**Servant**

Isaiah 53

We have arrived at the very heart of the Bible as we study the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah spoke the Word of the Lord in the middle of Israel’s story, as the kingdom was declining. He saw past the exile of God’s people in judgment to their future restoration. Even beyond that he saw their ultimate hope in One who would come - One called The Servant.

“Behold my servant… I have put my Spirit upon **him**; he will bring forth justice to the nations… The Lord **called me** from the womb… he made my mouth like a sharp sword… And he said to me, ‘**You are my servant, Israel**, in whom I will be glorified.’” Isaiah 42:1; 49:1,3

42:1 sounds like a future prophet or leader. But chapter 49 makes it sound like Isaiah is the servant until he hears God say, “You are my servant, ISRAEL.” So **who is the servant of the Lord**?

That is exactly the right question. Who **IS** the Servant of the Lord?

* Isaiah certainly was. The Lord certainly did call him from the womb and create him to be a polished instrument to speak God’s Word for over 50 years to a stubborn and rebellious people.
* Israel *was supposed to be*. They were supposed to serve the Lord. They were supposed to do His will. They were supposed to represent Him among the nations. Unfortunately they did a very poor job since they rarely obeyed and often outright rebelled against the One they supposedly called Master.

As we read Isaiah we should listen to wonder “Am I the servant of the Lord?” Are you?

**The Servant of the Lord does the will of his Master**

“Behold my servant… I have put my Spirit upon **him**; he will bring forth justice to the nations… The Lord **called me** from the womb… he made my mouth like a sharp sword… And he said to me, ‘**You are my servant, Israel**, in whom I will be glorified.’” Isaiah 42:1; 49:1,3

Is the Spirit of the Lord upon you? ***Do you speak the Word of the Lord?*** Do you minister the love of God? Do you work for the justice of God? I hope that all of us identify ourselves, as the Apostle Paul did, as servants of the Lord - bondslaves who have freely chosen to bind ourselves to our good and loving Master.

Write your name right now with a comma followed by “servant of the Lord.” Consider making that your email signature or the thing your phone says instead of “sent from my iPhone.”

* **Darin, servant of the Lord**

***That is our identity and it communicates our mission.*** A servant does the will of his master because he belongs to that master and joyfully devotes himself to pleasing his master. Of course the reality is that ***all of us fail*** to really be the servants our Lord deserves.

**The Frustration of Servants of the Lord**

“Who is blind, but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send?” 42:19

“But I said, ‘I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.’” 49:4

On the one hand, ***all of us personally fail to serve the Lord*** with all we are. We ourselves are blind to the fullness of God’s glory and deaf to His voice. Our hearts are hardened to His call and therefore our lives do not fully please Him.

On the other hand, even when we - like Isaiah - faithfully proclaim God’s Word and ministry His love we experience ***the frustration that people don’t listen***. Like us they are blind, deaf and hard-hearted. So we often feel like our work for the Lord is in vain.

Today we will look at the **character and commission** of the servant of the Lord. What is the servant like and what does he or she do? First we’ll see how Jesus perfectly fulfills Isaiah’s vision of the Perfect Servant of the Lord, then we’ll apply these principles to ourselves so we can increasingly seek to be conformed to the image of Christ - increasingly seeing ourselves and living as servants of the Lord.

You can see your outline is in table format today because each characteristic comes with a commissioning. Think of this as the PERSON and WORK of Christ. Because Jesus was the Son of God He was able to do the work the Father gave Him.

First, the Servant of the Lord is filled with the power of God in order to proclaim the truth of God.

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| 1. **Filled with God’s Power** | 1. **To Proclaim His Word** |

“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength… Behold the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him.” Isaiah 40:9,10

You’ll see that ***these themes run through the whole second half of Isaiah***, from chapter forty through the end of his book. Isaiah 40 sets the tone of this whole section with the opening words “Comfort, comfort my people says your God.” This is Isaiah, the servant of the Lord, speaking God’s Words of comfort to His people with the promise in 40:5 that “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

**The command comes from God to “cry out”** and the message for God’s spokesman is in verse 8 - “the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” While people are like grass, disappearing in the heat and wind, God’s Word endures for eternity. So the herald of God’s Word is commissioned to get up onto a mountain and shout out the good news “Behold your God!” He comes with MIGHT, and his arm rules for him. The message Isaiah proclaimed is the good news Jesus fulfilled.

**The Lord Almighty CAME**. He arrived. In fulfillment of Isaiah 40 John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness the arrival of the long awaited one - preparing the way for none other than THE LORD HIMSELF. “The everlasting God…”

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| 1. **Filled with God’s Power** | 1. **To Proclaim His Word** |

“The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth; He does not faint or grow weary… He gives power to the faint… they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.” Isaiah 40:28-29,31

The servant of the Lord is promised the very POWER of the incomparable God. Our God never grows tired or weary. He never needs to rest because He is the source of all life and the overflowing fountain of strength.

Jesus operated in the fullness of the Father’s power. And that very same power is promised to us as followers of Jesus.

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| 1. **Filled with God’s Power** | 1. **To Proclaim His Word** |

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses.” Acts 1:8

Just as Isaiah was anointed with the power of the Lord to preach the Word of the Lord – so do you and I have access to the resurrection power of Jesus. Just as Jesus Himself was filled with the limitless power of His divinity – so do we have access to this very power. Jesus said it was good that he went away – so that his followers could do GREATER THINGS than even He was able to do – because the Holy Spirit would fill and empower them!

Brothers and sisters, we should not be timid or fearful when it comes to sharing the Gospel. We are NOT ASHAMED of this message, because when we preach this good news it UNLEASHES the power of God by which blind eyes are opened, deaf ears are unstopped, hard hearts are softened and dead souls reborn. And that’s just the first characteristic of the servant.

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| 1. **Filled with God’s Spirit** | 1. **To Minister His Love** |

“Behold my servant… I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations… A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.” Isaiah 42:1,3

Consider these two images of weakness: a bruised reed and a flickering candle. What’s more vulnerable, more in danger, more powerless, than these two items? Yet the Servant will not break that reed. He will not snuff out that candle. Rather, ***he will enfold the hurting and broken with the overflowing compassion and mercy of God***. Flip back to chapter 40:

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| **2. Filled with God’s Spirit** | **2. To Minister His Love** |

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God… He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” Isaiah 40:1,11

***The Lord is our Good Shepherd.*** Though he disciplines His wayward people with the firm hand of a good Father, He restores them with the mercy of a shepherd for his foolish and wandering sheep. “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love!” Can you relate to that heart rending cry of the hymn writer? Isn’t it wonderfully good news that our God welcomes back the prodigal son and daughter? He does not wait for them, he runs to them. He throws his robe around them, he has a party to celebrate their return.

Israel felt abandoned. They felt forsaken as their enemies assailed them. ***But God had neither forgotten them nor forsaken them:***

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| **2. Filled with God’s Spirit** | **2. To Minister His Love** |

“Can a woman forget her nursing child… Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” Isaiah 49:15

***God is the faithful husband even when we are the faithless bride.*** He cannot forgive us. He will not leave us or forsake us, because He is true to His covenant vows. The verse Jesus quoted to start his ministry that provided his mission statement – was Isaiah 61:

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| **2. Filled with God’s Spirit** | **2. To Minister His Love** |

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted… to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Isaiah 61:1-2a

Jesus was filled with the Spirit of the Lord to lavish the love of God on all who came to him. ***Think how generous he was with his healing touch and power.*** Jesus did not turn anyone away. Countless hundreds, even thousands, experienced healing directly at the hands of Jesus – and the vast majority did not become his followers. They took their miracle and walked away. But still Jesus kept loving the weak, broken and powerless. Still he kept touching the untouchable and loving the unlovable.

Just as Jesus was anointed with the Spirit to minister the love of God to a hurting and broken world, ***so we have been filled with the Spirit to share the love of God with those around us.*** We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. May people see our good deeds and glorify our father in heaven. As we have opportunity, let’s do good to ALL PEOPLE and especially those who belong to the family of believers.

**There is a priority to our love** – starting with our biological families, then focused on the church family. But this love with which we love each other should spill over to our neighbors and the nations. Who has the Lord placed in your life that He is calling you to love? Do you have a neighbor who is a widow? Do you have a heart for the orphan? Some of our people work with refugees and international students. Some reach out to couples with an unplanned pregnancy. Hurting and broken people are all around us. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us and will lead us to them if we will respond to Him.

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| **3. Filled with God’s Presence** | **3. To Offer His Grace** |

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord… Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news… say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’” Isaiah 40:3,9

Who is the SERVANT of the LORD? It is clear that the ultimate servant is none other than GOD HIMSELF. The message is not “behold someone like God” but “Behold your GOD!” John the Baptist did not prepare the way for someone like the Lord but for the Lord Himself. Here is the miracle of the incarnation. Jesus, the one through whom all things were made – the eternally divine Son of God – infused the fullness of His divinity into a totally human embryo, knitted into Mary’s womb by the hand of the Holy Spirit.

Every servant before Jesus could only point to his coming. Isaiah could not offer God’s grace – he could only look ahead to the One who would. Moses could not offer grace – he could only show how the Law of God proved that we desperately need grace. Elijah and the other prophets could not offer grace – they had no way to provide a sacrifice sufficient to cover the sins of people.

The only One who could fully and finally offer the grace of a “pardon for sin and a peace that endureth” is God Himself. Jesus had to be fully human to die. But he had to be fully divine to provide the all sufficient, once for all sacrifice for sinners like you and me. Jesus is the ultimate servant of the Lord – filled with God’s presence, the perfection of His righteousness and every glorious perfection – yet submitted willingly into death for us. Listen again to the beauty and wonder of Isaiah 53:

1. **Filled with God’s Presence to Offer His Grace**

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5

Here is the clear doctrine of **substitutionary atonement** 700 years before Jesus was even born. Who is the Servant of the Lord? He is the One who lays down his life in payment for sin. He takes up his cross and carries it to the place of his execution. For the joy set before him he endures the shame and humbles himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Yes, Jesus is the servant of the Lord. ***The question is – are we?*** Have we been so transformed by all Jesus did for us that we live our lives this way? Can we honestly say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live?” Is it true of us that we take up our crosses daily to follow Jesus?

***Is the cross the appropriate symbol for our lives?*** Or would an iPhone be a better symbol right now? Maybe a couch or a television or a piece of fried chicken?

I’m not challenging us with guilt. There is always more we can do. I believe God is calling us – as he did Isaiah – to give all we are to announcing this message of grace to the world. If our lives are not regularly overflowing with the gospel I believe it’s because we have not yet been really marked by it. We have not yet fully experienced the wonder of Jesus’ mercy.

**3. Filled with God’s Presence to Offer His Grace**

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter… he opened not his mouth.” Isaiah 53:6-7

**WE ARE THE SHEEP.** Sheep were the common sacrifice. They were cheap and stupid and common. Yet Jesus offered His absolutely perfect and infinitely valuable life LIKE A SHEEP. He is the LAMB OF GOD. Let’s not lose sight of the glory and wonder of that truth. The all powerful, all wise, all glorious Son of God quietly walked to his death. He endured the most unjust trial of all time and did not speak in his own defense.

***Oh we are so much about our rights and our freedoms.*** I have the right to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I am free to live my life as I see fit. We even use the gospel to defend our shameless selfishness and abject self-indulgence, claiming we are “free in Christ” to live in perfect comfort, slaves to our every desire.

But Jesus gave up his rights. He surrendered his freedom. He abandoned his comforts and glory. His life was a downward progression through suffering, loss and pain into death. Our lives seek that upward mobility, that regular improvement of lifestyle that was the path of SATAN. He insisted on more and better. He demanded the highest place in the universe.

Consider – do you mostly follow the downward path of Jesus to increasing sacrifice? Or if you’re honest do you mostly follow the upward path of Satan to increasing luxury and glory? I’ll be honest that I tend to the latter. I think most preachers secretly want to be kings. We want a glorious kingdom and a big beautiful throne with throngs of adoring citizens at our feet. But God calls us to the way of the CROSS. He calls us to lay down our lives for the sheep – even when they kick and scratch and bite and stink and get worms and stuff. And he calls us to leave the 99 in the pen and go hunting for that one lost sheep.

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| **3. Filled with God’s Presence** | **3. To Offer His Grace** |

“Go and make disciples of all nations… and surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19,20

Jesus empowered us with His authority, filled us with His Spirit and promised His own presence to go with us as we bring this good news of His grace to the end of the earth. We need not fear any obstacle, any pain, any loss – for the Lord our God goes with us every step of the way. So we can be strong and courageous. We can preach the Word of God with great boldness. We can scatter the seed of the gospel widely, not concerned about what kind of response we receive – because the results are in God’s hands.

One more characteristic and calling of the servant of the Lord.

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| **4. Filled with God’s Glory** | **4. To Establish His Justice** |

“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together… ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’” Isiaah 40:5, 49:3

The Servant of the Lord would be filled with God’s power, Spirit, presence and glory so ***that the whole world would come to see the truth of who God is.*** This was the time of the Kingdom of Israel but already God was making it clear that the story was not about them. The goal from the beginning was to show the whole world the nature of God’s love and justice, His grace and truth. **Israel was to be a city on a hill** – a beacon of light that would draw people from every tongue and tribe and nation.

Of course they failed miserably at this mission. Instead of honoring God by seeking Him first and avoiding the idolatry of the nations around them ***they abandoned Him and devoted themselves to the gods of the nations around them.*** They were not a shining beacon of God’s glory but were instead a filth-ridden pile of broken stones. Instead of being a radiant tribute to the glory and grace of God Israel became another warning sign of what happens to those who disobey and dishonor God.

Think of how many churches for which this is true today. Places that once proclaimed the name of Jesus and stood for the truth of God’s Word, turned away from the true gospel and embraced the universalism and feel good nonsense of the world. All over Europe church buildings have been repurposed as museums, bars, nightclubs and all manner of other things because they long ago abandoned their commitment to glorify God and so He abandoned them.

We are only one or two generations behind Europe. The tide is turning in America, or trying to. Will we be carried with this tide of gender inclusivism as a new civil right? Will we abandon the teachings of the Bible to embrace people of all identities and sexual persuasions? Or will we stand firm on the truth of God’s Word in order to be that city on the hill – that shining light for the world to see?

A big part of the answer is **how we approach JUSTICE.** Sadly the evangelical movement turned away from the pursuit of justice issues many years ago. There are many reasons for this that don’t matter right now but thankfully there is a new movement among evangelicals to reclaim the Biblical teachings about justice, like those right here in Isaiah.

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| **4. Filled with God’s Glory** | **4. To Establish His Justice** |

“I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations… he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth.” Isaiah 42:1,4

***God’s mercy and justice are perfectly interwoven***. In the same section where God says His servant will not break a bruised reed or snuff out a flickering candle He three times promises to bring forth JUSTICE on the earth. God is perfectly good, righteous and just. These attributes are essential to His very nature. The Servant of the Lord reflects the glory of the Lord and is, in fact, filled with that glory.

Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of this truth – as the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

***Jesus perfectly ministered both love and justice*** in his personal relationships. He was not only concerned with loving people but also with restoring them to community and status among God’s people. Jesus did not just give out band-aids and surface solutions, He healed people in body, mind and spirit. The same should be said of us. Listen again to Isaiah 61:

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| **4. Filled with God’s Glory** | **4. To Establish His Justice** |

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor… to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.” Isaiah 61:1-2

**Is our message good news to the poor?** Does our gospel not only release people from the power of sin spiritually but also break the bonds of injustice that rest upon them? Jesus came to announce PEACE in its fullest sense of Shalom – wholeness, oneness, harmony and JUSTICE. Jesus brought the blessing of God primarily in HIMSELF and His spiritual work of salvation but also in the joy of a new community of God’s people loving each other and a new value system that elevates love and justice in the way the Law envisioned but the nation of Israel never experienced.

The year of the Lord’s favor is a reference to **the Jubilee**. Every seven years debts in Israel were supposed to be forgiven. Every 50 years land that had been sold was supposed to go back to its original owners. These were profoundly wise and generous provisions in God’s Law to prevent chronic, generational POVERTY and INJUSTICE. ***How many times do you think Israel celebrated the Jubilee?***

Precisely NEVER. Why? Because the wealthy people who had BOUGHT the land were unwilling to give it back. They were unwilling to PAY THE PRICE for this generous provision.

But here Jesus announces the YEAR OF THE LORD’S FAVOR. He says, ***“The year of Jubilee has finally arrived!”*** Why? Because HE was willing to pay the price. What the wealthy Israelites never chose to give to the poor among them Jesus freely and generously gave.

And notice how Jesus’ announcement at the start of his ministry cuts off Isaiah 61:2 mid sentence. In his ministry Jesus came to proclaim the blessing of God in His generous salvation. Any student of Scripture would have been stunned by the fact that Jesus stopped his quote there. They would have thought, “What about the Day of Vengeance of our God?” Wasn’t the Messiah supposed to bring perfect justice and establish the Kingdom of David FOREVER?

Yes. But not right then. That is what Jesus will do when He comes back! That is when the ultimate Servant of the Lord will provide full and eternal JUSTICE. It will be a dark day of reckoning; a day of weeping and gnashing of teeth; a day of fear and punishment of regret and anguish. That is when the high and lofty will be chopped down; the rich and powerful will be crushed before the Lord while the poor and powerless are lifted up.

Remember the story of **the rich man and Lazarus?** A rich man lived his whole life in luxury and self-indulgence and there was a beggar named Lazarus who sat at his gate. During their earthly lives the rich man was happy and comfortable while the beggar lived in misery. But when they died their situations were entirely reversed. The poor beggar was with the Lord in heaven enjoying God’s blessing forever. The rich man, however, was in anguish in the fires of hell.

For the sake of the parable Jesus presents the rich man talking with Abraham and somehow able to see the joy of the poor beggar. The rich man begs for just a drop of water to cool his suffering. But it is too late. Nothing can be done to ease his suffering. So the rich man asks for a message to be sent to his brothers. But Abraham says they must listen to Moses and the prophets.

Have we listened to Moses and the prophets? Have we paid attention to the fact that a man rose from the dead to show us what the true Servant of the Lord looks like?

Jesus gave up everything to serve us. Will we embrace the identity of a servant and give everything to Him?

Let’s pray.