

Isaiah 42:1-4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 April 2009

Preacher: Ronald Christie

[0 : 00] Now let's turn to Isaiah chapter 42 and we want to look at verses 1 to 4.

Isaiah chapter 42 verses 1 to 4. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.

When we interpret the Bible we are meant to ask, what impact would this have had on the people who originally heard it?

[1 : 16] When this message is first announced, what would people understand by it and how would they react to it? Now this is a difficult question to answer in regard to this passage.

But I would like to suggest something. Here the passage says, Here is my servant. And I think the people are immediately going to say, Ah, this is us.

He's talking about us. The nation of Israel. And then he goes on and says, Whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

And they say, oh great. Just what we've always thought. God thinks a lot of us. And then they go on. And I think that in some people's minds, they begin to wonder, Is this really us?

Or isn't it? And that by the end of the prophecy, there are some people who are not sure about the matter at all. Some will be saying, yes, we are God's servant.

[2 : 26] This is a picture of us. Isn't this wonderful? But others will say, hey, that doesn't really sound like us. In faithfulness, no. We haven't been very faithful.

A light to the Gentiles. Justice to the Gentiles. No, we haven't done much of that. This maybe is what we should be. But it isn't us. And there might even be some people that would say, This is somebody acting for us.

This is somebody doing what we should be doing. This is somebody who's taking up our job and doing it properly. And that's, I think, the way that we should look at this passage.

You see, the situation is this. Isaiah speaks quite a bit about the servant of the Lord. But it's not at all obvious who he's talking about. In the other passage that we read, he says quite distinctly that it is Israel that is his servant.

But this doesn't seem to fit very well. It's more about an individual sometimes that he speaks. And that's the strange thing that we've got in Isaiah. And there's only one way we can properly understand it, I think.

[3 : 36] It's this. He is Israel and he's got all his duties as a servant. But he's not doing them properly. He's failing. And God has instituted another servant. Who's going to take over the role of Israel.

Who's going to act for Israel. And who's going to do the job properly in their name. And that's the way, I think, we're meant to understand a servant passage such as this one.

Here's not the nation because they don't live up to this picture. Even though they should do it.

Here's an individual. Here's a servant of the Lord. And we know who he is.

He's our Lord. But what he's really doing is taking up the task that Israel is meant to be performing. And doing it properly. So that the task is fulfilled by them through him.

And that's the way we've got to look at this for ourselves. We've got a task to perform. And we haven't done it. However we may define that task.

[4 : 35] We're failures. But here's the real servant of the Lord. And he comes along and he does that task properly. Now, I want you to look at this servant and say, is this somebody that I can trust

to do the task properly?

Is this the sort of person that I can look to to do what I can't do for myself? Because this really is what we're being asked to do. He says, here is my servant.

And the new old translation, it is, behold, look. Here he is. Look at him. Study him. Consider him.

That's what we're being invited to do. Have a good look at the servant.

See what he's like. See what he's done. And study him from a personal point of view. Is he indeed the one that I can trust in him to do properly what I can't do for myself?

There's three things we want to look at in regard to the servant as we have it in this short passage. The status the servant enjoys.

[5 : 46] The style the servant displays. And the service the servant performs. Firstly, we've got the status the servant enjoys.

And the point here is that he's thoroughly equipped to be the best servant that ever was. And I think his status is here described in three ways.

He derives worth from the relationship which he enjoys, from the support he receives, and from the equipment that he has given.

Look at this relationship which he enjoys. How is he described? My servant. My chosen one. Now, a servant usually is of somewhat lowly status.

But there's an exception to that. The higher up in the scale of things the master is, the higher the servant also rises.

[6 : 56] The servant's status rises in accordance with the status of the one that he serves. And for this reason, amongst others, this is a servant with the highest possible status.

Because of this, he's the servant of the Lord. The Lord, the covenant God, is the one that is employing this person in his service.

And I think what is meant to be implied by that is that this is a servant like no other. Because he's serving the covenant Lord.

It's probably for this reason that the prophet speaks later on in verse 7. He says, in verse 6, I, the Lord, have called you.

And he describes in verse 6 who this Lord is. And he says, He who's created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people and life to all those who walk in it.

[8 : 06] This is the one that has done the calling. This is the one that has done the appointing. This is the one that the servant serves. There's no one like him. So there's no one like this servant.

His status derives from the fact that he is the servant of the Most High. Not just that, but he's his chosen one. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one.

Now, think of the status involved in that. He's been set apart for a particular purpose. The Lord had a particular plan in mind, and he says, Who's going to fulfill this plan for me?

And he chose this one, our Lord Jesus actually, he chose him as his servant, and he appointed him for the performance of that task. How are we going to envisage this in more specific terms?

Well, the scenario is this. In the past eternity, God decided to create the world. And he foresaw, before he even started, the sinfulness that mankind would involve themselves in.

[9 : 19] And before even things began, he appointed a people to belong to him. And he chose them out from the mass of humanity in order that they might be his.

And he appointed that they should be holy and without blame before him. Who was to do this? Who was to bring this about? He appointed his son for that task.

He said, Take upon yourself the responsibility of acting for these people and of doing everything necessary that they might be brought from their sin to a status of holiness.

Present them without blame before me. That's the task for which I have chosen you. And the son accepts that task and makes himself responsible for the sins of his people and promises to bring them to glory.

That's the sort of scenario that we've got to have in mind here. The father has chosen the son for the specific task of redeeming his people from their sinfulness.

[10 : 30] And that's why he's spoken about as the chosen one here. He's the one whom the father has appointed to do this great work of redemption and to bring a sinful people and to present them holy before him.

He's the servant therefore of the Lord because he has been chosen and appointed for that task. He's the perfect servant because he's been chosen and specifically appointed for the doing of that task.

Now when we speak about somebody that's chosen I think we don't only think of selection for a particular purpose. But surely there is connected with that idea the idea that he's a choice person. Because he's been given this special task he becomes a special person. And that's undoubtedly the way that the Bible puts things together. Isaiah earlier on has spoken in this way and he says See, I lay in Zion a chosen and precious cornerstone.

Now there's a different picture entirely. But there's the ideas connected. This is a chosen cornerstone just as the servant is my chosen one. This is a chosen cornerstone. And because he's chosen he's also precious.

[11 : 51] He's of value. So here's the status that the servant enjoys in virtue of his relationship with the Lord. He's special in the sight of the Lord. And he's precious in the sight of the Lord.

That enhances his status. The relationship which he enjoys makes us say there's no servant like this servant. You won't get anybody of greater standing of greater worth than this one. Because of his relationship with the Lord who has chosen him.

But he also derives status from the support that he receives. And there's two phrases that describe this. He says my chosen my servant whom I uphold.

My chosen one in whom I delight. And this suggests to me that here is Jesus here is the servant fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

And he's not alone. He's not just given a task to do and he's left to do it on his own. And he's just to get on with it as best he can as it were. There's the person that chose him standing behind him and cooperating with him and involved in the task with him and involved in these two particular areas.

[13 : 06] I delight in him says the Lord. I uphold him says the Lord. Now let's just reflect on these as this is as this is worked out actually in the experience of our Lord.

There can be no doubt at all that the father delighted in the work that the son was doing. There was real good pleasure flowing from the father to the son because the son had set about the chosen task for which he was sent.

We have this particularly in the baptism of our Lord. Here he is and he takes upon himself a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. There was no need for him to do that because he was not a sinner in himself but he was already identifying himself with sinners.

He was putting himself in the place of sinners. He was doing what they needed to do acting for them. And what does the father think about this? Well we've got this voice from heaven which says you are my son whom I love with you I am well pleased.

There's the father expressing his delight in the son the Lord expressing delight in his servant. The son has committed himself to the task publicly identifying himself with sinners and the father of the Lord says I'm delighted with you.

[14 : 30] That's a fulfillment of this passage. And this delight isn't just an expression of love and pleasure it's something practical.

The Lord upholds his servant and again you can think about this in the experience of our Lord in particular. Look at any stage in his life and you'll see that there was the father standing behind him upholding him for the task that he had sent them to perform even just after his birth.

Think about the wise men that came to Jesus with gifts that would be of value to them when they were refugees in Egypt. Think about the dreams that Joseph had that were given in order to keep Jesus safe so that he was taken down into Egypt and away from the anger of Herod who wanted to kill him.

There was the father upholding him protecting him keeping him safe for the task that was to be given to him. Or later on again in the baptism wasn't that an encouragement that was given to Jesus.

You're my son I'm pleased with you. There was a stimulus given to Jesus something that would motivate him and confirm his intention to complete the task that had been given to him.

[15 : 54] It was the father lending his support to the son in the work that he was doing. Or the transfiguration similarly in every way the transfiguration was a remarkable thing that was designed to support our Lord.

Here for a moment in the midst of all his sufferings he's given a taste of glory. It's like the father saying this is what you're going to get if you're just be faithful to the task. This is what you're going to receive as a reward of your faithfulness. And so he's given this foretaste of glory as an encouragement it's a father supporting him upholding him. And he gives him Moses and Elijah who talk with him and they're able to talk about things that nobody else could talk about. And this again is an encouragement to Jesus in his humanity to go on and complete the task. He's being supported and upheld by human companionship human companions who can speak to him even when his disciples don't understand what he's talking about. And there's a voice from heaven.

[16:58] This is my beloved son. Listen to him. There's a father authenticating validating the authority of Jesus and saying you've got to listen to him. He's my person.

All of that is the father upholding and supporting his son. And so we could go on and we will go on to the end of his days. John tells of an occasion when Jesus' heart was deeply troubled. So he's disturbed and he's deeply moved inwardly at what's happening or what's about to happen. And there's again a voice from heaven that speaks and assures him, I have glorified my name and I will glorify it again. And again you see it's a matter of the father speaking and saying don't be perplexed, don't be troubled, it's all going to work out well in the end. And he encourages them for the sacrifice that is to be made.

Or in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus is in agony there, we're told that an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. all of this was the Lord upholding his servant.

[18:10] And you see what this should do to us when we think about the servant. Is this a good servant that's worth trusting in? Is this a capable servant that can do what he's been appointed to do?

Can I trust in him to do for me what I couldn't do for myself? And the answer is sure you can because there's nobody like this one. The Lord who sent him says he's a wonderful person. The Lord who sent him says I'm upholding him, I'm supporting him behind him. This servant can't fail. This is a wonderful servant. Yes, we can trust in him. We see that when we see the support that he receives.

And connected with that also there is the equipment that he has given. We've got it here in verse one. My chosen one in whom I delight, I will put my spirit on him.

Now, notice that it says my spirit. It is the spirit of God, but he says my spirit, expressing once again the involvement of the Lord in the work of the servant.

[19:13] Now, if we think of this as the spirit that was given to Jesus, we can see the significance of that. The spirit is the agent through which God performs his work in the world.

On creation, the spirit of God hovered over the waters, preparatory to God working creatively. The spirit is present. Things happen when the spirit is present.

He's the agent by which God effects his purposes. And the spirit is active in the life of Jesus. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a spirit bringing Jesus into being, ensuring that he's kept free from the taint of human sin, giving him a genetic structure that is appropriate for the task that is given to him.

And later on at his baptism, the Holy Spirit came down in bodily form like a dove, resting on him.

The spirit is poured out in him. And what's he doing? He's equipping him for the task that he had to perform.

[20:19] Yes, he's God in human form, but the spirit is still in him, equipping him in his human nature for that task that was his. And John says that this spirit was given without measure.

So here is Jesus filled with the spirit, endowed with it to the fullest possible extent. And what does that mean? That all the equipment that was necessary has been given to the servant.

He hasn't been left without resources. Everything that he needs is available to him because the power of the spirit has been given to him. The spirit lives in a unique fashion and to an unusual degree.

That's the teaching we've got here. A servant that is not left to his own resources, but has all the resources of heaven behind him that is equipped by the spirit indeed for the task to which he has been sent.

Now, is there anything wrong with this servant? Is there any possibility that this servant could fail us or could fail to do the work properly? The fact of the matter is that when we look at the status that he enjoys, we've got to see there is no servant like this one.

[21 : 30] There is no one like this one. He has got a unique status because he's got a special relationship with the father as his servant, his chosen one. He's upheld by the father.

He's given the equipment necessary. It's all there. This servant is worthy of our trust and our devotion. The next thing that we want to look at here is the style the servant displays.

That's perhaps not the best word to use here but I couldn't think of a better one. The style the servant displays. Now, there are two characteristics, two sets of characteristics of the servant's ministry that are mentioned here that I want to bring out.

He is patient and sensitive. He is persevering and successful. Firstly, he is patient and sensitive. This is expressed firstly in words and secondly in pictures.

He will do things gently. He won't be like a revolutionary who will stand up in public and with the power of his oratory stir folks to rebellion.

[22 : 42] His style is not violent, compelling folks with vehement speech. speech. That's what it means when he says he will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.

He won't stir up a mob to revolt. He won't be that sort of troublemaker, that sort of violent person who accomplishes his purpose in that sort of a public way.

And then this idea is expressed in these two pictures that actually are very telling pictures indeed.

And if we remember nothing more about the servant than this, it's worth just remembering this.

A bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Now look at the gentleness, the patience, the sensitivity implied in these two similar pictures, twin pictures.

The bruised reed. The reed stands tall and grows high. But if it's bruised, then it bends over. And we would say, no hope of that reed being established again so that it grows strong and graceful and tall.

[23 : 58] Once it's bruised, that's it. Forget about it. Pull it up. It's not going to grow anymore. But here's the servant, Jesus of course, and how does he deal with the situation?

He takes the bruised reed and he restores it. And he doesn't break it off. But he ensures that despite whatever may be thought about it, it grows the way that it was intended to grow.

And of course, that's just a picture. It's a picture of the way that Jesus deals with those that are bruised and battered and sore. Their hurt, something that's caused them inner distress.

And they feel just like a bruised reed. They're alive, but to grow properly does not seem a possibility. And people would write them off and say, that's a psychiatric case and it always will be.

There's nothing for it but medication for the rest of their days. They'll never recover from this.

They've been so battered and bruised. Something like that is the situation. And Jesus comes along and says, no, that's not the way it is.

[25 : 09] And he nurses that person and he heals their wounds as it were. And he teaches them to grow up again until they are restored to what they ought to be.

He is the patient work of Jesus with the hopeless and the bruised and the battered to restore them to their proper situation. Similarly, a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

Here's a wick of a candle or a lamp or something and it's no longer burning brightly. It's just smouldering. And people would say, well, that's beyond recovery.

No matter what we do, that wick isn't going to burst into flame again. Let's just set it aside and we'll get another light from somewhere else. That's what man would do. But not Jesus.

You see, he takes that smouldering wick and he doesn't snuff it out and say, no good here, the fire's gone. He nurtures it and he tends it and he causes it to burst into flame.

[26 : 07] That is, here's the person and their spiritual life is virtually non-existent. They think that effectively their spiritual life is at an end. They're dead.

There's no life or vitality in them anymore. And maybe people would write them off. But Jesus, with utmost patience, he comes to them and he protects them by his hand and he blows in the wick and it begins to revive a bit and he tends it until it bursts into flame.

He looks after that spiritual life gently, persistently, carefully until it comes to full vigor once again.

That's the sort of servant that we're dealing with.

He's a wonderful servant, but not least in this, that he's patient and sensitive. And any poor person here that's battered by a sense of sin, that's bruised by the circumstances of their lives, that are

wounded in their soul, whose spiritual life is almost gone and they feel there's really nothing there to speak of.

This is the one you need because this is the one that can help you. He's patient and sensitive in restoring people and in building them up when all hope seems to be gone.

[27 : 21] What a wonderful servant, a patient and sensitive one. This was applied, of course, to the life of Jesus.

You can read about it in Matthew 12. If you want to think about that, you'll just have to read it for yourself. I don't have time to deal with that. He's also persevering and successful.

Now, again, we've got a number of words that speak about this and they're really very interesting, a couple of them because in the original Hebrew, they're much more meaningful than what they are in English.

But the first one is in verse 3. In faithfulness, he will bring forth justice. Now, never mind the bit about bringing forth justice at the moment. In faithfulness, this is what characterizes the servant. He works in faithfulness. And that seems to me to mean, in practical terms, this is a person you really can trust. He'll never let you down.

[28 : 23] He is trustworthy and true. He'll not fail you in any way. You can depend upon him for everything. So whatever your needs are for the forgiveness of sins, for spiritual growth, for help in problems, whatever it is, you can be certain about this.

You can go to the Lord, you can rest yourself upon him, and you'll be faithful, and he'll never let you down. The other expressions are in verse 4. Now, it's difficult for us to get the full impact of this, but these words, falter or discouraged, are really the same words that are translated in verse 3 as bruised and smoldering.

And it just doesn't fit right in English. But if you could imagine it, the way that it would have come to them, it really must have been quite significant in its impact on them.

He will not falter. That's connected with a bruised reed. So, he's saying, here's what we might call a faltering reed. Now, the one that deals with this is one that does not falter.

Or, here's somebody that's not discouraged. Okay, that's connected with the smoldering wick. So, I know it doesn't fit, but let's see, here's a discouraged wick.

[29 : 50] And the one that is dealing with it is one that is never discouraged. And so, these pictures are tied together in what must have been really quite a powerful impact upon the people when it was originally given, and it loses its sense quite a bit in English.

But you get the general impression. He will not falter. He'll not be discouraged. Nothing puts that servant off. Even the sight of the cross did not deter him.

Even when he was revolted by what was going to happen to him. And he felt agony in his soul. He did not falter, nor was he discouraged. He went on, and he completed the task.

He's persevering and successful, as well as patient and sensitive. That's the style of his ministry. That's the sort of servant we have to look to. And, you know, what can we say?

I mean, it's obvious. There's just nobody like this. He's somebody that will meet all our needs, somebody who we can trust absolutely, because he's this interesting combination of qualities.

[30 : 56] On the one hand, patient and sensitive. On the other, absolutely determined to persevere and be successful. He's everything we could possibly need. Now, let's hurry on to the last point.

The service the servant performs. Now, there's a number of little phrases we've tended to skip over here, which we'll now bring together to indicate the way in which the servant's service was described.

In verse 1, we've got this fact. He will bring justice to the nations. In verse 3, he will bring forth justice. And in verse 4, he establishes justice on the earth.

In his law, the islands will put their hope. Now, there's two things of note here. What he's going to do and the people for whom he's going to do it.

And the first thing is what he's going to do. And clearly, this is connected with justice. And it's the same word here used three times, and that tends to mean it's important.

[32 : 02] This person has come to establish justice. Now, we shouldn't think that's strange, because the Psalms in particular are really quite full of that sort of thing.

We were singing Psalm 72, which is a psalm about Christ, effectively. Endow the king with your justice, O God. He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones, with justice.

The idea that somebody would come to act in justice was common in the Old Testament, and here's a particular case of it. The servant is going to come to establish justice.

Now, the problem is this. To us, that's bad news. But to them, it was good news. To us, this is bad news. Because to think of God as a just God fills us with a sense of sin.

It makes us feel terrible. It makes us realize our guilt, and it makes us see that we are condemned by a holy God. And our instinctive reaction, I would think, to the idea that God is going to visit in justice, is that we prefer if he didn't.

[33 : 13] But not so in the Old Testament. It's obviously depicted as good news that God is coming to do justice. Now, how do we explain that? It was social justice that was particularly in mind here, it seems to me.

Justice has got to do with the vindication of the poor and the oppressed and the needy. That's what justice has got to do with in the Old Testament in particular.

So, we've got the verse in Psalm 72 that we already mentioned. He will judge your afflicted ones with justice. So, when God comes in justice, he looks around for those that are afflicted, for those that are oppressed, for those that are poor, for those that are despised.

And what he does is he acts justly for them. These are people who receive no justice. They're oppressed by the rich. They're despised by everybody. Nobody wants to look after their interests. They've got no clout when it comes to matters of law. Nobody will act on their behalf. They're abandoned, isolated, helpless. And it's to people like that that God comes in his justice.

[34 : 27] And he says to the poor widow who's been, say, deprived of the family piece of land by a rich neighbor, and he comes and does justice for that person. That's wonderful news. Or he comes to this person that's poor and deprived, and he can't get anywhere because everybody wants a bribe and they've no money to pay the bribe and they won't pay it anyway.

And there's nothing that these poor people can do. And God comes and acts justly for them. He rebukes the oppressor. He puts aside money and corruption and bribery. And he puts down the unjust judge and the tyrant and he establishes proper justice.

And that's good news. It's wonderful news for the people of that time. Now we may say, well, that's not great for us. We're in different social circumstances, and so we are. But the point, it seems to me, is this.

God comes to injustice, and that means he comes to look on the poor and needy and the oppressed and the afflicted, and to do what needs to be done to help them.

And that's the bottom line of justice, if you like. And we can apply that general principle, and we can apply it in our own circumstances. This is what the servant does.

[35 : 38] He looks for the oppressed, the poor, the afflicted, and he acts on their behalf. And he does what is necessary to relieve them from their distress. That's good news in any age and whatever social circumstances we live in.

And whether we are oppressed by actual injustice, or despised by rich neighbors, or whatever, or whether it's simply we're oppressed by a sense of sin, or oppressed by a sense of our inability, or whatever, it doesn't matter.

That's the sort of person that God delights to come and help. And that's what the servant is doing here. And who is he doing this for? He's doing it for everybody. He will bring justice to the nations. And that undoubtedly means to the Gentiles. Formerly, it was the people of God who knew God's blessing. They thought of themselves as being the objects of God's favor and love.

Now, the message is, no, no, God isn't restricted in any way. There is no one excluded from his help. The poor the world over. The oppressed the world over. They are going to know God's help in this way.

[36 : 46] This is what the servant is going to bring about. He's going to bring into being an era in which people everywhere will know this grace and experience the benefits of this sort of justice. In his law, the islands will put their hope.

The islands are probably the out-of-the-way places. The places at the back of beyond. And in other words, he says, there's no fear that's excluded from the help of the servant.

And that's the service that the servant performs. Now, at the end of this, the people of Israel have got to say, who is this that he's talking about?

Some will say, this is us. Isn't this wonderful? This is what we are. But that's because they had no spiritual perception. But others would say, yes, Israel is God's servant, but we can't possibly live up

to this.

And they would say, this is the promised help. God is going to send somebody to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. What a wonderful servant this is, who can help us in all our needs.

[37 : 55] Let us say the same thing in our particular circumstances today. I can't live up to the standards God has set. Even as a Christian, I cannot do what I feel I ought to be able to do or what I'm called to do.

There's all sorts of situations in life. Where my sinfulness, my guilt, my inadequacy is there before me. And here's this person set before you as somebody who acts on your behalf and does for you what you can't do for yourself.

What is wrong with him? He's the servant of the Lord in whom the Lord delights. He upholds him. He equips him. He's got everything he needs to do the task properly. And he comes with patience and gentleness.

And he comes too with perseverance and success. And he comes to the poor and afflicted to do what's right and proper for them. This is wonderful news. Let's look to him and put our trust in him and say, he is indeed faithful.

I'm going to trust in him. I'm going to depend upon him to do for me what I can't do for myself. May God bless to us his word. Let's look to him and put his word.