

The Servant

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Date: 06 December 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we do thank you for this wonderful hope that your son has come and he will come again. Lord, we pray that you would open our mouths, that our lips may proclaim your praise for that fact.

We ask this in his name. Amen. You may be seated. Now, at this time of year, as we approach Christmas during Advent season, I think many Christians often feel an acute sense of disconnect. Let me explain what I mean here. I think we feel a sense of disconnect between who Jesus is and what he came to do and what the Christmas season seems to be filled with and is all about. Christmas season ends up being kind of a secularized and commercialized something other. Excuse me. I've been sick for the last few days, so it may be like this the whole time, but bear with me.

We feel a certain sort of disconnect with what seems to be the emphasis upon the Christmas season in the culture in which we live and Jesus himself and what he actually came to do.

[1 : 2 0] But even more than that, we feel a certain sort of disconnect between the Christmas season and the sentimentalized, idealized world that that kind of paints of drinking hot chocolate by the U-log fireplace on the TV with Christmas lights in your room.

One time, my friends and I decided to watch the U-log and see how long it takes for it to repeat. It was a long endeavor. But all that is to say is sometimes there's a huge disconnect between kind of the Christmas season and actually the harsh realities of the world in which we live.

The darkness, the brokenness, and the injustice that is flooding the headlines day by day. Yet as Christians, we must not disconnect from Jesus because that leads to despair.

And we must not disconnect from the harsh realities of the world because that just leads us into an illusion. So how do we live without disconnecting all these things?

I think that's one of the questions that our passage in Isaiah chapter 42 actually helps us with.

Because Isaiah 42 is telling us how the mission of Jesus relates to the unjust realities of our world.

[2 : 3 7] Look at Isaiah 42 verse 1. The mission of Jesus is stated with crystal clarity at the very end. It says, He will bring forth justice to the nations.

The end of verse 3. He will faithfully bring forth justice. The beginning of verse 4. For he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth.

What has Jesus come to do? He's come to bring justice, says our text. Now at this point, before we go deeper into the details of what that actually means, I want to back up and give you just a little bit of context.

It's important that you know that the passage we're looking at is what scholars often call a servant song. In the book of Isaiah, there's four of these songs. The first one is here in chapter 42.

The last one is in chapter 53. And what these songs tell us is they tell us what is the servant of the Lord, who's kind of a mysterious figure at this point.

[3 : 4 0] The New Testament identifies him as Jesus. What is the servant of the Lord going to do when he comes into the world? And these servant songs are a major hinge or transition point in Isaiah every time they show up.

So before each song, there's a passage where God is confronting the idols of his people, saying they are futile and they are empty endeavors.

And then you get the servant song. And then after the servant song, you get all of creation and all of God's people and all the nations of the earth singing a massive song of praise and glory to the one true Lord of the universe.

So beforehand, you get God confronting idols. And afterwards, you get a massive hymn of praise to God. And in between, the hinge or the turning point every time is the servant of the Lord who comes

into the world to do something.

So when we come to Isaiah chapter 42 verses 1 to 9, we should expect some explosive stuff. This text is a game changer. Not only for us, but for the whole entire world.

[4 : 52] Now we may ask, what is the servant of the Lord going to do when he comes? And as I read to you in verses 1, 3, and 4, the servant of the Lord will come to bring justice.

And I think that looks like two things in this passage. I think it's a horizontal justice and a vertical.

Horizontal justice. This word in the Bible is often used as a sort of government word.

It means literally to govern or to rule or to reign. And in the ancient Near East, this wasn't just an isolated political affair. It meant to govern and rule and reign over public and private life, over religious and political life, and over social and moral life, over every area of life.

Total dominion. So in verse 1, when it says that he will bring forth justice to the nations, it is saying that when Jesus comes, he's going to establish proper order and right relationships to every aspect of human life as we know it.

So that every human being may flourish as the creator has created them to do. Now it's not hard for us to think of examples in our world where we desperately need this, right?

[6 : 07] I mean, think about the terrorist attacks in Paris not too long ago. Think about the Syrian refugees who have nowhere to live and some of the wealthy countries that are shutting the doors.

Think about the mass consumption that is in some countries and the mass starvation that's in others. Think of the hundreds of vulnerable Americans who are dying in mass shooting after mass shooting and the hundreds of powerful Americans who complacently do nothing about it.

And I say that as an American myself. Or a little closer to home. What about all the low-income housing in Vancouver that's been razed to the ground and demolished and replaced by high-income housing, half of which will be vacant?

And these headlines just scratch the surface of the injustices of our broken world. And if we were to dig into the innumerable hidden injustices, we would never fathom the depths of how much darkness the servant of the Lord needs to come to deal with when he comes.

And part of the message of Advent, according to Isaiah chapter 42, is that God wants to do something about all this injustice. God's heart breaks over this injustice, and he's not indifferent to it.

[7 : 32] Rather, he sends his son right into the middle of it, that he might bear it on himself and start the path towards restoration. So God's going to bring horizontal justice, but he's also going to bring vertical justice.

Remember the context of Isaiah. Remember how I said at the beginning, before each servant's song, God is confronting the idols of his people? I think in the context of Isaiah, one of the great injustices that he is, that God is so up in arms about, is that his people refuse to praise him and give him glory and honor, which is rightfully due to him.

And they give it to false gods and idols. And it's a massive injustice. So part of the servant's mission when he comes is to save God's people from their idolatry and open their mouths, that their lips may proclaim God's praise and they may give honor to the one true God.

So that's why the result of the servant's ministry is described in verse 8, if you look there. This way, I am the Lord. That is my name. My glory, I give to no other in my praise, nor my praise to carved idols.

Because the servant of the Lord has come not only to establish justice between human relationships, but once again to establish justice between God and people. Now the question we're left with is how is this going to happen?

[9 : 04] How is the servant of the Lord going to do this? And our passage gives us two answers, one negative and one positive. Verses 2 to 4 is the negative one.

2 to 4. Read those with me. He will not cry out loud 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. These verses describe how the servant will not establish justice.

It's radically different than what we would expect in our world, or what we would even want, right?

The servant of the Lord doesn't come with military, and political, and cultural, and economic power. He doesn't play the world's game on the world's terms. He comes with humility, and even obscurity, with gentleness, and tenderness, with faithfulness, and perseverance.

[10:14] Take a look at verse 2. He will not cry out loud, or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street. Meaning, he's not going to come, and coerce people with his words, and forcefully assert his authority over people.

He's going to come in humility, he's going to come in simplicity, and he's going to come, what looks like, obscurity to the world. Look at verse 3. A bruised reed, he will not break, and a faintly burning wick, he will not quench.

These are images in the ancient world of fragility, of brokenness, of vulnerability, and it's saying that when Jesus comes, he's not going to deal with people, with a heavy hand, or a big stick.

He's going to come with gentleness, and tenderness, for the most vulnerable, so that a burning wick, he will not blow out. Then look at the end of verse 3, and beginning of 4.

He will faithfully bring forth justice, and will not grow faint, or be discouraged. Notice how this servant of the Lord, doesn't come starting off idealistic, and then end in despair.

[11:26] He doesn't come with a burst of zeal, only to burn out in fatigue. He comes for the long haul, and the implication with, he will not grow faint, or be discouraged, is that this servant of the Lord, is not going to snap his fingers, and everything happens.

He's going to take the long, hard, suffering road to justice. I want to pause here for a moment, because I think this is actually, quite pastorally important, for us to digest.

We live in a tension, constantly in our lives, that's created by the gap, the felt gap, between God's promises, of bringing justice, and the day-to-day experiences, of our life and our world.

And that creates a tension, for us humans, which if we don't feel it, then we're just not opening our eyes, and paying attention. And what we're constantly wrestling with, in this tension, is questions like, where is God's justice now?

Where is God in the midst, of all these horrible headlines, that we see day by day? What are we to make, of God's promises, in light of all this whore? On the one hand, Isaiah 42 tells us, that the servant of the Lord, is faithfully working, towards justice, and he's present, and he's active, he's doing something.

[12:40] Although it often seems hidden. But on the other hand, Isaiah 42 tells us, that he's chosen, the long road to justice. He's not going to faint, or grow weary.

I right away, think of Martin Luther King Jr. He understood this aspect, of Jesus ministry well. During the American, Civil Rights Movement, he had a favorite line, that if you listen to his speeches, which I tend to, about every Martin Luther King day, because I just love his speeches.

He has a line, that he repeats often, and he says it, specifically to, in context, where there are people, who are discouraged, and fatigued, under injustice.

He says, the arc, of the moral universe, is a long arc, but it's bent, towards justice. The arc, of the moral universe, is a long arc, but it's bent, towards justice.

And I think, if you know anything, about him, he didn't believe, this is true, simply because, he had confidence, in the human spirit, or human goodwill. He knew the Messiah.

[13:49] He knew, the Lord Jesus. And he, and this is one of the reasons, why he insisted, on non-violent resistance, like Jesus, in his fight, for injustice.

Because he knew, that the road, to injustice, to justice, was going to be, a long one, but it was sure, because it was, in the hands of God. Behold, my servant, says the Lord, he will bring forth, justice to the nations, but not in the way, the world will expect.

But the question, that remains, if that's how, he will not do it, how will he do it? And so, the positive answer, we get in verses, five to seven. Before we read it, notice the scene changes, in verses one to four.

God was speaking, to his people, about the servant. And now, in verses five to seven, he speaks directly, to his servant. It's as if, it's a huge, royal coronation scene, where God is giving, his servant, his divine commission.

So, listen in with me, verse five. 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.

[15:06] The implication being, if God did all those things, surely he'll do, what he's about to say. I am the Lord, don't forget it. 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, and 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. Look at verse six, it says how the servant, will establish justice. God will give his servant, as a covenant, to the nations, or as a covenant, for the peoples, and a light, for the nations. Now, in order to understand, the explosive meaning, of those two phrases, we actually need to go, all the way back, to Genesis chapter 12. Don't turn there, I'll just explain it. The Abrahamic covenant.

Got to go back, in order to understand, what's happening here. At the Abrahamic covenant, God says to Abraham, I'm going to take you, to a land, I'm going to make, a great name for you, I'm going to make, a great nation for you, and I'm going to bless you, but what's the purpose, of all this Abraham?

[16:17] So that your nation, your family, will be a blessing, to all the families, and nations, of the earth. The purpose, of God's covenant, with Israel, is so that they, will be, a blessing.

But what's the problem, in Isaiah? The problem is that, Israel, who's meant to be, a blessing to the nations, are the very ones, who are committing, idolatry, rebelling against God, and not singing, his praises.

They're acting, a lot more, like the nations, than actually being, a blessing, in light to the nations. And what happens, is that they're actually, under God's judgment. They're in exile, because of their sin.

And so you're left, with this massive problem, how in the world, is the Lord, going to extend his blessing, to all the nations, of the earth, if his appointed means, for doing so, is in utter shambles? And the answer, is the servant, is going to take on, the mission, that Israel failed to do. The servant, is going to do, what Israel cannot do, and what we cannot do.

[17:19] He's going to be, a covenant for the peoples, and a light, for the nations. And finally, through this one person, God's promises, will come perfectly true. I think that's why, after our passage, all creation, sings for praise.

Because all creation, all of a sudden, realizes, here's somebody, that will give us, the blessing of God, that we've been waiting for, for so long. Because the coming, of the servant, means life, for the world.

I think that's part, of the reason, why Jesus said, in John 3, 16, for God so loved, the world, that he gave, his only son. I think that's part, of the reason, why Jesus, when he took the cup, at the last supper, the night before, he was betrayed, and killed, he looked at his disciples, and said, this is my blood, of the new covenant, which is given for you, but not just for you, for many, for the forgiveness, of sins.

And that's why, at Advent, we celebrate, the coming of Jesus, not just for Israel, but for all the world. Because he comes, and when he comes, as verse 7 says, he will open the eyes, that are blind, to bring out, the prisoners, from the dungeon, and from the prison, those who sit, in darkness.

So in conclusion, I want to ask us, what does this passage, say to us here and now? What are we to come away with? What are we to hear? And I just want to narrow in, on at least two things. I think this passage, very practically, says to us, keep your eyes, on Jesus.

[19:00] Keep your eyes, on the servant. That sounds, tremendously simple, but look how it begins. Behold, my servant. Literally, look at my servant.

Focus your life, on my servant. See, during this Advent season, we rightfully lament, the many injustices, of the world. When we read the headlines, and we experience, injustice in our own life, we should cry out, how long, oh Lord?

We should cry out, Lord, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. We should cry out, come Lord Jesus, come, please, do something. During this Advent season, we shouldn't just, rightfully lament, but we should rightfully, seek justice as well, in any way we can. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has this beautiful quote, and he says, we are not to simply, bandage the wounds, of victims, beneath the wheels, of justice. We are to drive a spoke, into the wheel itself. But in the midst, of all the injustice, in the midst of all the lament, and all the resistance, we must always keep our eyes, on the servant of the Lord. On his humility, on his gentleness, on his faithfulness, and on his perseverance.

[20:20] Because God says, behold my servant, he will not grow faint, or be discouraged, till he has established, justice, in the earth. Brothers and sisters, keep your eyes, on Jesus this Advent.

He's coming. And the second thing is, I think this passage, encourages us to praise the Lord, and not idols. Sounds really simple, actually pretty hard to do.

Look at verse 8. I am the Lord, that is my name. My glory, I give to no other, nor my praise, to carved idols. Now we don't have, carved idols technically, but during Advent, as Christians, we're caught up, in some weird sort of battle.

But just as soon, as we start singing, at the beginning of Advent, let every heart, prepare him room. It seems like, there's a flood of idols, waiting to rush in. The Advent season, is filled with the hustle, and bustle, and the clamor, of idols, surrounding us, at every corner.

And it's in the places, that seem so neutral, right? It's when we're surfing Amazon, to buy stuff. It's when we're watching, TV advertisements, or walking through the sights, and the smells, and the sounds, of the mall.

[21 : 45] Or when we're reading, and hearing about Christmas sales. Now these things, aren't bad. But the reality is, we have to recognize, our hearts are tickled, with desire, at every corner. Tempted to believe, that what the companies, tell us we need, is what we really want, this Christmas.

A new watch, or a new pair of jeans, or a new iPhone, or a new book. And as images, of these things, flash before our eyes, our hearts, are ever so subtly, tempted towards, idolatry.

Now if you're anything like me, your heart is jumping, to self-defense, at this point. Let's be honest, you're probably thinking, that's not me. I can name the idols, of the person next to me.

But I don't have, idol problems at Christmas. I got it straight. I often, convince myself of that. But according to the book of Isaiah, one of the best tests, for seeing, where and when you have idols, is seeing where, and when you are silent, towards God.

Idolatry, silences us, from praising God. That's what Isaiah says. But it also says, that when God comes, he will confront our idols. He will show, they are futile and empty.

[23 : 01] He will open, our blind eyes. And he will free us, from slavery to darkness. So that we will be able, to see his beauty, and his glory, and his worth, and his presence, in our midst.

And then once again, our lips will be opened, and our mouths, will proclaim his praise. And say, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he, who comes, in the name, of the Lord.

May it be so, this Christmas. I speak these things to you, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.