**The Servant of Justice**

Isaiah 42

Who is the Servant of the Lord?

“He healed them all… this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.’” Matthew 12:15-18; Isaiah 42:1

Matthew interprets the healing ministry of Jesus as a clear and direct sign that **JESUS is the servant of the Lord** foretold by Isaiah. But then look further down in Isaiah 42.

“Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord?” Isaiah 42:19

Ok, now ***that CAN’T be Jesus***. He wasn’t blind or deaf - he healed the blind and deaf both physically and spiritually. Ah, and that’s the point, isn’t it? ***Israel was SUPPOSED to be the Servant of the Lord***, but they failed because they were blind and deaf; they did not listen to the Word of God or obey the commands of God but allowed their hearts to be hardened.

In other words, **they lost sight of their IDENTITY** as servants of the Lord and as a result ***their ACTIVITY as God’s chosen people suffered***. They stopped hearing the voice of God. They stopped doing the will of God. They became deaf, blind and paralyzed. The ones who should have BEEN the servants of the Lord ended up needing another Servant of the Lord to come to heal and restore them.

I did some lifeguard training back in my camp counselor days. The first rule of being a lifeguard is **Don’t become a victim.** Your job is to rescue people so don’t get into a position that YOU now need to be rescued. The classic example is a riptide. If you see a swimmer struggling against a strong current, don’t just dive into that same current and start swimming toward the one in trouble. ***Get a waverunner or at least a rescue buoy*** - that long red thing lifeguards carry - so if you reach the struggling swimmer you don’t become another victim alongside that person.

***The Jewish people were supposed to be LIFEGUARDS to the nations*** - calling sinful, idolatrous gentiles out of their ignorance and rebellion into the light of God’s Word. Isaiah 43 commissions the Jews as God’s WITNESSES, as we heard in Isaiah 40 with the command to get up on a mountain as a herald of good news.

But the Jews lost sight of their identity as the servant of the Lord and as a result their lives shifted away from God’s priorities **until they themselves needed rescue** - which, of course, is why Jesus ultimately had to come.

So let’s start today with OUR IDENTITY - being reminded of who we are in Christ - and then move on to our MINISTRY - how we should live based on who we are as servants of the Lord. Here is our summary lesson for today:

**Identity produces Ministry**

As the chosen and cherished children of God

we must love the hurting, teach God’s Word and work for justice

**Because we are** God’s beloved children, we are called to love, to teach and to work. We don’t love, teach and work TO BECOME the children of God; we are not trying to earn His love and acceptance. We are not trying to gain the title Servant of the Lord by our religious activities or devoted service. Rather, it is because we ARE servants of Jesus, because we ARE beloved, blood-bought sons and daughters of God - therefore we live in light of that reality. We live up to our family name - ***we live in line with our family identity***.

* Our Identity: the **Chosen** and **Cherished** children of God

“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.” Isaiah 41:8

Verses like this one make it clear that at least some of the time ***ISRAEL is the servant of the Lord***. At least, they were supposed to be. Here God goes back to **Abraham** - the father of the whole nation. God called him when he was just Abram - a 75-year-old man with no son, no heir, married to a 65-year-old woman who could not have children. In other words, the least likely man to become the forefather of a great nation. But God chose Abram and Sarai for exactly that reason - they could never take credit for building up the nation of Israel and no one else could give them credit. Only GOD could have taken a super old, infertile couple and from them grew a nation like Israel that has endured through four millennia in spite of nearly constant opposition and persecution.

***Israel endured because they were the chosen and cherished people of God.*** Period. There is no other reason. It wasn’t because they were so smart or so faithful or so hard working or so devoted. Exactly the opposite. But in spite of their weakness and unfaithfulness and sometimes overt rebellion God kept His promises to Abraham and preserved Israel throughout the ages.

Now hear this, Christian believer - ***God speaks these words over YOU today as well***. YOU are my chosen, my servant, the offspring of Abraham. Look at verse 9.

Our Identity: the **Chosen** and **Cherished** children of God

“You whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners.” Isaiah 41:9

Though we were roaming, far from God; ***though we were straying like lost sheep***; though we were doing anything but serve the Lord - God chose us and called us to be His own.

Our Identity: the **Chosen** and **Cherished** children of God

“You are my servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off; fear not, for I am with you.” Isaiah 41:9-10

***Remember the context here in Isaiah***. The Assyrian army was looming on their northern border. The violent military king Sennecharib had conquered all the northern cities in Israel and come all the way to the walls of Jerusalem where only a direct intervention from God saved the Jews in Isaiah’s day under King Hezekiah. God isn’t saying, “Fear not, for I am with you,” just out of nowhere. He is speaking directly to their trembling hearts.

Yes, your brothers and sisters in the northern kingdom were taken into captivity in Babylon. Yes, judgment and exile are most likely coming for you in Judah as well. ***But that is the DISCIPLINE of a loving Father who will not give up on His children.*** It is not the rejection of an angry God, casting you off forever.

***Have you experienced the Lord’s discipline recently?*** Have you felt that conviction from the Holy Spirit, showing you where you went wrong? Have you faced the consequences for sinful choices or damage to a relationships? Hear this: discipline is not God rejecting you, it is God LOVING you.

***What parent doesn’t discipline his children?*** Lack of correction is not a sign of love but a sign of lack of love; neglect. Good parents train their children - they lovingly punish their children and help them learn that there are consequences for the choices they make.

Our older boys grew up in ***the pre-smart phone age of parenting*** - back when parents used resources like books and toys and “screen time” was called VHS tapes borrowed from this place called a Li-Brare-ee. Now those places lend you e-books online. We laugh about the difference between Seth, Caleb and Joel’s experience before any of us had a smart phone or even a portable gaming system. Seth was 6 or 7 when a friend introduced him to the childhood crack called a D.S. (That’s an old portable video game system.) Our boys had a very non-functional learning system called a DIDJ. You’d have an Indiana Jones type guy running through levels, jumping over pits, swinging on vines - then he would freeze and you’d have 10 seconds to solve a math problem. Then the whole system would shut down and say, “your Didj needs a tune up.”

All that to say, eventually Seth, Caleb and Joel all owned their own **Nintendo D.S.** and the main reason we allowed that was so we could threaten to take them away. You’d think your hand was hovering over a huge red button that said, “Launch the nukes.” Same effect later for Micah, who was raised in the smart-phone era of parenting, which gave us that option to take away his iPod.

The point is - parents don’t just threaten to take away privileges or impost consequences - they have to actually enforce discipline sometimes. ***That is what LOVE looks like.*** You take the device, send them to time out - let them feel the consequences for a few minutes - then go sit down and talk about what happened. Reassure them of your love - that it is BECAUSE you love them that you have to punish them. And the punishment does not mean you are rejecting them or kicking them out of the family - the punishment itself is a sign that they truly belong to the family.

That’s what God was saying to Israel through Isaiah. ***You are my chosen people*** - you are my beloved children, you are my prized servants - and I will never leave you or forsake you. But you have been really, really disobedient. You consistently refuse to listen to my prophets and to believe and obey my Word. So I have to now apply the consequences I’ve been warning you about for generations. I have to punish you - so that later I can bring you back.

Our Identity: the **Chosen** and **Cherished** children of God

“I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

God speaks these identity words over us - that not only are we chosen but ***we are cherished*** - we are secure in His love. He will uphold us, protect us, shelter and love us - no matter what. Not even our own sin and rebellion can remove us from His loving protection. No weapon formed against us will prosper. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is the message of Isaiah 41 that flows into chapter 42.

Our Identity: the **Chosen** and **Cherished** children of God

“Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” Isaiah 42:1

We’ll see very quickly how the Servant of the Lord here in chapter 42 is ***much more about Jesus***, but that’s no surprise. He is the true and better Adam, the true and better Moses, the true and better David - of course **He is the true and better SERVANT of the LORD**. Jesus is the eternal Son of God - the chosen, appointed, beloved One.

But the promises to Jesus and the descriptions of Jesus apply to us **as those who are IN CHRIST**. So just as the Father says to Jesus, You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased,” so - in Christ - the Father says that to us. We are the chosen and cherished servants of the Lord - in whom God’s soul delights.

And from that IDENTITY flows our MINISTRY. Look at the rest of verse one:

As the chosen and cherished children of God, we must love the hurting, teach God’s Word and work for justice

“I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” Isaiah 42:1

***God first placed His affection on us*** - choosing us to belong to Him - protecting us and cherishing us as His holy people; ***then He put His Spirit inside us*** and commissioned us for ministry. Do you see how this applies first to JESUS and then, by extension, to us?

Jesus said, ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me…”*** that’s Isaiah 61. The Holy Spirit came down visibly upon Jesus at his baptism as a sign of His good favor with God the Father. We know Jesus was eternally one with the Father so nothing changed amidst the Trinity at Jesus’ baptism. But that moment was Jesus’ public commissioning for his earthly ministry. And remember what God the Father said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased… LISTEN TO HIM.”

In other words - Jesus, who is my Son - that is His identity - is about to start His ministry, His activity for the kingdom - and as He does, you all need to listen to him!

So as we transition from identity to ministry let’s be sure we **get that order right**. Even for Jesus identity came first, action came second. He heard the words, “This is my beloved Son,” and then set out into ministry. If you do ministry in an effort to earn God’s favor and acceptance you will wear yourself out and never feel peace. But if you ***start with the gospel - and your new identity in Christ*** then you will begin from a place of peace and rest; of love and acceptance - of unconditional grace. And THAT starting place will unleash you for ministry. The first activity mentioned here in Isaiah 42 is justice and we will come back to that. The servant of the Lord is committed to three core practices: to love the hurting, teach God’s Word and work for justice. First:

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. Love the **Hurting**

“He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street.” Isaiah 42:2

This doesn’t mean the servant of the Lord will be silent - his second practice is to clearly teach God’s Word. It simply means that ***God’s servant will be GENTLE***. And that would have been surprising to the Jewish people. They expected the coming Messiah to be a powerful warrior - **a warrior King** who would defeat their enemies, unite the nation and reign in Jerusalem. So passages like this one were a puzzle for them - to say nothing of Isaiah 53. Keep going to verse 3.

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. Love the **Hurting**

“A bruised reed he will not break and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.” Isaiah 42:3

Here is the **tender compassion** of the true Servant of the Lord - so gentle that even the most vulnerable things are safe in his hands. And of course, this isn’t about THINGS it’s about PEOPLE. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are ***weary and burdened*** and I will give you rest. For my yoke is EASY and my burden is light.”

Jesus was concerned for the common person - so he rebuked the Pharisees and religious leaders for tying up ***heavy burdens of legalistic righteousness*** that no one could carry. Think of their **Sabbath rules** that had become so precise and limiting that you couldn’t do anything to help your neighbor; you couldn’t carry over a pitcher of water or a loaf of bread; you certainly couldn’t help repair a cart or do anything to prepare someone for the work week ahead. The rules were ironclad on points like that.

Same thing with their ***rules for the food*** you could and could not eat, ceremonial washings and prayers. Their lists were long when it came to all you had to do to try to please God. Long and exhausting. So many everyday Jewish people were bruised reeds and faintly burning wicks as a result. Their faith in their covenant God was shaken not because of God’s lack of love or faithfulness but because of the hundreds and hundreds of rules that had grown over the Scriptures like weeds.

Jesus sliced through all of that and got right to ***the heart of a relationship with God that was based on LOVE***. He touched the hurting, he healed the sick, he lifted up the downtrodden, he welcomed in the outsider. The ones society cast aside, Jesus went to sit with.

First to the Jew, then to the Greek. Jesus worked to gather in the lost sheep of Israel and picked up many strays from the nations along the way. Remember **the Syro-Phoenecian woman**? Jesus went to Tyre and Sidon and tried to find a quiet house in which to rest. But a local Gentile heard about him and barged right in begged Jesus to heal her daughter who was possessed by a demon. Jesus said, “The children must be fed first and then the dogs,” which most of us would take as quite an insult - “none taken, there Jesus.” But not this woman! She said, “Hey, even the dogs get the crumbs, right?” And seeing her bold faith Jesus granted her request and her daughter was healed - the demon cast out - at that very moment.

That was a bruised reed - like so many others that **Jesus loved and healed** and encouraged and lifted up.

* The woman caught in adultery
* The paralyzed man lowered through the roof
* The paralyzed man by the pool of Bethesda
* Countless lepers
* A few blind people and some deaf and mute
* Dozens if not hundreds possessed by demons
* Hundreds, probably thousands of others healed of various diseases

Mostly Jews - but some Gentiles too, like the Samaritan woman at the well. Several deliberately healed on the Sabbath. And with many of them Jesus made the point ***expressly to forgive their sins as well***. For the paralyzed man lowered in front of him Jesus did the forgiving first to make a vital point. Which is harder? To forgive sins or to heal diseases? I’ll do the easier one - to heal diseases - so you can believe the much, much harder one - to forgive sins. Healing just exercised some of Jesus’ limitless divine power. Forgiveness would cost him much more - infinitely more, in fact.

That’s what Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, did - he loved the hurting.

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. Love the **Hurting**

“A light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon.” Isaiah 42:6

When Jesus healed a blind person, it was literal but also symbolic of his entire ministry - which was about helping people see the truth about God they were unable to see. When Jesus healed a disease, it was literal but also symbolic of his ministry to bring wholeness to a person’s relationship with God.

I’ve shared before about my friend **Gregg Dedrick** in Louisville, Kentucky. He and his wife started a worship and prayer ministry just a mile south of our church. They renovated an old barn and created a very warm and wonderful environment - open for anyone to drop in and pray and sign up to be prayed for. Gregg was Dutch Reformed by background - so as conservative as they come theological - in other words, not a pentecostal who was trained to pray for miracles and healing. But the Lord led him and his also conservative wife into a ministry of faith, just praying for people and leaving the results to God.

What they learned after a couple of years of prayer ministry was that the FIRST THING you have to pray for is ***healing in your VIEW OF GOD***. Physical healing is secondary, tertiary - it’s way down the list - if your understanding of God or your attitude toward God is negative or deficient. In other words, if your spiritual eyes are dim or blind so that you are not seeing God clearly, how can you possibly have faith to believe that He could heal you physically?

As they met with people and helped them work through their ***anger against God, their resentment against God*** - confessing their sins and verbally turning from them - Gregg and his team were overwhelmed by how, very often, this unlocked something and physical healing also took place. Not always. But often. Now, I’m not making a prophecy here - not naming or claiming anything, ok?

My point is that Jesus loves the hurting. He still has a ministry of healing the broken and broken-hearted. And as servants of the Lord, we should have a healing ministry too. ***But the FIRST thing we are called to heal - just as it was for Jesus - is the HEART.*** We need to help people wrestle with their attitude toward God. As that relationship begins to heal, the Lord might well bring healing to other areas, according to His perfect will and His perfect timing. That leads to our second commitment as servants of the Lord. We love the hurting and:

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. **Teach** God’s Word

“I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.” Isaiah 42:6

Do you see the beauty and poetry of this prophecy? **JESUS is the One God gave as a COVENANT** for the people of Israel. The Jews and the church did nothing to establish a new covenant between God and the world. Only Jesus did that one. And Jesus is the Light of the World - but as those who are in Christ and with Christ on His mission - ***we, too, are the light of the world***. We didn’t make the covenant, but it is our job to proclaim that new covenant - which is the GOSPEL!

This is how we open the eyes of the spiritually blind, it is how we lead prisoners out of their captivity to sin - by sharing with them the good news that Jesus died to pay for their sins and break its power over them.

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. **Teach** God’s Word

“I will lead the blind in a way they do not know… I will turn the darkness before them into light.” Isaiah 42:16

How does God turn darkness into light? **Through HIS WORD**. Psalm 119, “Your WORD is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Every time we open our Bibles, we are bringing light into our own lives and to the people around us. Family devotions is leading the blind in a way they do not know. Small group discussion is turning the darkness into light - as people struggle with knowing and doing God’s will from one week to the next. Discipleship group meetings take an even closer look at the steps we are taking in obedience to the Lord Jesus.

Verse 17 is about calling people ***away from their allegiance to idols*** - false gods that cannot help them. This is our ministry of the word to one another and to the lost people around us - calling them to turn away from our lesser gods, the things we love, trust and serve more than God and commit to God alone. But look at verse 19:

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. **Teach** God’s Word

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

Do you feel the pendulum swinging in how we understand “the servant of the Lord”? At some points it has to be Jesus, the Messiah, at other points - like here - **it has to be Israel**. The Jews resisted God’s Word and God’s will to the point that their hearts hardened and they ended up rejecting their own long-promised Messiah! When the true Servant of the Lord came, they were too blind to see him, too deaf to hear His Word.

This is why Jesus so often said, ***“Whoever has ears to hear let him hear.”*** Only God can enable someone to understand spiritual things - the natural person, apart from Christ, cannot understand gospel truth apart from a miraculous work of God in their hearts. But that work is done **through the preaching and teaching of God’s Word**. That is the hammer that breaks up the rock; Scripture is the fire that lights up the darkness and breaks through our resistance. Verse 21:

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. **Teach** God’s Word

“The Lord was pleased, for his righteousness sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious.” Isaiah 42:21

This is our great privilege - to preach the Word of the Lord, to study and explain it - the glorious declaration of God’s identity and activity - His person and work. God gave us His Word for His own sake, His own glory, the presentation of His own perfect righteousness. ***“The Law of the Lord is PERFECT, reviving the soul.”*** Read Psalm 119 if you need a reminder about the beauty and blessing of God’s Word to us. Truly it is the Sword of the Spirit that not only protects us but also enables us to move forward in faith and on mission. One more commitment of the servant of the Lord:

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. Work for **Justice**

“I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” Isaiah 42:1

Three times in the first three verses of this chapter the servant is presented as **the bringer of JUSTICE**. The target of this justice is the NATIONS - in other words, the gentile nations, including Assyria and Egypt, the historic enemies of Israel.

**The Servant of the Lord will:**

1. Work for **Justice**

“He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth.” Isaiah 42:3-4

Young men grow tired and weary, young soldiers fall exhausted - but God will never grow faint, He will never stop working until **TRUE JUSTICE reigns on earth**. Now, we know that won’t fully happen until King Jesus reigns directly on earth. I believe that is what the Millennium is for, described in Revelation 20. No time to get into that. But there are promises like this one and many others in Isaiah alone that seem to look to an earthly fulfillment, before the final Day of the Lord.

But until that time that Jesus comes back and fixes everything, you and I are His agents of peace and justice on earth. ***We are the “little” servants of the Lord***, called to bring love and truth and justice where we are right now.

**Kids and teens**, this is a great point of application for you! Let’s say someone at your school is being unkind to another student - speaking rudely about them whether in front of them or behind their backs. That is UNJUST. That is out of alignment with God’s will. Do you see how YOU are called to BE the Servant of the Lord in that moment?

* Step in to comfort the one being attacked - to protect the bruised reed.
* Speak up for truth - express the fact that it isn’t right to speak unkindly to someone.
* And work for justice - if the bully won’t respond to your correction, go get a teacher or other adult who can help address the situation.

Adults, we never graduate from this assignment, do we? ***There are bullies everywhere*** - some of them just wear the title, “Manager” or “Boss,” or “co-worker,” or “neighbor.”

Some of you are called to be ***William Wilberforce agents of justice*** for a specific cause. Stand up for the rights of the unborn. Advocate for foster care and adoption. Speak out against human trafficking. Write letters to congress. Get legislation passed. Promote local efforts to help single moms and bring healing to those escaping from the trade.

* Some will have a focus on LOVING those who have been hurt by injustice.
* Others will focus on TEACHING the truth, leading Bible studies, preaching the gospel.
* Others will be called to fight for justice.

Here is our summary:

As the chosen and cherished children of God

We must love the hurting, teach God’s Word and work for justice

What does this look like for you this week? First remember your identity. You don’t work FOR God to earn His approval. You work for God because you HAVE His unconditional, eternal approval and acceptance forever. Because you ARE a chosen and cherished child of God, serve Him! Live for Him! And live like the True Servant of the Lord, Jesus. Model your life after His life - a life of love for the hurting and broken, a life devoted to preaching and teaching God’s Word, and a life devoted to promoting justice and righteousness on earth.

Let’s pray.