



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# The Servant – the LORD’s Answer to the World’s Plight (42:1-9)

- This is the first of the so-called “Servant of the Lord” passages.<sup>1</sup>
- But who is this “*servant*” spoken of in Isaiah 42? <sup>1</sup>
- There has long been a difference of opinion among commentators dating back to the Septuagint, which identifies the “*servant*” as the *nation* of Israel.<sup>1</sup>
- But, in the light of the New Testament, it’s clear that the Servant is an *individual* and that the individual is none other than Jesus Christ (cf. Mat 12:18–21).<sup>2</sup>
- Nevertheless, to appreciate Isaiah’s presentation of these messianic prophecies we must at first forego the benefit of hindsight and attempt to grasp how these passages would have looked to their original audience.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of Isaiah, Volume 2* – p. 59

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* – p. 82.

# The Servant – the LORD’s Answer to the World’s Plight (42:1-9)

- Isaiah has told his readers how the LORD was going to raise up a *conqueror* to carry out his purposes.
- As the book of Isaiah unfolds, we see the crucial and *paradoxical* role the Servant will have in bringing the LORD’s plan to completion for his people Israel—and for the whole world.
- We will be covering this text in *two* parts:
  - This week: The *Presentation* of the Servant (42:1-4)
  - Next week: The *Commissioning* of the Servant (42:5-9)

# The Presentation of the Servant (42:1–4)

42:1 *“Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations. <sup>2</sup> He will not cry out or shout; he will not publicize himself in the streets. <sup>3</sup> A crushed reed he will not break, a dim wick he will not extinguish; he will faithfully make just decrees. <sup>4</sup> He will not grow dim or be crushed before establishing justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait in anticipation for his [instruction].”*

42:1 “Here is **my servant** whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.

- Here in verse 1, it’s **the LORD** who is speaking as he refers to “**my servant**” – often known as “the servant of the LORD”
- The “servant of the LORD” is one of the richest themes in the book of Isaiah, and it lies right at the heart of his message as it moves to its climax in this second major section of the book.
- Of course, there have been **several** uses of this term in the book of Isaiah **prior** this point.
- For example, in Isaiah 20:3 the LORD refers to **Isaiah** as “**my servant**”.
- A few chapters later in Isaiah 22:20, The LORD refers to faithful **Eliakim**, Hezekiah’s chief steward as “**my servant**”.



**42:1** *“Here is **my servant** whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.*

- In Isaiah 37:35, the LORD refers to **King David** as *“my servant”*.
- In the **previous** chapter (chapter 41), **the entire nation of Israel** is referred to by the LORD as *“my servant”*:
  - *You, **my servant Israel, Jacob**, whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham my friend, you whom I am bringing back from the earth’s extremities, and have summoned from the remote regions - I told you, ‘**You are my servant.**’ I have chosen you and not rejected you. (Isaiah 41:8-9)*

42:1 *“Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.*”

- However, the announcement we see *here* at the beginning of **chapter 42**, “*Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one*” ... suggests that a new and significant stage has now been reached in the development of this theme.
- Samuel used a similar expression when he presented Saul to the people as their new king:
  - *Then Samuel said to all the people, “Do you see **the one whom the Lord has chosen**? Indeed, there is no one like him among all the people.” All the people shouted out, “**Long live the king!**”*
- And so we immediately sense that a **climax** has been reached here in the use of this term.

42:1 “Here is my **servant** whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.

- This text (Isaiah 42:1-9), which we will be studying for the next few weeks, is the **first** in a remarkable **series** of texts commonly referred to as the “Servant Songs”.
- In this series of texts, the “**servant**” theme is **developed** and brought to a **resounding climax**.
- As we observed earlier, God **himself** is the one who makes this announcement in verse 1.
- But who **is** this “**servant**” that the LORD refers to here, and **to whom** is the LORD speaking?
- One possibility, especially in light of 41:8-9, is that the servant is the **surviving remnant of Israel**.
- If that were the case, the announcement is being made to the nations: “Look,” God says, “here is my servant – this apparently insignificant group of people! I will achieve my purposes for the whole world through them.”



42:1 “Here is my **servant** whom I support, my chosen one **in whom I take pleasure**. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.

- But if we look **closely**, we see that the “**servant**” being described here is **far** too ideal a figure to represent Israel in any direct sense.
- God takes “**pleasure**” in him, he is quiet and gentle, faithful and persevering; he does not falter or become discouraged.
- Israel, by **contrast**, is resentful and complaining (40:27), fearful and dismayed (41:10), blind, deaf (42:18-19) and disobedient (42:23-24).
- If Israel is to be found **at all** in this announcement, it is in the “**crushed reed**” and the “**dim wick**” of verse 3 rather than in the “**servant**” of verse 1!

42:1 “Here is my **servant** whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.

- In short, the “**servant**” in this passage seems to be a figure who embodies all that Israel **ought** to be but is **not**.
- He is God’s **perfect** servant.
- This announcement, then, is not an announcement **about** God’s people, but one that is made **to** God’s people.
- The “**servant**” it refers to is not just an ideal they should aspire to but a **real person** who is God’s answer to their weakness and failure.

**42:1** *“Here is **my servant whom I support, my chosen** one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.*

- Consequently, I believe this passage is yet **another Messianic** passage like several others we have seen in the book of Isaiah:
  - *A young woman... will give birth to a son. You... will name him **Immanuel**.* (Isaiah 7:14)
  - *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and is called Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6)
  - *A shoot will grow out of Jesse’s root stock, a bud will sprout from his roots. The Lord’s Spirit will rest on him – a Spirit that gives extraordinary wisdom, a Spirit that provides the ability to execute plans, a Spirit that produces absolute loyalty to the Lord.* (Isaiah 11:1ff)

42:1 “Here is *my servant whom I support, my chosen one* in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.

- Several assertions are made here about this “*servant*”.
- First of all he is the Lord’s *own* servant (“*my*”).
- Furthermore he is a man of whom the Lord says “*I support.*”
- He needs help in his task and he receives all of help he needs – the Lord upholds him in every difficulty.
- This is further indicated by the fact that the LORD calls him “*my chosen one.*”

42:1 *“Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one **in whom I take pleasure**. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations.*”

- In fact he does his assigned task so well that the Lord can say of him, He is the one *“**in whom I take pleasure**.”*
- In his description of Jesus’ baptism and his transfiguration, I believe that Matthew ***alludes*** to this passage and applies it to Jesus:
  - *And a voice from heaven said, “This is my one dear Son; **in him I take great delight**.”* (Mat 3:17)
  - *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my one dear Son, **in whom I take great delight**. Listen to him!”* (Mat 17:5)

42:1 “Here is my **servant** whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. **I have placed my Spirit on him**; he will make just decrees for the nations.

- To **empower** the “**servant**” for his work, the LORD tells us, “**I have placed my Spirit on him**”.
- In the OT, we **often** see the Spirit of the LORD coming upon an individual in order to **equip** him to perform the tasks that God has given him.
- We saw a similar idea expressed in an earlier Messianic passage:
  - *The LORD's **spirit** will rest on him— a **spirit** that gives extraordinary wisdom, a **spirit** that provides the ability to execute plans, a **spirit** that produces absolute loyalty to the LORD. (Isaiah 11:2)*



42:1 *“Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one **in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him;** he will make just decrees for the nations.*”

- As we noted earlier, the description of Jesus’ baptism was undoubtedly intended to remind us of this passage (Mat 3:13-17).
- Not only was God said to take “*great delight*” in his Son, but when the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, it demonstrated to the world that Jesus was indeed the promised “*servant*” of whom this passage was speaking.

42:1 “Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; **he will make just decrees for the nations.**”

- There is no ambiguity in this text as to what the Servant’s mission is since it is repeated in vv. 1, 3, and 4: “*he will bring justice to the nations.*” (NIV)
- The Hebrew word (*mišpāṭ*), translated “*justice*” here, means ***much more*** than mere judicial equity.
- In its broadest sense it involves societal order in which the concerns of ***all*** are addressed.
- A society in which there is no “justice” is one in which the only rule is brute force used to increase the power of those in charge.

42:1 *“Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; **he will make just decrees for the nations.**”*

- The divine “*justice*” that the *Servant* will establish is nothing less than the salvation of God defined in its broadest sense.
- We are not merely speaking of the imposition of a humanly designed system for redistribution of goods – which is how justice is often defined in our day.
- The “*justice*” spoken of here is that life-giving order which exists when the creation is functioning in accordance with the design of its Lord.
- It is through the Servant that the lordship of God will be made effectively available to everyone.

*42:2 He will not cry out or shout; he will not publicize himself in the streets.*

- Here we see how this chosen Servant of the Lord will do his work.
- The servant stands in *sharp contrast* to conquerors in Isaiah's day (cf. 41:2 ff.), who were ruthless and cruel, trampling the vanquished ones under their feet.
- This Servant is modest and meek.
- He is not loud and boisterous, he does "*not cry out or shout; he will not publicize himself in the streets.*"
- He is so sure of himself and of the cause he represents that he fully expects his message to carry itself successfully through every test.
- How often Jesus shunned publicity, even though his aim was to carry his gospel to all men!

42:3 *A **crushed reed** he will not break, a dim wick he will not extinguish; he will faithfully make just decrees.*

- Here we see the Servant's gentle *pastoral care*.
- Wherever he finds men wounded and bruised by the harshness of life's experience, or wherever he finds wounded and bruised consciences, whether among the Gentiles or in Israel, there he is most tender and delicate in the gentle handling of these souls.
- Such individuals are likened in the first place to a "*crushed reed*," bent but not quite broken.
- He takes care that such a one is not utterly broken.

42:3 *A crushed reed he will not break, a dim wick he will not extinguish; he will faithfully make just decrees.*

- In the second place such persons are likened to a “*dim wick.*”
- The flame of faith and hope has begun to flutter but has not quite gone out.
- He cups his hand around the flame – “*he will not extinguish*” it.
- This will be the manner in which he “*will faithfully make just decrees.*”
- What a contrast this is to the conquerors of Isaiah’s day!
- But how in harmony this is with Mat 11:28-30:
  - *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.*



42:4 *He will not grow dim or be crushed* before establishing justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait in anticipation for his [instruction].”

- This assigned task was by no means an easy one.
- The Servant might have been overwhelmed by its enormity.
- But no! “*He will not grow dim or be crushed*” — the same verbs being intentionally used here as in reference to the afflicted ones whom he himself helps—as he goes about his task.
- Here for the first time comes a faint indication in the Servant Songs that this will be a Suffering Servant.

**42:4** *He will not grow dim or be crushed before establishing justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait in anticipation for his [instruction].”*

- Again, with emphatic repetition, he will carry on his work “*establishing justice on the earth.*”<sup>1</sup>
- But it will not be universal hostility and opposition that he encounters.<sup>1</sup>
- “*The coastlands*” refer to distant areas who “*wait in anticipation for his instruction*”.<sup>2</sup>
- Unlike the description given of them in the previous chapter, (41:5–7), there is no hint here of a hostile, negative reaction on their part.<sup>2</sup>
- However, their waiting with deep longing need not be in conscious expectation of the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>
- It may be an expression of their dissatisfaction and frustration that will persist until he comes (cf. Rom 8:19ff).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah, vol. 2* (pp. 62-63)

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* – p. 88.

The Citation of  
Isaiah 42:1-4 in  
Matthew 12:18-21

Isaiah 42:1 *“Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my Spirit on him; he will make just decrees for the nations. <sup>2</sup> He will not cry out or shout; he will not publicize himself in the streets. <sup>3</sup> A crushed reed he will not break, a dim wick he will not extinguish; he will faithfully make just decrees. <sup>4</sup> He will not grow dim or be crushed before establishing justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait in anticipation for his [instruction].”(NET)*

Mat 12:14 *But the Pharisees went out and plotted against [Jesus], as to how they could assassinate him. <sup>15</sup> Now when Jesus learned of this, he went away from there. Great crowds followed him, and he healed them all. <sup>16</sup> But he sternly warned them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup> This fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup> *“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I take great delight. I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. <sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. <sup>20</sup> He will not break a bruised reed or extinguish a smoldering wick, until he brings justice to victory. <sup>21</sup> And in his name the Gentiles will hope.” . (NET)**

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- In Matthew chapter 12, Matthew records that Jesus withdrew as a result of the growing hostility generated by his controversial Sabbath behavior, but he continues to draw crowds and to heal many sick people (12:15).
- To avoid even more unwanted publicity that would fuel the opposition, he tells people to keep quiet about what he has done (12:16).
- Matthew uniquely sees in all of this the fulfillment of **yet another** prophecy of Isaiah in **Isaiah 42:1-4**.
- This is the longest sustained quotation of the OT in the book of Matthew.

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- The Messiah, whom God loves, whom God’s Spirit anoints will come in humility, neither fighting to get his way nor resisting his opposition, but gently and quietly carrying out his mission (12:18a, 19a, 20a).
- *“nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets”* (12:19b) means that few will respond adequately, not that he never speaks publicly.
- Nevertheless, this Messiah’s mission displays divine power and ultimately will lead to the universal triumph of God’s kingdom (12:18b, 20b– 21).



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- The story of Jesus in his first advent is the story of gentleness, of mercy, of nonviolence, and of love.
- It is in this way that God’s judgment come to victory.
- The healings of 12:15 foreshadow this triumph.
- The next episode in Matthew will illustrate it even more forcefully as Jesus confronts the demonically possessed and demonstrates his power over the devil’s domain (12:22-32).

# Next Time

I plan to look at The *Commissioning* of the  
Servant (Isaiah 42:5-9)

# Class Discussion Time



# Class Discussion Time

- We saw in today's lesson that Jesus as the LORD's servant will not allow a *crushed reed* to be broken or a *dim wick* to be extinguished.
- All of us go through period in our Christian life where we feel as though we are a crushed reed or dim wick.
- Can you think of a time in your Christian life where you felt like this, and, in the midst of that time you experienced the LORD's hand moving in your life in such a way that you were comforted and kept from being utterly broken.



# Class Discussion Time

- Our passage today described the kind of *justice* that the LORD's servant will establish when *he* reigns on the earth.
- Does the twisting and perversion of justice that we experience so much of in our day give you a longing for *real* justice? The kind that only the LORD can provide?