

First Servant Song: A New Covenant

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Isaiah chapter 42. We're taking a brief pause in our series on Ephesians for the season of Advent to consider the servant king that is promised in Isaiah.

In different chapters in the second major section of Isaiah. So I'm going to read nine verses this morning from Isaiah 42. If you would, look there with me.

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 streets.

[1 : 11] A bruised reed he will not break. And a faintly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says the 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 to 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.

[2 : 25] And new things I now declare. Before they spring forth, I tell them, tell you of them. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Amen. You know, there's few things more frustrating as losing something. Whether it's your favorite toy or your car keys, your wallet, your new set of Allen wrenches, your phone, it's all so frustrating.

When you first notice something is missing, you begin looking. You make a quick scan of your surroundings, the car, the room, the house. If the item doesn't turn up, the real search begins.

You begin to retrace your steps. And if it doesn't turn up quickly, things get a bit hairy. You enlist whoever is around, family and friends, to join the search party for this lost thing.

It could be something of significant value or it could be something just perturbingly invaluable or without value that you want. And you enlist people.

[3 : 38] Your heart rate begins to increase as you still don't find this item. Your anxiety begins to mount up, begins to dominate your thoughts. Have you ever noticed that when you lose something important, you can't think about anything but the thing you lost?

You go to bed and you're thinking about where you lost that thing. And you can't stop thinking about it until you find it, if you find it. You know that feeling.

In the second section of Isaiah, the people of God find themselves overcome by a sense of losing something precious to them. As we talked a bit about last Sunday, because of their sin, they were carried off to Babylon in 586 B.C.

Isaiah 39, right before our section in verse 42, or chapter 34, Isaiah 39, which we have for you. Verse 6, he said, Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up to this day shall be carried to Babylon.

Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. Now if you remember, the Lord promised to the people, promised to Abraham, that he would follow, or they called him to follow him and into the land which he will give to him.

[4 : 56] The Lord led the people of Abraham into the promised land and now they're carried off the land into Babylon. They lost something precious, the land, which we saw in Ezekiel 34.

But it was not just the land that they lost. They assumed that losing the land meant they lost their special status as the people of God. God's people dwelt in the promised land and now they dwell in Babylon.

They were anxious, fearful. Will we get out of Babylon? Will God come for us?

Are we still the people of the Lord, the chosen people? Are we just like everyone else? Their anxiety gives way to discouragement when they saw no hope of rescue.

That's what the Lord addresses in Isaiah 40. He says, why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord.

[6 : 03] My right is disregarded from my God. The Lord is showing them how he knows what they're thinking, what they're feeling, what they're saying in their prayer closet.

That I'm in Babylon because God has left me alone. Disregarded what he promised to me.

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know that feeling quite well. Where is the Lord? What is going on? At this very moment, Isaiah speaks up to comfort them.

To tell them that the Lord is not done. To lay out the unspeakably bright future before them. Isaiah 40, if you've read through the book of Isaiah, which you're going to do this month, have no doubt.

Isaiah 40 makes an unexpected, unimaginably great transition. Isaiah holds out hope to this people that is in exile. The scope of the final 26 chapters of Isaiah are expansive.

[7 : 09] He speaks of comforting them. He says, comfort my people, Isaiah 40 verse 1. He speaks of rescuing them from foreign lands and foreign rulers.

Restoring them to the land. Freeing them from idolatry. Establishing them with a new covenant. Even leading them into the new heavens and the new earth where death is defeated.

Many authors have pointed out that Isaiah 40 through 66 is just like the whole New Testament. All of it's there, quoted repeatedly. And throughout this section, Isaiah tells of a servant.

The servant of the Lord. The one hand-picked to lead this great deliverance. This new exodus.

To gather a new people. In a word, where we're going as we look at this servant, Isaiah 42. Let all the earth find salvation in the new covenant through God's servant, Jesus Christ.

[8 : 12] Let all the earth find salvation in the new covenant through God's servant, Jesus Christ. Going to break this out. Three points to cover these nine verses.

First is who he is. Who he is. If you notice, immediately in our passage, Isaiah calls us to behold the servant of the Lord.

Behold my servant. Now in the surrounding verses, Isaiah has been urging the people to behold the worthless idols that all the world at that time worships.

Behold, behold, behold runs through Isaiah chapter 41. Look in verse 41, 29 in your Bibles right before the verses we read. Behold they, all these idols are a delusion.

Their works are nothing. Their metal images are empty wind. Isaiah is announcing to this people while they dwelt in a foreign land filled with foreign idols.

[9 : 14] All the nations look to these idols, but they're nothing. Their image is made by man, propped up with man's hand. They have no life and no power.

But over against the pervasive idolatry of the nation, the Lord says, behold my servant. Behold. My servant whom I uphold.

Throughout the Bible and the book of Isaiah, numerous people have been called servants of God. Adam is called the Lord's servant. Abraham, Moses, David, Jacob, the nation of Israel.

In fact, Isaiah has just reminded the people of the Lord that they are his servant. Isaiah 41. He says, but you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen.

He's referring to both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. That was divided. Israel representing 11 of the clans and Jacob in the south. He says, you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen.

[10 : 21] The offspring of Abraham. So he's reminding us of the promise. My friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from the farthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant.

I have chosen you and not cast you out. The Lord is reminding the people of Israel right there of their true calling. Remember Exodus 19.

He delivered them through the Red Sea and says, you shall be to me a kingdom, a priest, and a holy nation. Unlike all these other gods, all these other people devoted to the gods of the day, you will be devoted to me.

But this servant is someone different. The first thing we see about this servant is his utterly unique relationship with God.

Look in verse 1. My servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, and whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him. You know, in some ways, these titles are not unique.

[11 : 20] The Lord just said, you are my servant, my friend. I've chosen. I will not cast you out. But what is unique here is the Lord is not speaking of the nation of Israel sent on a mission to the world, but a servant sent on a mission to the nation of Israel.

Israel. It is Israel that is outside the promised land in these verses, and this servant is going to them to accomplish something for them.

And Isaiah is speaking of an individual servant. He is the servant of the Lord in a way utterly unlike Israel.

He is upheld by God, filled with meaning there. Idols are formed and propped up by man, but this servant is upheld by the Lord himself.

He is chosen by God, set apart. He is clothed with the Spirit. Surely this is that king from Isaiah 11 with the sevenfold evidence of the Spirit's work on his life.

[12 : 33] And in his ministry, Isaiah says, In whom my soul delights, speaking of the Lord. Perhaps it's this last descriptor that stands out the most.

God finds the deepest satisfaction and joy in this servant. This servant is not just the Lord's man for the job.

That's when that title is used in the Old Testament. Oftentimes, just talking about the Lord's man for the job. The people are the Lord's man for a job. This servant is the Lord's man in a unique, powerful way.

But who is this servant? In Isaiah, it's not completely clear, you know. And you'll see as we go through these servant songs, they're tremendously sweeping, beautiful, wonderful verses that just jump off the page.

But they're also perhaps perplexingly obscure at times. Not specific. However, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we learn who this servant is.

[13 : 45] When Jesus is baptized, Jesus descends into the water. Like all good Baptists agree with, the Spirit descends on Him.

And God, the Father, thunders from the heaven. This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. This declaration is almost certainly a reference to this verse in the Old Testament.

To this declaration, this servant is the one in whom my soul delights the core of my being. The light is the servant of the Lord, is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's been said as you read the Bible, you study the Bible, you should take note of first words when you read the Bible. The first words Adam utters when God gives him a wife are all poetry and every husband knows it at last.

Someone that is not like me and wonderfully not like me. So to these words, God the Father complains over his son are all poetry.

[14 : 54] That's worth pausing for a minute to think about these words. This is my son, and he might well, please in a day when fathers are not there and the ones that are there may as well not be there.

The words of God the Father in these verses are simply stunning. When Jesus is baptized, God the Father is there. He's not just there. He makes his presence felt by sending his spirit to rest on his son, fulfilling Isaiah 9, Isaiah 42.

He makes his presence known by speaking. He's not a wallflower. He is the Father, the good Father. He expresses his love for his son and his pleasure over him.

What does it mean? It means that Jesus is the servant of the Lord whom Isaiah promised hundreds of years before. It also means Jesus is the Son of God in whom the Father has delighted for all eternity.

Now several years ago, the media ranted and raved about the problem that they called toxic masculinity. how men made the world a worse place.

[16 : 03] But the numbers don't add up. 43% of boys are raised by single mothers. 78% of teachers are females.

So close to 50% of boys have 100% feminine influence at home and 8% feminine influence at school. which we're not tearing down feminine influence but we're underlining what is noticeably absent.

Toxic masculinity is not the problem. Absent masculinity or may as well be absent masculinity is the problem. Never forget reading the story of Andre Agassi.

If you're a tennis watcher these days, Andre Agassi is a thing of the past. You don't even remember the commercials? Agassi was successful by any measure the trophies, the money, the houses yet driven by a ruthless father who can never please Isaiah became quite a successful tennis player but began to hate tennis more and more for all it meant to him.

In fact, he threw himself into harm's way. any chance he could to try to shorten his tennis career. In his memoir he tells the story of a dream he had of his father.

[17 : 31] He says, I was hopping through the lobby of my hotel the morning before the 2006 U.S. Open when a man steps out of the shadows and he grabs my hand so he's dreaming of this man grabbing his hand in the lobby quit.

The man says, what? Agassi responds, helping the reader, he says, it's my father for a ghost of my father.

He lifts action, he lifts as if he hasn't slept in weeks. Agassi was not like, Pops, what are you talking about? He says, just quit. Go home.

You did it. It's over. when Agassi says, he never said, good job. Sadly, far too many of us have similar experiences with our father.

We may have had a father who was not there, which is so unlike the way God designed for you to grow up.

[18 : 47] Or you may have had a father who was there but was not there for you in the ways you really needed. It's hard to understand verses like this. What would it mean?

What would it feel like that a father delights? But what we're meant to see is that there's nothing but joy, satisfaction, and delight between this servant and the father.

the opening of this servant song is meant only thing we can take away. It's meant to pause and wonder at something utterly unique.

We're peering behind the curtain into the oval office, into the control chamber to see God the father delighting over his son. because before we learn what this servant will do, we're meant to consider and to learn who this servant is.

All the nations are filled with worthless idols, but this servant is the son of God, the beloved son, so that when you see what he does, you would not be confused to point to how he comes.

[20 : 06] How he comes. Isaiah continues by telling us how he comes. These are staggering verses. There's no way around it.

Unlike any other earthly rulers, he will not show his power with an iron fist. Running through this section, the emphasis is not on what the servant will do, but only on what the servant will not do.

Underlining not merely what he will do, but telling us what he will not do. Now, everyone knows negative sells. That's why the media is so negative, you know? Just 24 hours a day, negative, negative, negative.

Well, that's not the point here. He's not going to sell something. He's trying to underline the down-reaching, staggering wonder of what God is going to do in Jesus Christ.

We can summarize these descriptions by saying, his strength will be humble. Firstly, his strength will be humble. Look at verse 2, he will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard.

[21 : 12] Many rulers bring justice by showing their power to smash and rebuild, but he will not cry out. He will not sound his trumpet or call for truth. He will not startle or scare.

He will not pressure or threaten. He will not come by force. He will crush no one with his strength. He will not clamber or pander for the affirmation of the influential like so many people do in our culture.

He will refuse all trappings of power, position, and prominence. He will not build a platform. He will have no public offering. Have you ever seen a church billboard out there?

Come visit pastors, usually, husband and wife. Come visit this church when the Lord will have no public offering. He continues, he will not break a bruised reed, will not quench a faintly burning wind.

a bruised reed is just a blade of grass crushed under the weight of her foot, her hoof, her fallen branch.

[22 : 34] Could it be anything more worthless and pathetic? And a trampled blade of grass?

But he will not break. Many rulers showed their power, all rulers showed their power by how they can take out the strong.

The Lord shows his power by how he helps the utterly and pathetically weak. He does not break the bruised blade of grass.

He tenderly straightens it and straightens it. The Gospel of Matthew says this verse was fulfilled when Jesus healed all who came to him, refusing to turn away anyone who came.

But who are these bruised reeds? It's those miserable because of sin. It's those who are bruised because you realize your heart is so prone to wonder and strength.

[23 : 52] because you realize no matter how high you go or how far you come, you cannot stop thinking about yourself and your desire to be thought well of, your desire to be praised at any of these things until you realize that everything you do is tainted by this heart within and you see no hope for change such that you are utterly bruised, not only tainted and damaged goods only such as good for kicking down if you haven't been made miserable because of your sin and you may not understand what Jesus came to do those bruised are also those miserable because of the fallenness of this world.

Dean Carson says all you have to do is live long enough and you will suffer. Over years ago when I was first hired at Cornerstone Church came back from Pastures College 15-20 years ago I was being interviewed by family meeting along with my senior pastor Bill who was here a couple weeks ago and they asked why do you get up why do you read and pray in the morning being fresh out of seminary ready to drop knowledge on anybody that was close I said something like because God is infinite and I am violent because God possesses a savi having no need of anything outside of himself and I am thoroughly needy and I got droned on pontificating for a few seconds and Bill said I read and pray because

I'm terrified well many years later I understand after numerous miscarriages after burying my mother-in-law after burying the children of my best friend after burying others after watching so much hurt and heart it's anxiety and longing that drives me to pray more warnings than none how does life pursue where you've been like a blade of grass important thing though though you are bruised you will not let you break now you may think look

Lord I am too far gone this bruising is too far gone the word of God for you is he will not break you will not be broken all that he has promised will be true and that includes all that he's doing in you the fact that is bruising is far too often our faith is we are told our faith is by a faintly burning wick a little gust of wind it could blow out a little shifting of the table and it's completely out but the Lord does not look at your faith with disappointment or disgust he said a faintly burning wick he will not snuff out he will not quench it he will not let it slowly burn out because he's disappointed and scars you he will not snuff it out because he's disgusted or displeased with you rather he cups his hands as it were just like you would around a little fire keeping the wind away blowing your faintly burning wick into flame that is the image that is the

Lord his strength will be thoroughly humble but wonderfully his humility will be strong continues with these negatives he says in verse 4 he will not grow faint or be discouraged he will not grow faint or be discouraged strikingly these words grow faint and discouraged are the same word for him used in the adjective form for a bruised reed or a faintly burning wick what he's saying he's doing all he came to do he will not grow faint he will not lose heart he will not give up or give in to self pity it's not he will do this because of his super human strength he's thoroughly a man in every way he knows and feels the pain of this world he'll know the pain of the betrayal in a way that you never will all his friends forsook him on that night that dark dark night but he will not grow faint he went out into the fields out into the mountains to pray in the night because he was growing faint on the temptation of growing faint but he will not grow faint and he will not be discouraged he will be bruised but his bruising will not disrupt or dismay his plans of bringing justice to the earth just as a faintly burning wick was weary and tempted to give out so will he be just as a bruised reed is mistreated and oppressed so will he be but he will not give up he will absorb slight after slight blow after blow temptation after temptation and return on the grace he will be bruised to the point of losing his life and his death will bring justice to all the earth this is what you must see this is the outline this is what he's coming to do how he is going to come his strength will be humble but oh praise the Lord his humility will be strong this is the way he comes this is the way he brings salvation every king trickles down and strong but he will raise up the weak every valley will be lifted every mountain will be mangled and nowhere is his strength more humble and his humility more strong than the cross of

[30 : 18] Jesus Christ Jesus accomplishes his salvation not by gaining power but by losing him not by showing forth his strength but by being humble in weakness not by securing richness to protect him but by giving it all away not by being protected but by being bruised being crushed not by living but by dying it all looks like a massive failure but it's the salvation of God flips the scales and everything we value cause our life to cruciform not like an influence for Jews to men signs we seek wisdom we preach Christ crucify us come and block the Jews and follow the Jews why he comes point three why he comes it's going to take us to the end of verse nine Isaiah

Isaiah tells us why he comes in this context of so much idolatry he's telling us why he comes what he comes to do these last five verses function like a charge the Lord is talking about this servant and the verse the Lord talks to the servant he addresses him charges him three verses salvation in the broadest possible terms the focus suddenly is on the servant and not the surrounding world and not even on

Israel he says verse five he says the Lord the Lord and created the heavens and stretched them out and spread out the earth and what comes from it who gives breath to all people in it and spirit to those who walk in it he's saying God he's the mighty creator who stretched out the heavens and spread out the earth he gives breath to all people you see idols have no power and no breath but the Lord upholds all people he created them all in him we live move and have our being and so all of life is to be lived unto him justice is about returning a right relationship between all of God's creatures with God himself and so injustice is every instance when humankind does not live this way when men and women pursue their own way when kings live as an authority unto themselves when God's law is trampled when people live as if what they want is the only thing that matters all of it is idolatry the Lord come to bring judgment on it and justice through it the real injustice in this world and in the culture is not the rights that get all the talk about in our media or newspapers but it's about the disrespect of God it's about humanity living with no reference to he who created he who upholds him he upholds all things by the word of his power and that means you and me every breath to give rain falls on the just the unjust

God continues to give countless good gifts even to those who are bruised the real injustice is the injustice against God the servant comes to bring justice through a new covenant look at verse 6 I am the Lord I have called you I will take you I will give you as a covenant for the people and light to the nations you see the charge I I I will give I will take I am the Lord that's the covenant name Yahweh I'll bring covenant this covenant will be for all people now if you know biblical history God called Abraham the family from Abraham to be his treasure possession from all the peoples of the earth to be his people but this covenant has all people in mind all who are filled with the spirit from

God the spirit of life not talking about the third person of the trinity there it's talking about everybody that has breath he says to the nation verse 1 he bring justice to the nations verse 4 he says justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for your law for the nations again in verse 6 a light for the nations and then in verse 9 he says new things I declare to you the old things have passed away so he's doing something new that's not just respect to the people of Israel but something that has everybody under the face of the earth in view everyone who is called by the father's name is under or in view of this lord the lord will give a covenant for all people and give a covenant for the forgiveness of sins people of Israel are in exile off the promised land they assume justice will be delivered from exile but the lord makes clear here justice is not merely about physical or emotional deliverance but about their spiritual deliverance their moral failure and their need for a savior he says

[36 : 36] I'll establish a new covenant for the people verse 7 open the eyes that are blind and bring the prisoners from the dungeon from the prison those who sit in darkness through this covenant he will restore spiritual sight by nature our hearts and minds are darkened alienated from the life of god because of the ignorance that is in them by nature we stumble into serving the items of our own hearts that leave us only alone and in prison but the lord comes to deliver Isaiah says a life is coming I don't know what you think about Christmas I don't know whether you can get all giddy and start listening to Christmas music when it's illegal each year in September or October or whether you're one of those people who've grown through the whole thing with a bit of a bah there's much about the way our culture celebrates

Christmas that is more than a big nausea but one thing in our celebration of Christmas gets right is the emphasis on light is the night we were down at old fashioned Christmas and did the countdown for the tree there was something in me that was still like a little kid countdown 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1!

! Isaiah says this circle pray and come it will be a light to the nations the people who walk in darkness will see a great light those who dwell in a land of deep darkness on them will light shine it was light that appeared to the wise man that surrounded the shepherd it wasn't primarily about a star or constellation or astrological phenomenon all the light was about a person in him was life and the light was the light of men the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it indeed if we walk in the light of Jesus in the light we have fellowship with one another the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin it was this light similar to the light that began the whole world and the Lord said he created all things the light of the knowledge of the glory of the

Lord in the face of Jesus Christ in your life do we see light and the light still shines that's what we proclaim that's our message that we proclaim God is light and there is no darkness at all don't be confused but the light shines into the darkness to those who have no hope to those who cannot get out they cannot do better they cannot do enough on those who cannot free themselves it shines on those did you see seated in darkness those who assume there's no hope for them any longer and so that's where it goes it shines Christmas for those who truly understand is the end of thinking you're better than anyone else you needed light to come you needed God to come you needed Jesus to come to you to make it right to make you right with them it's it's here you know it's one of the reasons where

Christianity is showing it's like a diamond on a black felt cloth all other religions talk in some way about gaining enlightenment or attaining light inspiration something like that Christianity talks about light that is dawn all every other religion every other religion and I'm a religious studies major every other religion talks about in some shape or form about climbing the mountain up to the Lord when Christianity talks about the Lord that came down it's not a religion it could be made up with the best and brightest it's a religion utterly unique this is the only religion true God said Jesus said I'm the way of the truth and life no one comes to the father except for me so what I'm praying for you is the light of dawn maybe for the first time that beneath all the lights of this Christmas you would see that light has pierced in the darkness and the darkness not overcoming the light of the knowledge of God and knowing that truly through Jesus Christ our Lord that's what I offer to you wonderfully I offer it to you no matter how far deep you are in darkness how lost you are in your mind I offer you the gospel of Jesus Christ it's to you and to all who are far off this wonderful news has come and the light will never stop shining it may look like light that has stopped shining for you the progress for the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter into a full day wonderfully the light we have a foretaste of on that Christmas Eve will one day be the only light we see and so we wait for justice and righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord to fill the Lord world with light we long just as we did this morning we celebrate and some great grief through Advent sorry it's come to me a lot to me celebrates what Jesus will do in the end in his second Advent in this way it says after the last tear falls after the last secret stone after the last bullet tears through the flesh and bone after the last child starves and after the last girl walks down the boulevard after the last fear is just too hard after the last disgrace after the last lie to save some days after the last brutal jab from a poison tongue after the last dirty politician after the last meal commission after the last lonely man prison after the last plant fails after the last siren wails after the last young husband sails off to join the war after the last after the last this marriage is over after the last young girl's innocence is stolen after the last years of silence that won't let let him run over there will be love

[44 : 21] in the end the song continues to the end these oceans and oceans of love are not again we'll see how the tears of the fallen were caught in the palm of the giver of love and the love of all and we'll look back on those tears as all the tales of what God's done that's where it's headed that all the earth finds salvation in the new covenant through God's servant Jesus Christ I want to urge you to live this Advent season fixed on Christ sometimes I feel like we're going to bend our way through it or belong our way through it we bend we celebrate his birth we tend our affections for him by falling into culture too much emphasis on gifts and gatherings and we lose our way how many Christmas mornings have I left

I haven't lost my way this Advent which I didn't want to or it gets so mad about losing our way last year that we just belong to all things I'm welcome to that too we can find ourselves focusing on all the things Advent have been solving that Advent announces to your name that Christ gave for you and he won't lose any but he'll raise you on one last day so don't bend and don't promote hope and hold on Father Father we've cast ourselves on the game thank you that you came for us for all those who are far off would you come by your spirit make room for Jesus in our hearts again would you lead us by the hand discovering more of his love for us more of his joy over us more of his goodness that will not be stopped more of your promises for us that are truly Jesus Christ and with your peace this afternoon in Jesus' name

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