
The Servant's Mission

Isaiah 42:1-9

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Commercials get my attention. And then they get my decision. Commercials come on with great claims. They are good attention grabbers. Once they show me what I “need” then they tell me what I ought to do (think this way; buy this product, etc). As I consider the claim I consider its plausibility. I then say, “ya right. Like I’m to believe that?” And then off I go forgetting what they pitched.

We all do this; don’t we? We listen, then judge it and finally throw out the idea. We do this instinctively. This practice is fine for commercials. But it’s deadly practice for biblically accurate sermons that stimulate us to consider clearly Jesus Christ and His ways.

My sense is that whether it was in biblical times or in our times we tend to treat sermons as such. You know, a sermon comes on. It gets our attention. It orients us to the object of consideration. And then we give it a thumb up or down based upon our own understanding. We weigh out its plausibility in light of our experiences and reasoning skills. And then in our hearts say, “ya right. like I’m to believe that?” and then off we go forgetting what was pitched as truth.

(transition to message by way of a 2 min. orientation; that is, what and why I’m preaching = Big Idea with its purpose is:

*The **presentation** of the Servant’s mission
is followed by the **confirmation** of the Servant’s mission
so that we will believe and receive the **consolation** from the Servant’s mission*

The Presentation of the Servant's mission

v1-4

To receive consolation from the servant first let’s think together over how the servant’s mission is presented. Take a listen as I read v1-4.

*1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
3 a bruised reed he will not break,
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged
till he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his law.*

A mission of justice

v1,3c-4

First notice it is a mission of justice. The theme of what the Servant accomplishes is found in repetition. 3x in this paragraph Isaiah talks about justice. In v1, then in v3 and finally in v4 we hear the prophet describe the servant's mission as one who brings justice.

The word "justice" is defined for us as we notice the context. Alec Motyer in his book *The Prophecy of Isaiah* gave helpful comments. He said, "in the light of the foregoing court scene [justice] must retain its meaning of "judgment at law" the result of the trial between the Lord and the idols (see 41:21-29). The servant thus carries to the world the message that there is only one God". He goes on to say, "justice summarizes those things which the Lord has authoritatively settled. It is a summary word for his revealed truth...the servant brings the truth of God to the world".

Perhaps an illustration will help here (authoritative decision as a head referee having looked at instant replay comes out on center stage to announce what is true). The Servant listens to all the claims of the world and then weighs in to declare reality. The results, as we will soon see, are not unlike what we find in Ps. 96:11-13 (quote). We see the servant in these verses making right all wrongs and bringing joy to the world.

His source

v1

How this servant does this is noticed as we see the source of the servant's mission found in v1. The servant is supported. He is not operating on his own. He has the full backing from the Sovereign King of the Universe. We see in verse one that the LORD chose this servant for this mission. And his eternal choice is based on his full pleasure of him. The LORD finds his full and final joy in the servant. Sovereign delight is the servant's source for his mission.

Also, notice with me v1 and how the LORD upholds the servant. His mission will take everything he has. His support comes from the sovereign might of the LORD.

The servant's source for his mission is seen in v1 as both the sovereign delight and sovereign might. These two sources mingle together and provide the servant what he needs for his earthly task.

His Scope

v1,4

Continuing the presentation of the Servant's mission, we come to the scope of the mission. This is seen in v1,4. The extent to which the servant takes his justice can be understood as we notice three words; nations / earth / coastlands.

The mission is not limited to the Israelites. The effect of His declaration of truth travels throughout Israel and it ends at the ends of the earth. It penetrates the difficult places of Islam. It runs swiftly throughout postmodern Europe and into the shallow pluralism of America. It calls out to drug dealers and prostitutes. It beckons the self-righteous church-going do-gooders to repent and come to the life found in Christ. This mission penetrates and permeates the wide-world. Its aim is to create a world-wide celebration of the King.

His Success

v3c-4

If we take a few minutes to study the mission we will begin to feel the hope of the mission. But if it is just described in terms of source and scope we may not have a solid confidence that the Servant is our consolation; our only hope. Notice with me the last way the Lord presents his servant's mission. This is found in v3c-4. The term "faithfully" tells us that this mission will continue and stay the course "till" (see v4) the whole earth is filled with the effects of his mission.

A mission to people

v2-3b

Now, as I was studying and praying over this passage, I was thrilled with what I saw. But it still seemed somewhat conceptual. The scope and success of the servant's mission was impressive but it didn't feel too personal. That is until I got my heart on the heart of this passage found in the middle of the paragraph.

At the center of this passage we find people; broken and weakened people. We find men and women; boys and girls who look like you and me. Watch carefully how the servant approaches these people.

His manner

v2

In v2 Isaiah understand the manner of the Servant. He is not like the world's leaders as seen in 41:2 (read). His mode of operation is not to stomp around and scream out. He does not shout nor is he showy. Rather, the Servant is gentle and kind. He is quiet and unaggressive as he transforms people.

His mercy

v3

Also in v3 we notice His mercy. To him, people are not useless like a bruised reed (ill. with my boyhood adventure at McKinley lake = cattails as spears. When one reed was weakened, I'd just snap it and throw it away).

Nor are the people in the path of his mercy seen as too far gone like a smoldering wick (ill of our kitchen candle when it appears to be done ... Jesus smells your smoke. He doesn't snuff you out as though you are "too far gone" and need to be terminated. Rather, He cups his omnipotent hands around you and through the written Word (the Bible) and His Holy Spirit flowing through His people He breaths on you changing you from a flicker into a flame so that you regain the heat and light necessary for life and ministry.

* Let's pause for a moment. In just a few minutes we've travelled over much terrain looking at characteristics of the servant's mission. V1 starts off by saying, "behold the Servant". He is presented to us. So what's the point? What are we to see? What are we to feel? What are we to believe? What are we to take away? Put succinctly we are to say...What a Servant! What a Savior!

Confirmation of the Servant's mission

v5-9

We noticed in v1-4 the LORD saying something about the Servant's mission – its source, scope and success. We also saw how people are at the center of his justice – how kind he is and tender he works. Now we want to conclude the message by noticing what the LORD says to the Servant. In v5-9 we hear the LORD confirming the Servant's mission. All that we heard and felt in v1-4 will happen because v5-9 tell us that the LORD guarantees it!

Who confirms this amazing mission? Take a listen as I read v5-9

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6 "I 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 covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. 8 I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. 9 Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

From the creator of the universe

v5

This guarantee of the Servant's mission first comes from the creator of the universe. This is seen in v5. He who says v1-4 are true is the One who causes and controls the entire universe. He is the One who created and stretched and spread out over 200 million galaxies. He is the One who gives (present tense) both past and ongoing creative activity.

If He confirms v1-4 then who are you to doubt v1-4.

From the maker of the covenant

v6-7

Then in v6-7 we see another reason for confidence over v1-4.

This guarantee of the Servant's mission secondly comes from the maker of the covenant. He is the one who called and takes and gives to His Servant so that His mission will be successful. The Great Yahweh planned and promoted and promised the preservation of the Servant. We see in these verses the Servant as the covenant. You can almost hear the Servant projecting his voice out to say, "this is the New Covenant"; the means through whom the bad, bruised, flickering, fainting people of God will enjoy a distinct covenant relationship with the LORD of creation. He takes v3 kind of people

- Out of disorder and brings them into order
- Out of chaos and brings them into beauty
- Out of darkness and brings them into light
- Out of bondage and brings them into freedom
- Out of sitting and causes them to walk.

This passage makes clear that what will be accomplished is the creation of perfected people in a perfected community in a perfected world. Oh, do you believe?

If he confirms v1-4 then you are you to doubt v1-4?

From the knower of the future

v8-9

Finally, we see this guarantee of the Servant's mission as it comes from the knower of the future.

Throughout the book of Isaiah, the LORD makes fun of idols; gods who are no gods. He exposes their identity (that they are nothing) by asking them to predict the future. A block of wood simply stares and says nothing. The LORD is the one who tells the hearers what is to come. In these verses he continues the pattern. He is the Only One who is divine. The great and marvelous Creator and sustainer and orchestrator of history is

- personal (notice that he has a name)
- peerless (notice there is no serious rivals for his throne)
- praiseworthy (notice his jealousy. He will not share the status of being worshipped with anyone.

And so, coming to the end of our passage and the end of our time, what's the point? Why does the LORD have v5-9 written directly after v1-4? Could it be that found in v1-4 is such a profound and personal message for us that we might get our attention caught by it but after we think about it a little bit we are tempted to say, "Ya right. like I'm to believe that?"

How can I know for sure of this truth? Can I bank my life on this?

If the point of v1-4 is what a Savior then v5-9 is what a certainty!

Commercials do get our attention. They come on with great claims. We consider the claim and then consider its plausibility. I then say, “ya right. Like I’m to believe that?” And off we go forgetting what they pitched.

As we get ready to go, O Beloved, never do this with the Bible.

Do you sense in your heart a growing sense of certainty over v1-4? Are you beginning to think there is hope for a “bruised reed and a smoldering wick” like you today?

Let us be like Charles Wesley who wrote words so fitting for our conclusion.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light
My chains fell off, my heart was free
I rose, went forth and followed thee
I rose, went forth and followed thee.*

Look, the Servant’s Mission...

Behold him.
Believe him.
Obey him.
And find in him
the hope for your soul.