

This morning, we heard that God saw – and God knew.

And when God sees and God knows – then God does something about it!!

Now we hear that Israel – the Servant of the LORD –
will see and know *that the hand of the LORD has done this,*
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Isaiah loves to speak of the LORD as “the Holy One of Israel.”

Perhaps it went back to his vision in Isaiah 6 –

“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The Holy One of Israel is high and exalted!

But he is also *near* to the one who is humble and contrite.

Last week we heard three voices calling Jerusalem and Judah to listen to the LORD.

God has decreed that Jerusalem shall fall to the hand of Babylon,
but he has also promised that the exiles shall return.

God himself will come to Jerusalem.

The glory of Yahweh will be revealed as he comes down the highway in the wilderness.

And those who trust in him—those who wait for him—
shall have the strength to walk with him to Zion.

Chapter 41 continues this theme,

but now no longer are the heralds speaking to Jerusalem.

No longer does Jerusalem speak to the cities of Judah.

Now Yahweh himself speaks.

This is the message that the heralds called Jerusalem and Judah to hear.

What is the word of our God that endures forever?

What has the mouth of the LORD spoken?

He has spoken of his purposes for his servant.

Isaiah 38-55 focuses on the theme of the Servant of the LORD.

The servant theme is introduced in verse 8 for the first time,
and will continue as the dominant theme for the next fifteen chapters.

Who is the servant of the LORD?

Israel – my servant – the offspring of Abraham, my friend.

Let me summarize briefly how this works for Isaiah.

Israel is the servant of the LORD.

The problem – as Isaiah will continue to show –
is that Israel is a failed Servant.
Here at the beginning of the Servant songs –
Isaiah will speak of the Servant unambiguously as Israel.

But as we go along, we will see more and more a way in which the Servant
also delivers Israel!

To put it simply: Jesus will do and be all that Israel was supposed to do and be.
But Jesus will *also* do and be all that Israel's God was supposed to do and be!

Because is God and man in one person.

1. Who Is God? (v1-7)

a. Listen, O Coastlands! – the Nations Come for Judgment (v1)

*Listen to me in silence, O coastlands;
let the peoples renew their strength;
let them approach, then let them speak;
let us together draw near for judgment.*

Verses 1-7 explain who God is.

Last week we heard that God is the “creator of the ends of the earth”

Now he reveals himself as the ruler of history.

He calls for the coastlands (or islands) to listen in silence.

41:1 is echoed by 49:1 “Listen to me, O coastlands,”

We will look more at the structure of Isaiah 38-55 another time,

but suffice it to say that Isaiah has very carefully structured this section.

Chapter 41 calls the coastlands together for judgment.

Chapter 49 calls the coastlands together for blessing.

The peoples—the nations—are called to renew their strength—

precisely the thing that those who wait for the LORD will do in 40:31.

God calls the Gentiles to his counsel.

You may recall 1:18—“Come let us reason together.”

At the beginning of the first section of Isaiah,

God called for a judgment day for Judah and Jerusalem.

Now in part 2, he calls for a judgment day for the Gentiles.

But then in verses 2-4 Isaiah speaks of the great king who destroys his enemies.

b. They Come Because He Is LORD (v2-4)

² *Who stirred up one from the east
whom victory meets at every step?^[a]
He gives up nations before him,
so that he tramples kings underfoot;*

*he makes them like dust with his sword,
like driven stubble with his bow.
³ He pursues them and passes on safely,
by paths his feet have not trod.
⁴ Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, the first,
and with the last; I am he.*

Who is the one who stirred up to trample kings underfoot?
The Rabbis said Abraham or Joshua –
after all, Abraham defeated the kings of the east in Genesis 14,
and Joshua defeated the nations of Canaan –
but it is not clear that the great king is a “good guy.”

I am inclined to leave this great king unnamed.
The point, after all, is that God directs the steps of generals and conquerors.
Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step?
All military campaigns started in the east among the powers.
Damascus, Assyria, Babylon—all the great nations came from the east.

But all of these armies—all of these generals—must acknowledge
that God is the author of their victories.
Who has performed and done this?
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, Yahweh, the first and with the last; I am he.

He is the I AM who appeared to Moses.

He is the Lord of history—the ruler of the nations of the earth.
The coastlands have seen this.
The coastlands—such as Tyre and Philistia—
tremble at the coming of the armies of the king.
But rather than turn to Yahweh for deliverance, they turn to idols.
(Read 41:5-7)

c. They See and Tremble – But They Do Not Humble Themselves (v5-7)

⁵ *The coastlands have seen and are afraid;
the ends of the earth tremble;
they have drawn near and come.
⁶ Everyone helps his neighbor
and says to his brother, “Be strong!”
⁷ The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith,
and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil,*

*saying of the soldering, "It is good";
and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.*

There is a certain comradeship found in idolatry.

Humanity has joined together in its opposition to the LORD God.

And there is a certain fellowship that unites those who join in common cause!

But the common cause of the idolater is contrasted with the fellowship that God has with his servant!

(In a very real way, you can see in Isaiah the roots of Augustine's great phrase:

"you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless
until they find their rest in you."

2. Who Is God's Servant? (v8-16)

a. Israel – My Servant; Abraham – My Friend (v8-9)

⁸ *But you, Israel, my servant,*

Because there is a people that is not like the nations.

Israel, the servant of the LORD.

Let me give you a brief outline of what Isaiah is doing here in chapters 41-42.

After calling for the day of judgment for the nations, we hear:

First, God's blessing to "my servant Israel" (41:8-20)

Twice in this section God says "fear not...behold"

Concluding with six "I will's" in verses 17-20

Second, we hear God's challenge to the idols (41:21-42:4),
with another three "beholds"

Concluding with eleven "he will's" in 42:1-4.

And finally we hear God's promise in 42:5-17,

opening with two declarations of I am the LORD (42:6-9),

a call to praise him (42:10-13),

concluding with fourteen "I will's" in verses 14-17.

Isaiah 40 has called Jerusalem and Judah to listen to Yahweh.

This is what Yahweh has to say.

This is God's introduction to the Servant who will bring forth justice to the nations.

Tonight, however, we must content ourselves with looking merely at the first part of this:

God's blessing to "my servant Israel" (41:8-20)

Twice in this section God says "fear not...behold"

Concluding with five "I will's" in verses 17-20

Isaiah provides three pictures of God's blessing and care for his servant.

Verses 8-9 sets forth the picture of Israel as the chosen servant of Yahweh.

God took Abraham from the ends of the earth and brought him to himself.

*Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off";*

Israel is declared to be "my servant."

When God called Israel out of Egypt –
he said to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, my firstborn –
let my son go, that he may serve me."

Israel is the Son of God – Israel is the Servant of the LORD.

And this is because Israel is the offspring of Abraham – the friend of God.

God chose Israel – and God will not cast them off!

This is the foundation for our confidence.

And God follows this up with two "fear not" statements –
each followed by a "behold" statement.

b. Fear Not... Behold... (v10-13)

i. Fear Not, I Am with You

*10 fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Verses 10-13 then sets forth the first picture of God's care for his servant.

"Fear not, for I am with you."

God is present with his servant.

Herald Jerusalem had proclaimed in 40:10

"Behold, the Lord Yahweh comes with might, and his arm rules for him."

Now God declares "I will strengthen you, I will help you,

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Do not be afraid.

Babylon is coming—and they will take you captive.

But fear not.

Your children will be exiles in a foreign land.

But fear not.

Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

This first “fear not” finds its comfort in the “behold” of verse 11.
(Read 11-13)

ii. Behold, Those Who War against You Shall Be as Nothing

¹¹ *Behold, all who are incensed against you
shall be put to shame and confounded;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.*

¹² *You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.*

¹³ *For I, the LORD your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, “Fear not,
I am the one who helps you.”*

Yahweh your God, the one with the righteous right hand (verse 10),
is the one who holds your right hand (verse 13—forming an inclusio).
Israel, my servant, may have confidence because his right hand
is upheld by God’s right hand.

Why are you afraid of man?
Why are you afraid of those who contend with you?
Fear not! – God says –
I am the one who helps you!

I am the one who does for you what you could not possibly do for yourself.

c. Fear Not... Behold... (v14-16)

i. Fear Not, I Am the One Who Helps You

¹⁴ *Fear not, you worm Jacob,
you men of Israel!
I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.*

Verses 14-16 set forth the second picture of God’s care for his servant.
“Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel!”

From servant to worm!
Does that startle you?
That is because you are thinking of the Servant of the Lord in noble terms.

But the Servant is a worm.
David had spoken of himself as a “worm—and not a man.” (Ps 22:6)
The Servant of the LORD is such a worm.
Israel is a soft, feeble worm, with no strength of his own.
Again, God says, “I am the one who helps you.”
I am the one who does what you cannot do for yourself!

“Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.”
Think back to the book of Ruth – and the kinsman redeemer.
The Redeemer is one who delivers and protects the one who depends on him.

Israel – the Servant of the LORD – is helpless and in need of redemption.
So fear not, you worm Jacob!
As the first “fear not” ended in a behold,
so also the second.
Behold (verses 15-16).

ii. Behold, You Shall Make the Hills Like Chaff

¹⁵ *Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge,
new, sharp, and having teeth;
you shall thresh the mountains and crush them,
and you shall make the hills like chaff;*
¹⁶ *you shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away,
and the tempest shall scatter them.*

This is fun!

The worm who had no strength
is the threshing sledge that threshes the mountains.
the winnowing fork that winnows the nations—
as the wind/Spirit carries them away.

But this so often how God does this!
The weak and the helpless is the one who puts to shame
the powerful and the proud.

And all of this because of the work of the Spirit of the LORD.

Chapter 40 had spoken of the breath of Yahweh blasting the grass—
and the nations are but grass: “he blows on them, and they wither.”
And also here, the Holy One of Israel who helps you (verse 14)
is the Holy One of Israel whom you shall glory in (verse 16—another inclusio)

*And you shall rejoice in the LORD;
in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.*

So God is present with his people –
and he will make his servant Israel the instrument of judgment against the nations.

3. What Will God Do for the Thirsty? (v17-20)

a. I Will Answer Them...I Will Not Forsake Them (v17)

¹⁷ *When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the LORD will answer them;
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*

Verses 17-20 set forth the final picture of God's care for his people.

But this time Isaiah does not follow the "fear not....behold" pattern.

Throughout chapters 41-42 Isaiah concludes each section
with a rapid fire series of verbs
stating what he and his servant will or will not do.

Verse 17 sets the stage.

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I Yahweh will answer them;
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

(If you hear echoes of Jesus' words, "I thirst,"
you are right on track!)

When the Servant is parched,
God will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys.
God sets forth four ways he will do this in verses 18-19 (read)

b. I Will Give Them Water (v18)

¹⁸ *I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys.
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.*

c. I Will Provide Shade (v19)

¹⁹ *I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,*

Verse 18 emphasizes water.

Verse 19 emphasizes shelter.

God will provide water and shelter in the desert

for those who journey back to Zion.
And as the first two sections conclude with “behold,”
this third section concludes, “that they may see and know.”

d. That They May See and Know that the Holy One of Israel Has Done It (v20)
²⁰ *that they may see and know,
may consider and understand together,
that the hand of the LORD has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

There is no noun here.
It is simply that “they” may see and know.
Who may see and know?
The poor and needy from verse 17, which connects back to the worm Jacob,
who is the servant Israel.

To sum up,
God is faithful to his servant.
Israel is surrounded by enemies, but God is righteous,
and therefore he will be faithful to his promises (10-13).
Israel is also weak and helpless, but Yahweh is also a redeemer,
and therefore he will blow away their enemies by his Spirit/wind (14-16)
And Israel is parched with thirst, but Yahweh is the Holy One,
and therefore he will provide all that his Servant needs (17-20).

Isaiah 41 first introduces the Servant of the Lord.
Who is the servant of Yahweh?
41:8 plainly states that the servant is Israel.

There is no question that Isaiah is saying that Israel is the Servant of the LORD.
Israel is the chosen one—the elect Servant whom God has called and redeemed.

But Isaiah is not finished teaching about the Servant of the LORD.
This is only the introduction.
But already we are seeing how the Servant of the LORD
is the agent of God in bringing judgment to the nations.

Babylon is coming.
Exile is coming.
But God is not finished with Israel yet.
He is faithful and just,
and he will bring his servant through exile to glory.

Take heart, O servants of the Lord,

because the Servant has come,
and though he endured exile and death,
he has been raised to glory at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
Therefore you may rest assured that God has indeed opened a highway in the wilderness,
where only the redeemed may travel.
He has made the wilderness of pool of water.

Yes, there are times when you may feel as though you are in the wilderness—in the desert—
and you may feel parched with spiritual thirst.
But rest assured, dear congregation,
that our Lord Jesus Christ has brought forth fountains in the midst of the valleys.
The river that flows from our Savior is living water to sustain you in all times and places.
Drink deeply of him, because from his heart flows the river of the water of life
that can quench the most powerful thirst.