of us will be entirely set free in this life but that's his work he sets us free you know something of the freedom that Jesus Christ can give and if you're not are you asking!

him for that I'm trying to show you this morning this person what he can do just sort of scratch the surface of it really but there's enough there that you might be thinking that's exactly what I need that's I'm now beginning to see what Christianity is all about it's about this person and I want him to do those things for me and in the text every time the servant is mentioned in a section like this the thing that happens afterwards is that the nations are told to rejoice describe the servant see my servant sing to the Lord a new song his praise from the ends of the earth isn't it great isn't he great isn't he marvellous isn't this tremendous it's a bit warm in here isn't it see one or two of you falling asleep would you like just to wake up for a moment say do you agree that this is tremendous that he is fantastic and if if

[46:52] God said to you sing to the Lord a new song would you say yes I will yes that's what we're going to do and that one thing I forgot this that if we follow him we're supposed to pick up on his character we'll follow that another time let's sing number 98 a!

thank you Thank you.