**Jesus in the Servant Songs of Isaiah**

**Song # 1 – Is. 42:1-9**

**Is. 42:1-9** – 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. 5 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." ESV

In seminary, I took a master’s level course on Isaiah. The main text was written by a professor who has spent over 30 years studying this one book! I had no idea how much there was to learn in Isaiah. I was especially impressed when I learned that Jesus is revealed in the four “servant songs” of Isaiah. Have you heard of them? They’re four passages, Is. 42:1-9, which we just read, plus 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13 – 53:12. They’re called songs, because they’re written in the form of poetry. A renowned commentator called them the Servant songs.

It’s important to see Jesus in these songs. Why? **First**, because the predictions of Jesus in the OT are powerful evidence that He really is the Messiah and Savior of the world. That’s why, after His resurrection, Jesus showed His disciples how the prophets had predicted His coming and His ministry (Lu. 24:27). The early disciples used the OT exclusively to get the Church started, and it was the foundation for the NT. Vs. 1 says “Behold my servant,” and that’s what God had this written for, so all the world could behold Him!

**Secondly**, these songs form a bridge between the testaments, connecting them so that both together make more sense. They help us understand how it was that Judaism, a religion of one people in a small part of the world, morphed into Christianity, a world-wide family made up of people from every nation, yet still worshiping the God of Israel. They songs help us understand better who Jesus was and what His mission was, especially when it came to His last week, when He allowed Himself to be arrested and crucified.

A **third** important reason to study these songs is to be better able to share the gospel with Jews. Most Jews don’t believe the NT is inspired by God. They don’t read it or believe it. But if we learn about these Servant Songs, we can show Jewish people that everything they need is right in their Tanakh, the Hebrew (OT) Scriptures!

Honest Jewish scholars have struggled over the centuries with these passages, trying to understand who the servant represents. The nation of Israel itself was often referred to as God’s servant. Right here in chapter 42:18-25, we find an example of that. Various historical figures have also been called God’s servants, like Moses, Abraham, Job, and David. But neither Israel nor anybody else fits all the descriptions in these songs perfectly. That’s because the Servant in these Servant Songs is and does things that are beyond mere human capability. No Jewish person of history has ever accomplished the things this Servant is said to accomplish. But those who believe Jesus is the Jewish Messiah see that He fits the description of these songs perfectly. Let me show you why I say this.

Notice the attributes and character of this Person in chapter 42:

Vs. 1 – behold Him! He is God’s Servant. God will uphold (strengthen, maintain, help, hold Him up) in some special way, or God will lean on Him, meaning depend upon Him completely to accomplish His purposes.

* God calls Him His Chosen One. The term Chosen One refers to the Messiah (Lu. 23:35).
* God will put His Spirit upon Him. The word Messiah means “anointed one.” This Servant, anointed by the Spirit, is to be a special Envoy, a Sent One of God, empowered to do His will.
* The Chosen One will be a delight to God. He will please Him in every way.
* He will bring justice, not just to Israel, but to the nations, all the peoples of the world! Vs. 4 says He will establish justice on the whole earth!
* This word means He will judge the earth, setting all things right, condemning the wicked and the powers of darkness, and bringing righteousness to the humble.
* The islands (an ancient way of saying the farthest reaches of the earth) will put their hope in His Torah, His teaching.

Vs. 2 – 4; This Servant will be of a gentle nature, such that He does not cry out in the streets, or do harm to anyone. This doesn’t mean that Jesus never spoke loudly. It refers to His gentle, lowly heart and actions. Jesus didn’t make His way by bluster and loud, overwhelming talk, but by the Spirit of God upon Him. A bruised reeds or a smoldering wick of an oil lamp, these speak of people barely hanging on in faith. He won’t crush them or put out their fire but will care for and restore them, setting things right in their lives. Though He may be tempted to falter or be discouraged, He will persevere until He has brought justice to the whole earth, so that peoples from the farthest corners of the world will hope in His teaching, His law.

Vs. 5 – 6 – Here God sort of gives His credentials, so all can know who is promising these things. He is the God who created the heavens and the earth, and who gives life to all, the Lord. It is He who has called this Servant in righteousness, or for a righteous purpose, and He who has promised to personally take this Servant by the hand and keep or protect Him. In other words, God will work thru Him in a special way. He will also give Him as a Covenant to the peoples!

This is extraordinary and unique! God established a special covenant, which we call the Old Testament, with His first people, the Jews. But this Servant will be *made* a covenant, an agreement between God and man, including both Jews and Gentiles. God gave the first covenant through Moses, and Jer. 31:31 prophesied that God would one day establish a new covenant with His people. But who is this who is said to actually *be* a covenant with mankind?

Vs. 7 - Through this Servant, God said He would open blind eyes and set captives free from their bondage.

Vs. 8 – God will not give His glory to any other. This would seem to indicate the Servant will do His work by the power of God, so that all the glory goes to God alone. This Servant is truly extraordinary! Who could this possibly refer to?

I think any honest person has to admit, no one fits this description but Jesus of Nazareth! He was God’s chosen One, the One specially anointed by the Spirit, so He was called Christ or Messiah. God spoke of Him in an audible voice saying in Him He was well-pleased (Matt. 3:17). He came to bring judgment against the powers of darkness and justice to the nations. He was gentle and humble, not working by human pomp and ceremony but by the quiet power of the Spirit. He didn’t (and still doesn’t) crush bruised reeds or put out smoldering lamps. He has become the hope of millions of people from all nations.

On the night He was betrayed, He initiated the New Covenant, saying this bread is my body, this wine is my blood (Lu. 22:20). He is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5) He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one can come into relationship with God except through Him. (Jn. 14:6) No other Jewish person of history could ever say He *was* the covenant between God and man, but Jesus clearly did!

He is the only Jewish Person of history who has given sight to the blind. All of us who know Him can testify we once were lost but now we’re found, were blind but now we see! In John 9:30-33, a man who was born blind said that since the world had begun, no one had ever given sight to one born blind, yet Jesus did! During His earthly ministry, Jesus set free a man who had a legion of demons in him and freed a woman from being bent over and unable to rise. And throughout Church history, countless millions can testify that He has freed them/us from addictions or demonic powers or from hatred or lust or greed. Who else has done this?!

God said He wouldn’t give His glory to another. But Jesus brought glory to God by His miracles. When He raised the widow of Nain’s son from the dead, the people said God had visited His people (Lu. 7:16). Even one of Jesus’ names, Immanuel, means “God with us.” When Jesus calmed a storm, His disciples worshipped Him. In Ps. 45 and Heb. 1, even Yahweh Himself tells all the angels to worship Him! God truly took Jesus by the hand and empowered, protected, and revealed Himself through Him. He glorified Him, but that wasn’t competition or blasphemy, because Jesus *is* God, equal with Father and Spirit.

The Servant’s extraordinary attributes make it obvious He is more than a mere human being. His character is so noble because God called Him in righteousness and upheld Him so that He never sinned or failed in any way. His works are plainly said to be worldwide in scope, applicable to people of all nations, even the most distant islands. (vs. 2 – 4) What Jewish person of history even comes close to fitting this description? Certainly the nation of Israel never met up to the standards of the Servant of Is. 42:1 – 7. No Israelite leader ever did either, not Abraham, Moses, David, or even Joseph or Daniel. Surely we can all see there is only One who ever did – and His name is Yeshua, or, as we say in English, Jesus!

A majority of Jews throughout the ages haven’t accepted the New Testament or Jesus as Messiah. Yet a Jewish tax collector named Matthew referred to Is. 42:1-4 as evidence that Jesus is the Servant of whom Isaiah spoke (Mat. 12:17-21).

Was Matthew right to do this? Was Isaiah’s prophecy really about Jesus? Well if not, who else could it possibly be about? Matthew’s interpretation fits perfectly, and Jesus’ ministry fits Isaiah’s description. Jesus is the only Jewish leader of all time who has millions of followers from nations all across the globe. Our hope is built on nothing and no one else!

Now then, so what? What difference does this section of scripture make for our lives today? How can the message of the Servant Songs be applied in our present-day context? I want to suggest three things:

First, the message must be heard and believed. That is, we must behold the Servant of the Lord, look at these scriptures and recognize that only Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these predictions, and is therefore the Servant of the Lord, the Savior of the world. He’s the One who reconciles us to God. We are to come to God thru Him.

Secondly, we must receive the benefit of His ministry. We should actively receive the forgiveness of our sins and adoption into God’s family. If we only accept the *theory* of these things, but don’t allow ourselves to really “make them our own” through meditation, prayer, thanksgiving, and confession, then we haven’t truly applied them at all! If we do not come to the place where we actually *feel* forgiven, and *feel* the sense of relief, the sense of deep peace that comes when we *know* we are right with God, then we still have not really applied the message of the Servant Songs.

One final thing we must do to apply the message of these songs, is share that message with others. These songs were given by inspiration of God. They are amazing prophecies given hundreds of years before their fulfillment, and Jesus fulfilled them completely. God commands us to spread the news of His Suffering Servant and the New Covenant in Him to all the world!