

I Am The God of Bethel

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to Isaiah, the chapter we read in chapter 42, reading from the beginning. Isaiah 42.

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.

Now the previous chapter closes with a great sense of chaotic helplessness.

[1 : 02] It's all this picture of, behold, they are all a delusion. Their works are nothing. That's a very futile picture.

It's one really of despair because there's kind of nothing worse than discovering. And it's the worst thing of all to discover at the end that something was a delusion.

And sadly that's far too often the case in life that people, when they put their hope and trust in, they begin to discover that it's all a delusion.

And we find here that this, they're saying, when I look there is no one among these, there is no counsellor who, when I ask, gives an answer.

And all that, of course, is contrasted with what we have here, which is a very clear and a very precise showing of God's servant and of God's work.

[2 : 01] So there's a huge contrast between the two. And I think it's fair to say that so often in life we have discovered, like at the end of verse 41, just how true that is.

When I ask that there is no answer, when we've looked to the other things, when we discover that the things we put our hope in, that it became a delusion. And one of the sad things of life is that it's very often as a last resort that people turn to the Lord.

And I'm sure that will be the testimony of many or most people, that it was kind of when they were sort of almost at the end of themselves, when they felt there was really nothing else at every prop and every support and everything that they were hoping to build on in life had been kind of taken away, that they ended up, they didn't know really where to go.

And it was really to the Lord that they began to cry. And I'm sure a lot of us can identify with that, that we cry to the Lord at that time.

Amen. And so it's very important for us, and it's a sad reflection really upon the depravity of the human heart, because you'd think as God, as our maker, that we would go to him right away, but we don't.

[3 : 21] That's human nature, and that's sin. And it's as we see very often as a last resort. But then Isaiah focuses in here on the Lord's chosen servant, and he begins in one of his customary ways of speaking, where he says, Behold.

And Isaiah has a very graphic way of writing. Sometimes it's almost as if he's speaking. As we've said it often enough before, the writings of Isaiah are probably the best or the most beautiful writings that are found in the Hebrew language.

It's almost poetic. There's a grandeur and a beauty about the language. But it's also sometimes he writes in a way that you can almost hear this speech, as somebody speaking.

And that's exactly what we have here. Behold. And Isaiah often calls like that, Ho, everyone, or listen, or behold.

And here we have this, because Isaiah is saying, I've got something really, really important to say, and I want you all to stop, to sit up, to take notice of what has been said.

[4 : 36] And so he says, Behold my servant. Now, as we know, Isaiah again uses, he interplays this word servant quite often. And sometimes servant is spoken of as a nation of Israel.

And sometimes the servant is spoken of as the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's very obvious from this passage that Isaiah is speaking here about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says, Behold my servant whom I have chosen, in whom my soul delights, I will put my spirit upon him, and so on. Behold my servant whom I uphold.

And again, it's quite an interesting word, this word uphold, because it can also have the idea of meaning to lean on, to uphold, yes, and also to lean.

And both these words are absolutely true with regard to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. Because when Jesus came into this world, as our Savior, as our mediator, he was upheld by the Father.

[5 : 47] Because he did something quite remarkable. The whole thing was his own essential glory, the glory that belonged to him as God, was veiled.

And he lived in absolute dependence upon the upholding of God the Father all the time. So, when it says here, Behold my servant whom I uphold, it is absolutely true of Jesus as his role in this world as Savior.

But it's also true where it says, where God would say, Behold my servant on whom I lean. Now again, back in those days, in the Near East and so on, a king would often lean upon his favorite courtier when he was going somewhere.

The king in those days had incredible authority, and they did things probably very differently to the way things are done today. But that's one of the things they did. They would lean upon their favorite courtier.

And again, showing this trusting in them, because they're putting their weight, leaning upon them. And in a sense, that is what we have also, of what God the Father did with God the Son.

[7 : 09] Because with regard to the whole way of salvation, he trusted implicitly his Son. He leaned upon his Son to do absolutely everything that was required.

And there was an awful lot required in the saving of our souls. And so the Father is saying, Behold my servant whom I uphold, yes, and my servant on whom I lean, depend, and trust, that he will do everything for me.

And that's exactly what Jesus did. I have put my Spirit upon him. Now again, we remember how Jesus received the Holy Spirit.

I remember at the time of the baptism, John saw the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove and resting upon Jesus. And Jesus, we're told, had the Spirit without measure, which simply means he had the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Now, none of us can know that. We will in glory know it. But here in this world, we will never know the fullness of the Spirit. Because we're sinners.

[8 : 23] And we grieve the Spirit in various ways. We do things that we do not ever understand the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit. And just the least thing will grieve the Holy Spirit.

So that we do not have an effective ministry in our lives as really we should. And I think we're all very conscious of times maybe when we're very close to the Lord.

And we're conscious of, we're really conscious of the Spirit's prompting. And even when we come to the Word, everything is alive. And our souls are alive.

And we're so aware that the Lord is close. And this is how the Holy Spirit is ministering to us. But then again, there are times we feel so hard, so distant, so far away.

And we're so often in danger of grieving the Holy Spirit. But that was never so with Jesus. And then it says, He will bring forth justice to the nations.

[9 : 33] Now, in a sense, I believe that this is speaking primarily about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That He will bring forth justice to the nations.

Because one of the things that the gospel of Jesus Christ is, is incredibly just. Because you look at the life of Jesus. And there was never a more just and righteous life lived in this world than the life of Jesus.

And Jesus is a fulfillment of the law. Which is the justice of God. And so Jesus is that embodiment of God's law, of God's justice, of everything.

And this is speaking about what Jesus is going to do. That He's going to bring, that God is saying, I'm going to bring the Lord Jesus to the nations. Now, we see here the way that the Lord works.

He will not cry aloud or lift up His voice or make it heard in the street. Again, that seems kind of strange. Because if you're going to work and do a great work, you expect that there will be a lot of activity, a lot of energy, a lot of show.

[10 : 49] And this contrasts hugely with the religions of the day. For instance, if a nation was captured and brought into captivity, they were brought into another land.

One of the things that was done right away, because every nation had their own religions, their own ways. One of the things that was forced upon them as captives, was that they were introduced in no uncertain terms to the religion of that particular place.

And if there was a change in the religion, all the people were brought, it was something that was forced upon them, and it was done with great power and with great pomp. I think you have a great example of that in Daniel, where, remember where Nebuchadnezzar made that huge image, about 90 foot tall of gold.

Maybe it was in response to the dream that he had, where he saw this image and the head of gold, and Daniel told him, interpreting the dream that the head of gold was, that he was the head of gold and the Babylonian empire.

Maybe it went to his head. And he thought, oh, right. And of course, the Babylonians had their own religion, but he was there in the center. And so there was this command.

[12 : 00] There was all kinds of music and loudness and whatnot. And when all that was displayed, everybody, everywhere, had to bow down and worship this new image that had been built up.

And if they didn't, they would be thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. Remember how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ended up in there. But that's an example of how captives were introduced to the type of religion of the country that they were in.

Completely the opposite to what we have here. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice. See, that's the way the Lord works.

Quietly, silently, secretly, touching people's hearts, people's lives. Remember when Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, he said, the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound thereof. You don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. It's a silent, secret, personal operation of the Holy Spirit within a person's heart.

[13 : 16] There's no fanfare. There's no blowing of trumpets. There's no great noise. It's quiet and it's silent. Maybe even just now. The Holy Spirit could be working in somebody's heart.

The amazing thing is that the person beside you would have no idea. A person behind you would have no idea. A person in front of you would have no idea.

But God is working away quietly and silently and speaking and opening a person's eyes and ears to the truth. And this is the way that the Lord works.

And that's why it's very dangerous for us to say, ah, there's nothing happening. People can sometimes look around and say, ah, you know, there's nothing happening these days. How do we know? Because God doesn't do things with huge outward displays.

He does it so secretly, so quietly, so silently. And then, of course, when it says, he will bring forth justice to the nations.

[14 : 21] As I said, I believe that is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world. And that's why it is so important that the Lord Jesus Christ is brought into this world.

Because if there's one thing today that we would say in so many of the nations of the world is that it's not justice but injustice. You know, you look so often, as we're fed with our news, it's just injustice upon injustice upon injustice.

So often our hearts weep with the injustice. It's one of the worst things that can happen. But we see it in all its brutality, in all its hatred, injustice all over.

And really the only answer. Yes, I know, and we give thanks to the Lord for every meeting and everything that people try and do to bring peace and try and deal with these situations.

But ultimately, the only answer is the changing, transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ into people's lives. And that's what we must pray for.

[15 : 31] That the nations of this world will discover this justice, as we said earlier, who is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let us not become too discouraged. It's easy to become discouraged. Sometimes when you look at the news, you just say, I don't even want to look at the news. I know quite a lot of elderly people now who won't look at the news.

It's just so depressing. It's so discouraging. But we must never lose sight of the fact that one day the Lord is going to bring justice to reign. And so this is what we find it saying here.

And then at verse 4, it adds, we'll come back to verse 3 in a minute, and it says, He will not grow faint or be discouraged. Again, this is speaking about Jesus.

And he had every reason to be faint. There were times when he virtually fainted. There were times when he was so overwhelmed with what he had to do that it was almost beyond him.

[16:40] We have that picture in the Garden of Gethsemane. But even before he went to the Garden of Gethsemane, remember when we're going through in John's Gospel, we saw there of how he was greatly distressed within his whole being.

There was anguish in his soul at what he had to do. And yet Jesus, he never held back, never at one moment. And I say, this is the marvel of it.

Hundreds of years before the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world. What a graphic picture we have here. Of him, of his ministry, of the way that he worked.

It's really quite extraordinary. And so he did everything. He fulfilled everything. He met death and he beat it.

He went into the grave and he robbed it of its victory. He met sin and he broke its power. He has met hell and destroyed its claim.

[17:43] All of these things for his people. And then it says, A bruised reed he will not break. Or a faintly burning wick he will not quench.

Or a smoking flax, it's quoted elsewhere. Now this particular verse is quoted in Matthew's Gospel. And Matthew, it is in relation to the contrast that Matthew is painting between the Pharisees who were murderers in their intent against Jesus.

And Jesus' gentle, compassionate, loving way of dealing with people. But Matthew, as he writes, this is how he's contrasting the murderers Pharisees against the gentle Jesus.

And one of the things that Isaiah is showing us here is just the quiet way in which Jesus works. He will not grow faint or be discouraged until he has established justice in the earth.

But as we said, he won't cry aloud or lift up his voice. And I think that's important for us because that was a great feature of Jesus' ministry.

[19:03] It was the gentle, quiet way that he worked. Yes, there were one or two instances for the cleansing of the temple where we saw the righteous indignation of Jesus coming to the fore.

But by and large, there was this very gentle, compassionate way of working. And it also shows us that this is the correct way to deal with error.

You know, there are some people think that the way to deal with error, whether you discover what is wrong, is to shout and rant and to rave and to condemn.

And a lot of people think that that's what you do. You go to the pulpit and you start preaching against something. Well, I don't think that's actually the way it works.

Because the greatest way to highlight error is to put truth beside it. If you want to see the flaw in something, put something similar that is perfect beside it.

[20:09] Suppose you went for a plank of wood. Suppose you were needing a plank of wood. And you went to the down and you went to buy this plank of wood. And when you saw it, you said to yourself, That plank of wood is not straight.

I can see, I can look at it. There's a kind of curve in it. And you say to the person, That plank of wood is not straight. Of course it's straight. No, it's not. It is. And you can argue away all day.

And then you say, Well, there's only one thing for it. You go off and you get another plank of wood.

And you look at it and you say, Well, that plank of wood is absolutely straight. Put that plank of wood that's absolutely straight beside the one with the curve in it.

And then you see right away, Oh, it's not straight. Another way to deal with error is to bring the truth beside it. And either people will do one of two things when the truth is placed before them.

They will either see the error clearly, or they'll become angry against the truth. And they will try and destroy the truth. And that's because they know they're wrong.

[21:17] That's what they did with Jesus. They had to destroy him because they knew. You know, deep down, they knew, they knew deep down that he was speaking the truth.

But they couldn't bear him because he was getting right in under their skin. He was offending them. He was hurting them. And they weren't prepared to face up.

Some of them were. And thankfully they were. And they were able to see, Oh, this is right. And I've got to deal with it. And that's what we've always got to do. Because that's what Jesus is saying. You've got to face up to the truth.

And do you know what it says in the Bible? The truth will set you free. By embracing the truth, we discover freedom and liberty.

By not facing up to the truth, it just, it devours us, it destroys us. And that's what we find the Pharisees and the religious leaders doing.

[22 : 14] They destroyed Christ. Because they couldn't bear the truth. And so we find that Isaiah is teaching, telling us about how Jesus is going to be and how he's going to act.

And so we have then this picture of the bruised reed that he will not break and the faintly burning wick he will not quench. And that's one of the wonderful things about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's one of the wonderful things about his people as well. That they will never ultimately be broken. And the flame that burns in their heart will never ultimately go out.

That doesn't mean that we won't be battered or bruised or shaken or thrown this way and that way. Sometimes by providence, people's lives can be turned completely upside down.

We can feel that our whole life is shattered. You look at the book of Job. And there was a man who lost virtually everyone and everything. And if ever there was a broken man and a man whose heart was just constantly bursting with pain, it was this man Job.

[23 : 29] And yet, he wasn't ultimately broken. The fire didn't go out, although it had gone low.

And also sometimes we can be bruised and battered with regard to who we are ourselves. Just within our own being, within our own self, about the sense of failure that we often have, the sense of sin that we have.

It's very interesting. You look at the life of the Apostle Paul. Sometimes you read his testimony. Wow. I was shipwrecked. I was stoned and left for dead.

I was imprisoned often. I was starved often. Beaten up. Can't tell you how often I've been beaten up. All for the sake of the gospel. And when he tells you that, do we find him saying, Oh, poor me. No, never. But it's only when he begins to speak about his own sinfulness and about the discovery of who he is, it's then he says, Oh, wretched man that I am.

[24 : 41] Who shall deliver me from this body of death? So you hear, you have this man and he's going through all these really hard things, but we don't find him saying, Oh, poor me, until he speaks about himself, what he is inside himself.

But of course, side by side with the fact, when he says, Who shall deliver me from this body of death? He then gives thanks for the victory that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the reed will not be broken. Sometimes you'll see after a storm, a gardener, or even yourselves, sometimes you'll see plants that are right down.

Sometimes you try to tie them together, maybe put a wee stick beside them to encourage them to get back up and to grow. Even although they might not be broken, they might be bent right down and tenderly and gently you can begin to get them up and going again.

And in a sense, that's how it is. But you know, the other funny thing about it is that sometimes it's in our brokenness, and this may sound strange, it's in our brokenness that our broken prayers and our broken sighs are almost like music in God's ears.

[26 : 00] You know, sometimes it's, well, you look at the reed of the bagpipe which is flattened, and yet the most beautiful music when you put it in the hand of a skilled musician, the most beautiful music comes out of it, out of this flattened reed.

And sometimes, it's through the flattened and the broken and the pained, that the music will come before God. As it says in the psalm that we sang, a broken heart, broken spirit is to God a pleasing sacrifice.

It's not that there's anything beautiful in the breaking of it, but of the fruit that's produced from it. And so, the Lord will not ever allow his people, no matter how battered and bruised and shaken and how low the flame may go until others might not see it at all.

In the Old Testament, ascending smoke was a symbol of prayer. And it might be that you might even look at a person who you thought was a Christian and now you're not sure if that person is a Christian.

But you can't see inside. But the Lord knows and he's saying, I don't know, it might be broken, but it's not broken without recovery.

[27 : 19] The flame might be so low you're not seeing much, but I'm seeing. And I'm going to blow upon that flame again and it'll fan that flame and it'll burn bright again.

See, the Lord, the Lord is in the purpose of, it's always his plan and purpose is to restore his people. So, let us give thanks to the Lord today that we can never, ever be ultimately broken. But I would ask as we finish here, have you discovered this gentle, amazing work of the Lord Jesus Christ within your own heart?

Or are you still looking for the answers to life in the places that end up only with delusion? Because it's so easy, you know, the world captivates and the world is so enticing and we hear so much and we read so much and knowledge is so great today and it's so easy to be drawn aside and to be sucked in and we think this is right or that is right.

Let me tell you, only, only the Lord at the end of the day will prove to be right. Everything else will be a delusion.

[28 : 40] That doesn't mean that there aren't good things within other things. But let us also remember that every good thing that is in other things ultimately comes from God. because every good and perfect gift is from above.

What we're saying is here center yourself in God first. Then all the other things will fit into place. Don't put God aside and seek into the other things because ultimately they will be delusion.

He will never be. Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for the wonderful prophecies that your word have held out and have been wonderfully fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We give thanks that we live in gospel times and where we have all the light and all the knowledge. And we pray that through the light and knowledge that we have we will not become so accustomed to it that we will become dismissive of it but that we may embrace what is being taught and that we may embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

Lord, we ask that you will do us good. Bless the cup of tea and coffee in the hall and bless us all with all spiritual blessings. Bless every home and family. And we pray to bless us in light of the coming communion and ask Lord that you will encourage your people and particularly any who might be considering going forward grant them the strength and the grace so to do.

[30 : 08] Wash away from us in our every sin in Jesus name. Amen. We are going to conclude from Sing Psalms Psalm number 18 the 18th Psalm Sing Psalms Psalm number 18 and that is on page 21 We are going to sing from 27 to 32 the tune is Warrington You save the humble and the meek but bring the proud down from their height you Lord will keep my lamp of flame God turns my darkness into light with help from God I can advance against a troop and rout them all and with the aid my God will give I can leap over any wall for perfect is the way of God no flaw is found within his word to all who put their trust in him a shield and refuge is the Lord Psalm 18 verses 27 to 32 the tune is Warrington on page 21

You save the humble and the meek you save the humble and the meek but bring the proud down from their height you Lord will feed my lamp aflame God turns my darkness into light with help from God I cannot pass against the truth and rise and rise and all and with the aid my God will give I can't be hope but any hope for perfect is the way of God no flaw is found within his word to all who put their trust in him a shield and refuge is the Lord for who is God except the Lord besides our God who is the Lord He is the God who gives me strength and he perfects the path
I walk now may the grace and mercy and peace of God the Father Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore Amen Amen