
The Servant of the Lord

DAVE BAST

The Bible is a storybook; not just because it is a book that is full of stories – it is; but because it is a book that tells a single story, the story of salvation. This is the theme of the whole Bible from beginning to end. The old and New Testaments are not two different books with two separate stories, one about the Jews and the other about the Christians, or one about law and the other about grace, or one when God was angry and the other when He was loving. No, they are two parts of the same story, the story of salvation by grace through faith. There is an old saying about the relationship between the two Testaments: The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed; and the most important thing concealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New is the identity of the hero of the story, Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Savior. That is why the book of Isaiah, in particular its later chapters, is so pregnant with meaning for Christian readers, as we hope to show next on Groundwork. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, we are excited. We are beginning a new series on Groundwork, and we are going to focus on a section of Isaiah, primarily Chapters 42 to 53, but it is the part of the Bible in the Old Testament, at least, that probably talks more in prospect about Jesus than anywhere else.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that has to do with the fact that all through these particular chapters – and we are not going to be able to cover everything in these nine or ten chapters even so in this series – but we are going to do our best to get through a good bit of these chapters.

DAVE BAST

Hit the high points.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and particularly the “Servant Songs,” because one of the reasons this looks forward to Jesus – one of the reasons we as Christian believers should be interested in what God says and promises here – is because these are promises also for us because we believe that the Servant of the Lord that we are going to hear a lot about in these chapters is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, and that makes all of these promises, and a lot of the imagery – we are going to see a lot of imagery in this series – it applies to us in the Church today.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, one of the hallmarks of the New Testament apostles was their absolute, utter conviction that the life of Christ was shown in prospect in the Old Testament; that the Old Testament was all about Him; and frankly, they got that idea from Jesus Himself. There are a couple of very significant passages... I think about the end of Luke Chapter 24, for example, where the risen Christ appears to the disciples and tells them about the scriptures that point to Him; and nowhere is that clearer, Christians believe, than in this chunk of Isaiah, beginning in Chapter 42, which is the focus of our program today.

So, as we go through these very important passages, we are going to see over and over why the first Christians were convinced that God was revealing ahead of time through His servant, Isaiah, the identity of His Messiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is from Isaiah 42: ¹Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in whom I delight. I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations. ²He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets. ³A bruised reed He will not break; a smoldering wick He will not snuff out. In faithfulness He will bring forth justice. ⁴He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth. In His teaching the islands will put their hope.

DAVE BAST

⁵This is what God the Lord says, the creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it; who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it. ⁶“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the gentiles, ⁷to open eyes that are blind. To free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁸“I am the Lord; that is My name. I will not yield My glory to another or My praise to idols. ⁹See, the former things have taken place. The new things I declare; before they spring into being, I announce them to you.”

DAVE BAST

The prophet Isaiah is really writing in the voice of God; so it is quotation marks and it is God who is speaking; so He is sort of channeling through Isaiah, who first pronounced these words and then wrote them eventually; but God in the first person is the one who is doing the talking, and He begins by drawing the readers' attention – the hearers, initially, and us, because it is for us, too, as you commented, Scott – drawing our attention to this very significant person – this person whom He calls, “My Servant.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what is interesting is that it is clear... we will talk in just a moment: Who is that Servant? And as is often true with biblical prophecy, there is kind of more than one fulfillment ultimately of these words; but you mentioned God speaking in the first person... If you look at these verses, also in the English translation, look how often the first person pronoun, I, comes up, and then in the Hebrew, actually, like in verse 6: I, the Lord... and in verse 8: I am the Lord... in Hebrew it is *ani Yahweh*, which is an extremely emphatic pronouncement. It is not God just saying: I, the Lord. It is like God thumping His chest as He says: I, Me, I am the One talking here; because that is where the power of the Servant is going to come from; not from His own power, it is the Lord God Almighty, the creator of the heavens and the earth – Yahweh – I, Yahweh – I am going to be the one who is going to do all of this *through* this servant.

DAVE BAST

First He says, “I am upholding Him...” I am the one who is giving Him all of His strength. He is My Chosen One. I have sort of nominated Him... I put My finger on Him. Wouldn't it be nice, given our political climate, if God suddenly clearly put His finger on His chosen one – His servant? Well, He does that with the Servant of the Lord here in Isaiah, and He says: Furthermore, He is the one in whom I delight. I will pour My Spirit on Him – I will put My Spirit on Him. So it is just a piling up of terms to say: This guy – this is the one. Look at Him. Listen to Him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there is a sense in which: Who is this Servant? That is the big question. These people have been in exile now. They have been in Babylon when Isaiah – God through Isaiah speaks these words. Who is this? Well, in a sense, it is going to be all Israel. All Israel is called. This is a common calling, a common vocation for all the people, in a way; so it can be fulfilled through all the people if they live into their identity as God's

people. Clearly, though, it is also going to be fulfilled through any leader or king who will take upon himself the ways of God and the bringing of God's justice. (We are going to talk about that in the next segment); and ultimately, of course, the arrow points all the way down to Jesus Christ as the *final* servant of God; but it is always going to be the same Yahweh – the same God of Israel behind them all – behind the people as a whole – behind individual kings and prophets, and ultimately behind the final Servant, who will be Jesus; and all along it is going to be God doing the work and God's power flowing through that person to do the things that need doing.

DAVE BAST

Right; and maybe this is a helpful analogy... I think we may have used this before on Groundwork, but this goes for me all the way back to seminary. One of my teachers shared this image or analogy, which I found helpful. I happened to be, not too long ago, in Denver, and it was a beautiful, clear day; and you could look out and see the mountains to the west of the city; and it was range upon range, you know. There were beautiful, snow-capped peaks on the horizon. From a distance, it looks like one mountain. If you actually climb up into them or travel into them, you see it is a successive series of mountain ranges; and that is how prophecy works. In one sense, the Servant of the Lord is the people of Israel; in another sense it could be a given king, a just king or prophet; but ultimately, the highest range, the furthest fulfillment and deepest, is in Jesus; and we know this, in fact, from the Gospel itself because Matthew says in a place in Chapter 12 that at one point Jesus withdrew and many followed Him and He healed them all, and then Matthew adds this:
¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah... and then he quotes Isaiah 42:1-4; so we have explicit warrant, not only from Matthew, but from Jesus Himself, as we said, that these words really find their ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And therefore, so does the Servant's role in bringing justice; and what that means in a broken and crooked world we are going to think about next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and this is our first program of a series of programs on some of the latter chapters of Isaiah, particularly Isaiah 42-53, and we are looking in this program at Isaiah 42, which we read a good chunk of, Dave, in the first segment, as God through Isaiah says there is going to be a Servant – an ultimate Servant – who is going to restore Israel; and that Servant, we just said at the end of the last segment, is Israel itself, some key leaders, but it is ultimately fulfilled, as the New Testament itself says, in Christ; and so, Christ then, too now, is going to do what Isaiah... God through Isaiah says in Chapter 42, and the main thing He is going to do is bring justice. We hear that justice, justice a lot in what we read just a moment ago; and so, we need to wonder, what is that?

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. This is the theme, really, of this first Servant Song in Chapter 42. So God says immediately in verse 1: I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring *justice* to the nations. Then verse 2: He won't shout or cry out or raise His voice, so it is going to be some kind of a gentle... You know, usually we think of justice, we think of demonstrations in the street and screaming against the police brutality or something. A bruised reed He won't break; a smoldering wick He will not snuff out; He will kind of, it seems, in imagery there that He will take account of people's frailty maybe. That is what that is suggesting; but here it is again: In faithfulness, He will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth; and in His teaching the islands will put their hopes. So, He will bring justice; He will establish justice; the key question then is: What does that exactly mean for us – for our lives – for our world?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And sometimes – and you can actually hear both senses of the word *judgment* still used today – most of the time I think when we hear justice we think of law and order, right? Justice is done when the criminal is arrested and put on trial; the jury renders a verdict and he or she gets his or her just punishment and the sentence is passed down. Justice is done. Criminals are punished. Laws are upheld. People drive at the speed limit. They don't break into each other's houses. But in the Bible, of course, justice, *mishpat* in the Hebrew, justice is always very closely tied to righteousness, which is right-living before God, and so following God's Laws; and God's Laws aren't just law and order, they are also designed to bring about a wider flourishing; and therefore, justice is yoked with righteousness, and both together lead to *shalom* in the biblical vision; we have talked about that often here on Groundwork. What is *shalom*? *Shalom* is sort of the webbing together of all people and all creatures into mutually edifying relationships. *Shalom* happens – justice happens – when everything is fair; everybody has a fair shot; everybody has opportunity; nobody is disadvantaged; the poor have a little extra provided for them and a hand up to not be poor anymore; the wealthy are generous; farmers leave things on the edges of their fields for the poor to pick up; all that is tied in with justice. So, yes, it is law and order, but it is more than that. It is a society that is just beautiful because everybody is getting along because everybody is helping everybody else.

DAVE BAST

You mentioned the Hebrew word for justice, which is *mishpat*. Sometimes that is translated judgment or judgments in the plural, as in Psalm 19: The judgments of the Lord are true and altogether righteous; a verse, incidentally, that Lincoln quoted in his second inaugural in connection with the idea that if God has willed this terrible civil war to come as a judgment against the sin of slavery, surely we won't call that unjust. That would be fair; that would be appropriate. So it can mean also what is fair or what is appropriate in a given situation; not just what is against the law, but sometimes there is an idea in this word of *teaching*. In fact, that is mentioned here in Isaiah 42. It speaks of the Servant's *teaching* the nations. So there is a kind of revelatory aspect to God's judgments or God's justice. He has to first show us or tell us what is right in any given context, and then there is the law enforcement side of it. So, it is a positive and a wonderful word, because in a world where God's justice is made known and established, everyone will know and do the right thing; and again, that brings us back to the idea of *shalom* – the right thing – the way things ought to be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And also why there is a teaching aspect to it, as you just said, Dave. Even today we talk about retributive justice, and that is kind of the law and order one, where retribution is exacted – punishment is exacted on those who break the law – but there is also this thing called distributive justice, in which we distribute fairness to all people, and of course, once you start talking about that, a lot of people have different ideas as to what a distributive justice society looks like. How do you distribute the goods to society? What one person's good idea about what it looks like is labeled as socialism by somebody else or communism by somebody else, or actually something unfair; so that is where we need God, and through His Servant, and ultimately through Jesus, to teach us what that kind of a fair distribution of opportunity looks like. So the Servant is not going to just talk about justice, but also to establish justice, which means the Servant goes forth into society actively to work toward this.

DAVE BAST

The Lord's Servant is not a typical revolutionary. He is not shouting in the streets; He is not establishing so-called justice at the point of a gun; but He has this kind of tenderness about Him – this gentleness of not bruising a reed or not breaking a bruised reed or quenching a flickering wick; as though to say He takes into account our human weakness, our human frailty, and as He goes about the work of establishing justice, of revealing what it is, first of all, and then bringing it about, He does so in a context that cares about real human beings – that doesn't run roughshod over them the way the world's revolutionaries tend to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; sometimes we think that we have to be loud, and if our opponents are loud we have to yell louder; if they have big signs if they are picketing something, we have to have bigger signs and picket in front of them. No, that is what I liked, what you picked up on earlier, Dave; that this Servant isn't a screamer, isn't a shouter, and in fact, part of what happens as a result of being gentle is that He is able to notice the little people – the marginalized, which is symbolized by the bruised reed, a smoldering wick. He has time to see the little people, the marginalized, and elevate them and lift them up; which I think for us also today means that if we are going to have the eyes of Jesus as the ultimate Servant of God, we too need to have an eye for the invisible people, the ones that everybody else overlooks in all the attention we pay to the beautiful, famous people. True justice comes, not just for those we know about, but to those we don't know about but will find more about if we could just have the eyes of this Servant.

DAVE BAST

Well, and that brings up a wonderful point. Maybe we will just wrap up this segment by observing this; that in this prophecy, in verses 6 and 7, we read:

⁶I 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 light for the nations. All those *you's* there are plural; so it is not just the individual Servant of the Lord that is being described here; it is the people whom the Servant will gather together. It is us as the body of Christ, who are called to this same ministry of justice-bringing and of compassion and of care for the little person, and that is part of our mission, too, as followers of Christ; and it is a hope – a mission – that embraces the whole world – all the nations. That is the last thing we want to observe, and we will do that in just a minute.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and our program on Isaiah Chapter 42; and Dave, we have looked at the Servant of the Lord, which is introduced here in Isaiah 42, and it becomes a theme. We are going to see it in other chapters in this series. We just looked at what it meant that He will bring an established justice on the earth, and that means the flourishing of all people and all creatures, including the little people that the Servant will have a special eye for; and if we connect it to Jesus, we know He was always seeing the people on the margins; and that this is something then that brings us into the kingdom, and that for the Israelites anyway initially, it was supposed to be something that would help them be a light to the nations to draw in other people; and that was something Israel often struggled with, because we have this human tendency, no matter what nation on earth we live in, we like to make ourselves the center of the universe.

DAVE BAST

Even just some of the ways we describe ourselves, we tend to be tribal as human beings. That can be kind of quaint, you know. In our neck of the woods you will still sometimes hear people say something, which I think is really dumb, but: You're not much if you're not Dutch – that kind of thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But other groups...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; the Chinese call their nation the Middle Kingdom, meaning the center kingdom – the one at the center of the earth. Everybody else is on the fringes. Even the word *barbarian* comes from Greek, an onomatopoeic term: *barbaroi*, which was the way they thought people speaking non-Greek languages sounded. They sounded like sheep going bar-bar-bar...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I can remember, too, and maybe some of you can, too, that the world map on display in my classrooms all along at Ada Christian School and so forth... Curiously enough, the United States was always right in the middle...

DAVE BAST

North America, anyway; yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right...

DAVE BAST

Or the North Atlantic, so we have the new colonies and the old Britain kind of bracketing the center. Why is it that we always put ourselves in the middle, at the heart of God's vision, and we are God's chosen people and everyone else is sort of on the fringe? Maybe they are allowed in by sufferance, but they are not really part of the deal; and this is Israel's number one problem throughout the course of the Old Testament. God had always intended them to be the light to the nations. The thing that drew and attracted people to Israel's God; and over and over they failed in their vocation. They turned aside to other gods. They did not focus the spotlight of the nations upon the one true living God. That was their biggest problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it was their biggest piece – and again, we are going to see this in another program – their biggest perpetual piece of collective amnesia; that they forgot that the very first thing God said to Abram in Genesis Chapter 12 is: Look, I am calling you. I am drawing you out of the nations for the sake of the nations, because through you all nations will be blessed. It is *the* first promise to Abram. It is the very first thing that God said: You are going to be chosen now. I am electing you to make you and your descendents ultimately a mission to the rest of the world. I am not forgetting about the rest of the world, I am just starting here, and then I am going to spread from here. Israel was supposed to remember that; they generally didn't.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you know, years ago the knock on Calvinism, which stresses God's choice – God's election – has been that all too often it is rather self-centered – rather selfish; and actually, the old bit of doggerel that was sometimes addressed... People don't even remember where it comes from, but it goes: We are the chosen few; all others will be damned; there is no room in heaven for you; we can't have a heaven crammed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, brother. I'm glad to say I never heard that before today, Dave.

DAVE BAST

Well, that struck me when I first ran across it years ago. Nothing could be further from the truth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

The point is, if God has said... and this is where it comes down to our lives, and where it applies to us. If we know that God has loved us, God has chosen us to belong to Himself, it is not for our sake alone. It is for the sake of others, that we might in turn reach out to them and extend... to be a light to the world, to the nations of the world...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And to hope.

DAVE BAST

It's not just about us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and to hope for those people. One thing I often said in my preaching, but only because I often had to remind myself of it, I have said several times: If when we get to heaven – as we call it that, or the new kingdom – if it is a lot more crowded than you thought, and if hell is a lot more empty than you thought, you won't be disappointed, will you?

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; wouldn't that be a good thing?

SCOTT HOEZEE

We would hope that that would be the fulfillment of why God called us to be with Him in the first place, and indeed, it is.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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Printed on January 9, 2025