

**Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, August 8, 2010**

**THE CHOSEN SERVANT**

**Isaiah 42:1-9**

When I was in elementary school, our teachers had us recite the pledge of allegiance every day. You probably had the same experience. Do you remember the words?

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America,  
and to the republic for which it stands,  
one nation, under God, indivisible,  
with liberty and justice for all.

“With liberty and justice for all!” In America, we have fought hard for justice. Back when I was in elementary school – in the deep, deep South – justice wasn’t available for everyone. It took the civil rights movement to gain a measure of justice for African-Americans. That reminds us that we often miss the mark when it comes to justice.

There is the story of a taxi driver who spotted a mugger in the act and used his vehicle to trap the criminal. He pinned the crook against the wall of a building until the police arrived. Later, the driver was taken to court and had to pay the mugger \$25,000 for using “excessive force.”

Or how about the story of a gentleman who purchased several expensive cigars and had them insured against fire. After he had smoked them all, he filed a claim, pointing out that the cigars had been – you got it – destroyed by fire. The gentleman and the insurance company went to court, where the judge ruled that the insurance company was legally responsible and had to pay the claim.

Was justice served in either of these cases? Probably not! In fact, we hear of stories all the time of injustice – criminals getting off with a slap on the wrist and law-abiding people getting the shaft. It makes us wonder, “Where is the justice?”

That’s what I’d like to talk about this morning. Justice. Where does real justice come from? Better, from whom do we receive justice?

This passage is the first of the four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah. Each song speaks of a Servant of God who is given a mission by the Lord. The Servant Song can be divided into two sections.

In the first section (verses 1 through 4), the Lord speaks *of* the Servant. In the second section (verses 5 through 9), He speaks *to* the Servant. In both sections, we find that the Servant’s mission is bringing justice to all creation.

## **THE IDENTITY OF THE SERVANT**

God is speaking and He opens the song with the phrase, “Here is my servant.” The New Living Translation has, “Look at my servant.”

He invites the hearers (and readers) of this song to take a good look at the Servant. Find out what He is like; discover His character and His relationship to our Heavenly Father. Learn about His mission and how He carries it out.

So, before we dive into this passage, let’s answer the question, “Who is the chosen Servant?” The Servant is chosen by God Himself. He delights in the Servant with deep affection. The Lord places His Spirit on Him for the appointed mission. So who is He? The New Testament gives us the answer.

At His baptism, God speaks the words of Isaiah 42, showing that Isaiah 42 was a prediction of Christ:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.”

The baptism of Jesus demonstrated to Israel and to the world that He was the Chosen Servant; that He was the Messiah, the One on whom the Spirit visibly rested. In Matthew 12, Jesus clearly applies the Isaiah passage to Himself:

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “Here is my Servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory. In His name the nations will put their hope” (Matt 12:17-21).

So Jesus is the Servant. We know that Jesus is God incarnate. This passage focuses on His nature as human being. His divine nature is not emphasized. Much like the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Though He was a Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, He took upon Himself the form of a servant, who obeyed the will of God, and gave His life to advance the interests of God’s kingdom. He was God’s servant.

Understanding the humanity of Jesus, that He was both God and man, is necessary to understanding how Jesus brings justice. The chosen servant will bring justice to the nations by His submission to the will of the Father all the way to the Cross.

This is prophecy, so we need to read these words as if they are being said at the time Christ walked this earth.

### **JUSTICE FOR THE WEAK**

The Servant's Mission is to bring forth justice to the nations, but He will not cry out, raise His voice or make His voice heard in the street for His own justice. In bringing forth justice, the Servant will suffer injustice willingly and silently. He will seek justice not for Himself but for others.

What is the justice that Jesus will bring? One commentator wrote:

Justice in Isa 42:1-9 is primarily an attribute of God, all true justice finding its source in God Himself and therefore carrying with it His demand. "When therefore the Scripture speaks of the justice of God, as it frequently does, the word has a particular shade of meaning and that is not so much just statutes of God as the just claims of God. God, who is the Lord, can demand and He does demand."

Justice is the very nature of God. It is characteristic of His kingdom, ruled according to His righteousness and grace.

In verse two, "He will not shout or cry out, or raise His voice in the streets." In other words, He will not seek publicity. There are two possible meanings here:

1. It could refer to the gentle character of the servant's methods in fulfilling His mission, indicating His meek, humble, gentle character.
2. Alternatively, it means that the Servant endured suffering quietly, where no cry of justice (for Himself) is directed toward God.

I think both are true. His manner of appearing is quiet, gentle, and humble; the very opposite of those who try to exalt themselves by noisy demonstrations. He does not seek His own, and therefore denies Himself; He comes in truth and humility.

Zechariah 9:9: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Jesus submits Himself to God's will and out of loving obedience endures insult, injury, and death without regard for His own justice. Although He had all the power to do so, He did not retaliate against those who hurt Him.

While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23).

The obedience of the Servant to the plan of God, obedient to death – even death on a cross, meant that at the crucial moment, He would not cry out to the Father for justice for Himself. While hanging on that cross, He became sin for us and took the penalty we deserve. As He bore the filthiness of our sin, He would endure the pain of His Father turning away, no longer hearing “my chosen one in whom I delight” but instead being forsaken by His Father.

The servant song goes on: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.”

A “bruised reed” is symbolic of someone who has been weakened by exterior pressure and can't bear any more burdens. Some kings would break such bruised reeds, but not the Servant of the Lord.

A smoldering wick is symbolic of someone whose inner resources are at an end, who lacks the strength necessary to continue. Some kings would extinguish such dimly burning wicks, but not the Servant of the Lord.

The justice that the Servant brings forth, therefore, embraces bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks – the oppressed and the weak, the damaged and discarded.

To those who are weak, He will be tender. He will not despise them, will not plead against them with His great power, nor lay upon them more than they can bear. He will not break the bruised reed, but will strengthen it, that it may become a cedar in the courts of our God. He will not quench the smoldering wick, but blow it up into a flame.

That should give us an idea about who receives the Servant's justice. Those who are weak! Those who recognize that before God they are poor in spirit, spiritually impoverished and in need of grace. The Apostle Paul got this when he wrote:

And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Cor 12:9).

In verse 4 of chapter 42, we read that He will not falter or be discouraged “until He has established such justice.” The word “falter” is the same word that is translated “smoldering,” and the word “discouraged” literally means “crushed” and is the same one that is translated “bruised.” The Servant will suffer injustice in fulfilling His mission, but He will not cry out for His own justice; but He will faithfully bring justice to the weak.

So, how does Jesus bring forth justice? By becoming a bruised reed and smoldering wick. Not only does He become a bruised reed, He becomes a broken reed. Not only does He become a smoldering wick, He becomes an extinguished wick.

That is how He brings forth justice to the nations – by allowing Himself to be broken and extinguished by the sin of the world. The justice demanded for sin is satisfied, and the

justice demanded by God's compassion is extended. And now the coastlands – people all over the world – wait expectantly.

Jesus became a bruised reed that was broken for us. He became a dimly burning wick that was extinguished for us. He did so in order that God's justice – which in the end turns out to be God's compassion – could be brought forth.

Are you a bruised reed, weakened by the pressures of life? Are you a dimly burning wick, unable to respond to those pressures? Do you feel damaged or discarded? We are all weak, fragile creatures, far more vulnerable than we care to admit. Many of us hide our bruises and manage to keep our flames burning for the public, but when we're alone we feel the pain and the flame burns dim. We need the justice that the Servant will bring.

### **JUSTICE FOR THOSE IN DARKNESS**

In verse 5, the song shifts. The Father turns directly to the Servant, affirms His divine call, and promises to empower Him in the accomplishment of His purpose. Isaiah grants us the privilege to listen in to this conversation.

The Father encourages the Son by reminding Him that He is creator, and the Lord, the covenant God of Israel. He is responsible for creation and for the people who inhabit it. He created the universe, the heavens and the earth, and gives breath and life to the people who live on the earth. The reality of God as Creator gives assurance that He can guarantee the success of what He asks the Servant to do.

The language is impressive: He who created the heavens and stretched them out (like a tent), who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it (in the same manner as a goldsmith or silversmith beat out the malleable metal with their tools).

I have a friend named Jack, who was a physics major in college. He was an avowed atheist when some folks from Intervarsity came to his dorm room. Over the course of several discussions, Jack came to understand the universe and all that was in it was created by God, and did not evolve on its own.

Jack understood that logically, the universe needed something or someone outside of itself to get it going. In other words, he came to believe what the Scriptures tell us, that God created the universe out of nothing. I remember what he said to me: If we can believe that God made his creation simply by commanding it to be made, then every other miracle in the Bible, including Christ's resurrection, would be plausible, absolutely true.

That's why the gospel depends on the fact of creation. If God did not create, then nothing else could happen. He could not bring forth justice. But since He is the Creator, His purposes and timing are always right (that's what Isaiah meant by the Father calling the Servant in righteousness) and He takes Christ by the hand and guarantees the mission of going to the Cross will be accomplished.

The Father appoints the Servant as a “covenant to the people.” It is through the making of covenants that the Lord administers His justice. The covenant most prominent in the minds of the Israelites would be the Mosaic Covenant, in which the Lord entered into a relationship with the people of Israel. Now a covenant relationship is being extended to all people. This Servant will not only be the mediator of the covenant, as Moses was, but He will in some sense be the covenant Himself. He would be its focus. He would be the light and power that enables God’s people to keep the covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 says, “The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.<sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>34</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

By embodying the Lord’s covenant and light, the Servant will open the eyes of the blind and bring out prisoners. Here we are reading about those who are enslaved by their own sin, those who are spiritually blind. The blind, those who are prisoners, those who are in darkness are metaphors for people who are weak, dead in their sins and in need of a Savior.

Jesus called Himself, “the light of the world;” and said, “he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12). Jesus is the light and through Him we can see. His purposes are clear in John 3:

Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

The Servant brings justice by exposing our deeds, bringing weak people like us, enslaved by our sin into the light so that we will know we need a Savior. The Servant is our Savior because He was obedient to the mission the Father gave Him.

## **CONCLUSION**

Michael Horton wrote, “The gospel is not good instructions, not a good idea, and not good advice. The gospel is an announcement of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.”

That’s the key that unlocks this servant song; it is what we need to know to understand the gospel. God has done this for us. In verses 8 and 9, the Lord is saying that no one else can do what He can do. Therefore, no one else can share His glory or praise.

A preacher by the name of John Stevens wrote of his travels to Italy, in particular a museum with a sculpture called “The Captives.”

I was struck by four partially finished sculptures. These were figures Michelangelo originally intended to use on the tomb of Pope Julius, but midway through the project he decided not to use them and ceased work on them. There is a hand protruding here, a torso of a man there, a leg, part of a head, but none are finished.

Nearly everyone who sees these works senses the turmoil, the struggle embodied in these figures. It is as though they are crying to break free from the prison of the marble to become what they were intended to be.

Author Theodore Roder looked on these four figures and wrote, “When I looked at those partial figures, they stirred up in me a deep longing to be completed – an ache to be set free from that which distorts and disguises, imprisons and inhibits my humanness, my wholeness. But as with those statues, I cannot liberate myself. For that I need the hand of another.”

That is what we need, the hand of the Chosen Servant. To have real liberty and justice, we must come to the place where we see ourselves as weak, broken reeds and smoldering wicks. *We* must recognize our own spiritual poverty before God – apart from the light that the Servant brings, we are prisoners groping around in darkness.

But through the Chosen Servant – the Lord Jesus Christ – who took on our weakness and bore our sin we can, by faith, experience the justice that He has brought.

When we do, we’ll join in the celebration and as Isaiah writes in verse 10, “Sing to the LORD a new song. Sing His praise from the end of the earth!”