

AM Isaiah 42:1-9 The Lord's Chosen Servant

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- [0 : 0 0] If you could open your Bibles this morning, please, in Isaiah chapter 42. The Old Testament reading this morning is Isaiah chapter 42, verses 1 to 9.
- You can find that on page 728 of the church Bibles. Isaiah 42, verses 1 to 9.
- Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him.
- 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.
- [1 : 1 1] 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 of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.
- 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. And then the New Testament reading this morning is found in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 12, verses 15 to 21.
- And that can be found on page 985 of the Church Bible. Matthew 12, 15 to 21.
- [2 : 3 2] 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. Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.
- I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.
- A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory, and his name the Gentiles will hold.
- Amen. That is it. Well, it is lovely to be with you today. Thank you again for the invitation. When Norman contacted me at the start of the week to talk about the service, I said I was thinking of speaking from John chapter 2, provided that wasn't last week's sermon.
- [3 : 4 1] And he said, well, it wasn't last week's sermon, but it was the Sunday before. So we've had a bit of a change of plan. And I saw from Facebook that you have quite a lot of sermons from the book of John over the last six months or so.

So this morning I thought instead we would turn to the book of Isaiah, in particular the passage that was read for us. And I apologise in advance, because looking at the book of Isaiah probably means we're going to have to work a wee bit harder today to get into the passage and to be able to understand what we're looking at this morning.

But maybe that's not a bad thing. Good for us to be stretched at times and important to look at these Old Testament passages and seek to understand them. We're going to look together at Isaiah chapter 42 this morning and then at chapter 61 this evening.

But let's ask God for his help before we begin. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your word, that it is indeed a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

So may your light shine forth this morning, that we would better understand you and better be able to praise you for all that you have done for us in Christ.

[4 : 54] Help us by your Holy Spirit to benefit from all we're going to look at. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you look around the world today, you might well observe that there is a lot of turmoil and change.

There's the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. There's uncertainty in the global energy market and with the supply of commodities such as wheat.

There's political turmoil. There's political turmoil including investigations into politicians like Boris Johnson and Nicholas Sturgeon, Donald Trump.

Not to mention all that's going on environmentally and earthquakes and droughts and severe storms. Many key country and world scale political events affecting our world.

In the midst of it all, it's good to remember as Christians that God is sovereign, ruling over the world, working out his plans and purposes for the nations.

[6 : 01] That was something that God's people Israel needed to know amidst the turmoil of the decline of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Babylonian Empire and the eventual replacement by the Persian Empire.

God's people needed to know amidst the world.

God's people that God's people that God's people that are in the world. And then to the eventual coming of the Savior and Redeemer to properly deal with the problem of sin and rebellion. And then ultimately to the final renewal of all things and the establishment of a new heaven and earth.

So it has a very broad sweep of time in its horizon, has this book. Chapters 1 to 39 are set within the context of the final years of the Assyrian Empire.

So the Assyrian Empire, they invaded northern Israel and carried the northern tribes away. And they settled them throughout the lands of Assyria. The Assyrians then threatened to attack the city of Jerusalem in the south.

[7 : 37] But God miraculously delivered the city because King Hezekiah of Jerusalem looked to the Lord and trusted in him for deliverance. But chapter 39 of Isaiah closes on a low point.

So envoys from Babylon visit King Hezekiah. And instead of Hezekiah using the opportunity to give glory to God for the deliverance of the city and his own personal healing.

He actually allies himself with the Babylonians. And puts his trust in them. So the chapter closes therefore with Isaiah's announcement that Hezekiah's descendants will one day be taken into exile and serve the king of Babylon.

Chapter 40 then in the book of Isaiah begins a completely new section of the book. So chapter 40 onwards looks forward in time to a point when towards the end of the Babylonian Empire.

And the people are in exile in Babylon. But Isaiah speaks prophetically about the rise of the Persian Empire. And the defeat of the Babylonian Empire. And the return from exile that we read about in books like Ezra and Nehemiah.

[8 : 51] So Isaiah in chapter 40 onwards therefore speaks to future Israelites. Giving them in advance a message of hope and comfort for their situation. Chapter 40 verse 1.

So it's a message of comfort.

God's judgment on Israel is over. He's going to bring them back from exile. The glory of the Lord is going to be revealed and all his people will see it. He will show himself to be far superior to the gods and the idols of Babylon.

He is the one who rules over nations. His words of promise endure forever. He rules with a mighty arm and will lead his people home like a shepherd.

There's no one who can compare with the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. He doesn't grow tired or weary. His understanding and ways are beyond our understanding.

[9 : 55] He renews the strength of those who put their hope in him, who wait for him. You could probably imagine that the people in exile in Babylon, those who will be there, who will be receiving this message that we're about to look at.

They'll be thinking, there's just no hope of going home. No exiled nation ever gets to go home. They remain displaced. The people in Babylon at that time will be wondering, does God even know where we are?

Does he care? And even if he wanted to, could he actually deliver us? Will he deliver us? And Isaiah declares, yes, see the sovereign Lord comes with power.

Speaking prophetically, he announces the Lord's future deliverance and the future return from exile. Isaiah chapter 41 continues that idea.

Verse 2 announces that God is stirring up one from the east, calling him into service. So as the chapters progress, we come to realize that that's talking about the rising up of the Persian Empire.

[11 : 04] The Persian Empire eventually defeated the Babylonian Empire and under Cyrus, the people of Israel are allowed to return from the exile. Chapter 41 also affirms God's continued care for his people.

Verses 8 to 10. And you might want to, please do have your Bibles open and look with me now at this and keep them open as we look at these various verses. So this is Isaiah chapter 41, verses 8 to 10.

Isaiah 41, verses 8 to 10. 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.

And verses 13 and 14. I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand. It is I who say to you, fear not. I am the one who helps you.

[12 : 12] Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel. I am the one who helps you, declares the Lord. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. So these scattered exiles of Israel will feel small and insignificant in the light of these world superpowers and empires.

But God says, you are mine. I have not forgotten you. I am going to help you. We will come back to the start of chapter 42 in a moment.

But let me just give you a wee overview of the next chapters as well. End of chapter 42. Isaiah actually goes back in time to thinking about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies.

And he declares that God was right to judge Israel. Although they are now his chosen people, they behaved like a blind and deaf servant. They paid no attention to his commands.

They broke covenant with the Lord, he says. They sinned against him and would not follow his ways. And so the violence of war and the flames of destruction overwhelmed them and the city of Jerusalem.

[13 : 18] And they ended up in Babylon because of God's judgment. So even though God is now going to rescue them from exile, God was still right to judge them. But then the good news of Isaiah chapter 43.

God says he's going to do something completely new. He's going to do something that has never happened before to other nations. He's going to bring his people back from exile.

And they will be a witness again to his mighty deliverance. I, even I, am the Lord. And apart from me there is no saviour, God declares. Chapter 43 verses 18 and 19.

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. And then just go back up to 43 verses 1 to 3. Thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed you.

[14 : 22] I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned.

And the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your saviour. Great promises of hope and comfort for God's people in exile.

He has not forgotten them. He is going to rescue them. Now if you have been a Christian for a while, you might well recognise some of those verses that I have just read.

They are the sorts of verses that often get written on cards or put in promise boxes. You know, along with verses like Jeremiah 29 and 11. I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

But I think it's quite important that we take a moment to recognise that these promises were given primarily, firstly, to God's people, Israel, and given to them in a very specific situation.

[15 : 29] As I've been stressing for the last few minutes, God's people are in exile in Babylon and God promises to bring them back to Jerusalem. At least to bring a remnant back.

He has redeemed them. He has summoned them. He is going to be with them. Verse 2 of chapter 43, When they pass through the waters, they will not be swept away. When they walk through the fire, which I assume is metaphorical, they will not be burnt.

So through his prophet Isaiah, God says to his servant Israel, to his people in exile in Babylon, I've not forgotten you. I have not rejected you.

Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, and I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41 verse 10.

Now, it is possible for us also today to draw comfort from these words. If the people of Israel were God's chosen people, then how much more are we as Christians today chosen and called and redeemed?

[16 : 35] We are precious to him, precious to Jesus. But God does not promise, for instance, that as Christians today, we will necessarily be saved from all harm.

That we will necessarily prosper. He doesn't actually promise you and me that we'll not be swept away during this life by a river of difficulties.

He might protect us from hardship in this world, but he doesn't promise deliverance in the way that he was promising to deliver his people in exile. Where we today can draw comfort from these lovely, beautiful words in Isaiah is where the New Testament reaffirms the promises that God was making to his people in exile.

Hebrews 13 verse 5, for instance, reminds us that God will never leave us or forsake us. So, we can say with confidence, the Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can mortals do to me?

Or Matthew 6. Jesus tells us not to worry because our Heavenly Father knows what we need. Or Romans 8. We're told that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

[17 : 51] Or Philippians 1. That God will bring to completion the work that he has started in us. That he is making us like Jesus and he is advancing his kingdom and at the right time is going to take us to our eternal home to be with him forever.

There's no guaranteed promise of physical blessing or freedom for suffering in this world despite what we might expect if we currently live in a fairly comfortable existence. But it is true in the words of Isaiah 40 verse 10 that you and I as Christians do not need to fear or be dismayed whatever happens in this life.

For God is with us to strengthen us and help us. He will uphold us with his righteous right hand. We do not need to be afraid. Isaiah 43 verse 1 For God has redeemed us.

He has summoned us by name. And we belong to him. How much more is that true because of Jesus? We belong to God and I as his children.

And no river can ultimately sweep us away. And no fire ultimately consume us. For we are eternally secure in Christ. And nothing can prevent us being brought into our eternal home with him.

[19 : 10] God the sovereign Lord is working out his purposes in the world and redeeming a people for himself. And that is incredibly good news. The problem though for the people of Israel to whom Isaiah is writing is that even when God brings them back to Jerusalem the problem of sin will not actually have been dealt with.

He can bring them back from exile in Babylon but what is going to stop Israel his servant from rebelling and coming under God's judgment again. Israel as God's chosen servant has proven its inability to faithfully follow the Lord and honour him before the nations.

Which brings us then to the passage I particularly want to concentrate on this morning. Isaiah chapter 42 verses 1 to 9 And I know that's a very long introduction but please don't worry we're actually well through already and do stick with me because this is really good stuff.

So this is Isaiah chapter 42 verses 1 to 9 And I should explain that the title God's servant is a key one in the second part of the book of Isaiah.

You've maybe heard the book of the book A Tale of Two Cities. Well the second part of the book of Isaiah could be described as a tale of two servants.

[20 : 46] The first servant is the one that I've mentioned already God's people Israel is God's servant. They're described in chapter 40 onwards as still being blind rebellious and fearful yet God in his grace promises to redeem this servant and to use this servant people as a witness to his redeeming love.

So with the exception of one reference which we're about to look at in this first servant song all the uses of servant in chapters 40 to 48 refer to the first servant God's people Israel.

But there's a second servant who increasingly comes into focus as the book develops particularly chapters 49 to 55. This second servant is described as one who is obedient gentle and who suffers unjustly.

and God promises to uphold this chosen servant and to use him to bring Israel and the nation back to himself. So this second servant will restore God's divine order and justice to the world.

And all the references to servant in chapters 49 to 55 with the exception of one refer to the second servant so two servants. Now you might wonder why am I saying all this this morning and even why have I given you such a long introduction but it's just that it is actually helpful to have some context if we're going to understand what's going on here and understand this servant theme is also really important for understanding the second part of the book of Isaiah that we're now in.

[22 : 17] So there's God's servant Israel on the one hand but God's chosen and ministering servant on the other. As I said a moment ago this is the first of four songs about this second servant and we're going to look at it.

The others are found in chapters 49 50 and 53 if you want to look at them afterwards and throughout there's a gradual increasing revelation of what the servant is like and how he will bring about God's redemption and the forgiveness of sin through his death.

This second servant or special chosen one will be meek and gentle but he's also a royal figure and a priestly figure and a faithful and effective redeemer.

Anyway today and the remainder of our time we're just going to look briefly at the first song and enjoy the words here. So this is Isaiah 42 now. Isaiah 42 verses 1 to 9 and let me read it again.

Behold my servant whom I uphold my chosen one in whom my soul delights I have put my spirit upon him he will bring forth justice to the nations he will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the streets 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.

[23 : 45] 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 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 let me take you through that a bit more slowly and we can focus a bit more closely on what God is saying about his servant through the prophet Isaiah verses 1 to 4 to begin with God speaks of his servant that's my heading for the first four verses

God speaks of his servant verse 1 behold my servant whom I uphold my chosen one in whom my soul delights that opening sentence might well remind you of something of the words that God the Father spoke when Jesus was baptized or again at the transfiguration this is my son whom I love with him I am well pleased for of course as Christians we know that the promised coming servant in Isaiah is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ the verse continues Isaiah 42 verse 1 I've put my spirit on him again we can think how that's true at Jesus' baptism when the spirit of God descends on Jesus like a dove it was Pentecost Sunday a few Sundays ago when the global church remembers how Jesus has now poured out the Holy Spirit on all who follow him verse 1 again we read how he will bring forth justice to the nations so this servant will bring about God's just rule not just in the sense of legal equality or fairness but in the sense of being God's king exercising God's just rule over the nations bringing in God's kingdom he will deal with the problem of sin and rebellion and evil so that people can live peacefully in God's just world verse 2 he will not cry out loud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the streets in other words he won't accomplish this through loud shouting through blowing his own trumpet he will quietly accomplish the purpose of God he will do it humbly without drawing attention to himself just think how

Jesus fulfills this verse 3 a bruised reed he will not break a faintly burning wick he will not quench he won't extinguish those who are weak and struggling there will be room for the weak in his kingdom those who only just have enough life left he will faithfully bring forth justice this is a faithful servant who will obediently do the will of the Lord God verse 4 he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth he won't give up he won't fail we're not told here in the book of Isaiah the details of how he will accomplish that we have to wait well we'll hear a bit more later in Isaiah but here we're told just what he won't do he won't fail and finally end of verse 4 the coastlands wait for his law or as the NIV puts it in his teaching the islands will put their hope in other words the farthest reaches of the known world will look to this servant they will put their hope in him for salvation and redemption in his quiet unaggressive unthreatening way this chosen servant of God will accomplish the salvation of God's people isn't that an exciting promise and these verses that we've just looked at are specifically quoted and applied to Jesus by Matthew in his gospel chapter 12 the passage that was read for us as well

Matthew throughout his gospel is at pains to point out the many ways Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy in Matthew chapter 12 verse 15 and following he says Jesus fulfilled this servant's song verse 15 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 behold my servant whom I have chosen my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased I will put my spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles he will not quarrel or cry aloud no one will hear his voice in the streets a bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not quench until he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope verses 5 to 9 then of Isaiah chapter 42 speak to his servant God speaks to his servant so if the first four verses of this song are about God speaking of his servant then the second verses are the words

God speaks to his future servant verse 5 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 and then Isaiah goes on to give us God's message but just look at again there verse 5 what he says what we're told about God this is God the Lord who's speaking so Lord here represents the name Yahweh the holy name of God I am who I am I am who I will be this is the Lord God the Lord of all who is speaking God the creator the maker of heaven and earth verse 5 he stretches out the heavens he puts the planets and stars in space he makes the galaxies he puts us in motion around the sun he spreads out the earth with all that springs from it he forms the dry ground he causes the land to produce vegetation and seed bearing plants and trees he brought forth the living creatures according to their kinds the creatures that move along the ground the animals the fish in the sea the birds in the earth he produces it all and it was very good and as a pinnacle of creation he made human beings male and female he created them in his own image he gave them breath he gave life to those who walk on the earth this is the God that Isaiah is describing the one who is about to speak and just jump over for a second to verse 8 so if we're in any doubt about the significance or importance of what's being said by this God look at what verses 8 and 9 tell us

[30 : 18] 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 God the Lord is the creator the bringer into being of new things he cannot be compared to idols and he will not yield his glory to anyone else he is the sovereign ruler he rules over all that is past and he brings into being new things and he tells his people about them in advance he announces them through his prophets so what is it that this mighty God says to his servant well verse 6 I am the Lord I have called you in righteousness I will take you by the hand so this is a chosen servant one who has a very special relationship with the Lord one who is righteous and will act in righteousness verse 6 continues I will keep you I will give you as a covenant for the people a light for the nations or it can be translated a light for the Gentiles

God will not allow this servant to fail but he will be kept he will be made to be a renewer of the covenant between God and his people and also the one who brings light to the Gentiles not just to the Jews but to the Gentiles you know Israel as God's servant failed on both those counts they failed to keep God's covenant because of their sin and rebellion and they failed to be a light to the Gentiles because they never properly demonstrated what it meant to be God's people but this special servant this righteous servant is going to do both he will fulfill the covenant and he will be a light for all nations verse 7 he will open the eyes that are blind to bring out the prisoners from dungeon from the prison those who sit in darkness when we think about Jesus earthly ministry we recognize that he did some of those things quite literally didn't he he restored physical sight to blind people he brought healing to the lame and freed people from imprisonment to sickness as his kingdom values and teaching are followed it does turn societies upside down and bring about release for the poor and the oppressed literally but those physical things are a sign pointing beyond to the spiritual transformation that he was bringing about

Jesus physical miracles during his earthly life showed he had the power to heal spiritual blindness and release the spiritually imprisoned and bring about a world that is ultimately free of all sickness and suffering the Lord Jesus is Lord of both the physical world and the spiritual world that's what Jesus was announcing when he read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue that day the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor he has sent me to proclaim freedom from the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour verses that we're going to look at this evening words given originally to the oppressed people of Israel ultimately fulfilled for all God's people through the work of Jesus the servant of God through Christ the kingdom of God has come the first fruits of the work of the spirit have begun God's people are being redeemed through his life his death and his resurrection it's when we look to Jesus to his life to his death on the cross that we understand how the words of Isaiah 43 verse 25 can be true for God's people

Isaiah 43 verse 25 I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins how is that possible well it's possible because of the redeeming and sin paying work of the suffering servant that's how Israel that's how God's people will ultimately be set free from sin and be free to live as God's holy people it's been helpful hasn't it this morning to get an understanding of Israel's situation it's good to understand what Isaiah was saying to the people in exile in Babylon but ultimately we rejoice today that the words of this servant song were fulfilled in Jesus God's son it's because of him and his redemption of us that all these promises that we've been thinking about this morning in the book of Isaiah these beautiful descriptions of the coming kingdom of God these things are made possible because of Jesus

God's righteous servant God the Lord is like no other he alone has worked his plan of salvation and he has done it through Jesus his son praise the Lord we're going to sing again Lord he's done it he left with God he was he is m he is back and he is B this may be the may fly he is in openly road he was in only he is he was in baby he is in baby there to me in the ex