

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Four songs of the Servant: The style of the Servant

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*. Today we begin a new series of talks entitled 'Four songs of the Servant' based on the four Servant songs in the book of Isaiah. These four songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-9; Isaiah 49:1-9; Isaiah 50:4-9; and Isaiah 52:13-53:12 respectively. Our talk this morning is entitled 'The style of the Servant' and is based on Isaiah 42:1-9. Before we consider this in detail, we need to look at the background to these Servant songs.

### Introduction

Even the casual reader of the book of the prophet Isaiah cannot help but be struck by the marked change of character that there is from Isaiah 40:1 onwards. Isaiah 1:1-39:8 are largely taken up with messages of judgment to the nation of Israel for their unfaithfulness and to the surrounding nations for their idolatry. Occasionally shafts of light burst out as in Isaiah 1:18-20 when God tenderly calls to His people to repent and turn back to Him and also in Isaiah 9:1-7 when the promise is made of the coming Saviour: "*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.*" But in the opening verses of Isaiah 40, everything changes! "*Comfort, yes, comfort, My people!*" says your God. "*Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned*" (Isaiah 40:1-2).

The change is so dramatic that critics of the Bible have argued that there must be two different authors of the book. However, this fails to recognise the subjects of each part. In Isaiah 1-39, guilty, sinful man is in view, whether in the nation of Israel or in the surrounding Gentile nations. However, as we shall see, God's perfect Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is very much the subject of the second part of the book and He comes to bring blessing to fallen man! As the hymn writer reminds us:

*"For all is changed when Jesus comes to stay."*

Oswald Jeffrey Smith (1889-1986) © 1940 The Rodeheaver Co.

### God's anticipation of His Servant

We'll read Isaiah 42:1: "*Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!*" Various opinions have been advanced as to who this Servant is. Is it the nation of Israel or a repentant few in their midst or even a restored nation in a coming day. The Bible leaves us in no doubt as to the identity of this Servant. In his Gospel, Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, describes the ministry of the Lord Jesus as fulfilling Isaiah 42:1-3 (see Matthew 12:17-21). In passing, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the fourth Servant song is similarly seen as applying to the Lord Jesus in Acts 8:29-38.

Of course, God had described others as '*My servant*'. So we find Abraham (Genesis 26:24), Jacob (Isaiah 44:1, 45:4) and Moses (Numbers 12:7-8; Joshua 1:2, 7; 2 Kings 21:8) amongst those described in this way. Even the heathen King Nebuchadnezzar is described in this way (Jeremiah 25:9) as God used him to carry away God's people to Babylon in judgment for their unfaithfulness.

When we come to the New Testament, we find that the Lord Jesus describes His disciples in several ways:

- My disciples (John 8:31);
- My friends (John 15:14); and, wonder of wonders,
- My brethren (John 20:17).

But never My servant. Servanthood was a position that the Apostle Paul delighted to take up in responsive love to the Lord Jesus for dying for him at Calvary (see Galatians 2:20; Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1). Paul loved to describe himself as a bond-slave of Jesus Christ. I wonder, can God look down upon you and me and own us as 'My servant'?

But to return to our verse, Isaiah 42:1. The prophet Isaiah wrote some 700 years before the Lord Jesus came into our world. Yet already God is looking forward with eager expectation to the coming of His perfect Servant. Some of us

spend a lot of time looking forward to special occasions: a happy event, a long holiday, a special birthday, Christmas. Yet such is the frailty of human experience that often the looking forward is better than the realisation! Not so for our God and His perfect Servant! At Jesus' baptism, God opened the heavens upon Him, declaring, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Similarly on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter, James and John saw the Lord Jesus in His glory with Moses and Elijah and would have treated them equally, God specially intervened declaring once again, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5).

We need now to think about what God has to say about His perfect Servant. While these things are especially true of the Lord Jesus, we will find that in a lesser measure we can also claim God's promises to His Servant as we seek to serve Him. Moreover the character traits that God was so much looking forward to seeing in His perfect servant are the same character traits that He would wish to see in us.

### **The lifestyle of God's Servant**

We need now to look at the lifestyle of God's Servant. Straight away in Isaiah 42:1, we see God's promise to His Servant: "*Behold! My Servant whom I uphold...*" The Hebrew word translated 'uphold' has the force of 'to keep fast' or 'to help'. That promise had previously been made by God to the nation of Israel: "*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand*" (Isaiah 41:10). Consistently in Scripture, the right hand is used to depict both power and honour. What a tremendous promise of encouragement that must be for any servant of God! God's powerful hand is there, ready to help. You might feel that you would so like to serve God but feel totally inadequate for the task. Be encouraged! Most of God's servants have felt like that at some time or other in their lives. Claim His promise and serve Him in the help that He has promised!

The Lord Jesus showed that dependence on His Father for help in His service. So often in the Gospels we read of Him retiring to some quiet place - the desert (see Luke 5:16), a mountain (Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12), a garden (Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32; Luke 22:39)- so that there in communion with His Father, He might find help for that day. That dependence upon His Father was so complete that He could say, "*The Father who dwells in Me does the works*" (John 14:10). So the Apostle Paul would encourage the believers at Philippi, "*...it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:13).

We need to move on now and look at some of the character traits that would be seen in God's perfect Servant. Isaiah 42:2 tells us: "*He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.*" What a contrast to the way of the world today where so often it seems to be thought that the one who shouts the loudest wins the argument.

When we look at the Gospels, we find that there are indeed very few occasions on which we are told that the Lord Jesus cried with a loud voice. Those few occasions are very significant.

After the week long Feast of Tabernacles which ought to have been a cause of great celebration, we read, "*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'*" (John 7:37-38).

On the cross of Calvary, we have first His loud cry of abandonment, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (Matthew 27:46) and His cry of triumph, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30; Matthew 27:50).

Jesus' summoning of Lazarus from the dead was with a loud cry so that all those there might hear and understand that it was the power of God at work there (John 11:43).

It was, perhaps, His absence of noise and His quiet manner that made Him so accessible and desirable to young children (Matthew 19:13-14).

Isaiah 42:3 continues, "*A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.*" Can you picture the shepherd boy, David, as he tended his father's sheep, wandering by the brook so that he might find a suitable reed wherewith to fashion a pipe and play a tune. Here is a reed, but as he examines it closely, he sees that it is bruised. It will play a discordant note and is fit only to be thrown away. There were those whom the Lord Jesus met whose lives were characterised by discordant notes. James and John, two of His disciples, were such. So fiery was their temper that they had been nicknamed 'Sons of thunder' (Mark 3:17). What did the Lord Jesus do with them? Throw them away as useless? Not a bit of it! Under His influence and teaching, John would be transformed into the disciple who, perhaps more than most, appreciated and wrote about the love of God (see Mark 3:17; John 13:23).

In Bible times, Jewish homes would be lit by a small jar containing oil and some flax for a wick. If the oil was running out, then the flax would start to smoke and give off offensive fumes. It needed to be quenched or the jar refilled with oil. Two thieves were crucified with the Lord Jesus (Luke 23:32-43). Men had decided that these two men's lives

were so offensive that they should be put out. But not so the Lord Jesus! One of those thieves, realising his desperate need, turned to the Lord Jesus in faith and received from Him that wonderful promise, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43). In our world today there are many whose lives might be described as ‘bruised reeds’ or ‘smoking flax’. As followers of the Lord Jesus, we need to be careful that we do not give up on them but rather bring them under the transforming power of the Saviour.

Isaiah 42:4 continues, *“He will not fail nor be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth.”* Another translation reads, *“The reed that is splintered He will never crush, nor blow out a wick dimly burning ... Not dimly He’ll burn, nor will He be crushed.”* That translation better emphasises the parallelism that there is between the appropriate Hebrew verbs. So often we are ready to tolerate those failings we see in others because we readily recognise them in ourselves. The Lord Jesus recognised and helped weakness though no such weakness was ever found in Him!

### **God’s support of His Servant**

In Isaiah 42:1-4, God speaks to all who will listen. In Isaiah 42:5-9, He speaks directly to His Servant: *“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand. I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images”* (Isaiah 42:6-8). Here we have a lovely word of encouragement directly from God to His Servant: *“I ... will hold Your hand.”* Here surely is a promise for the encouragement of each one of us. We do not go alone as we serve Him. He has promised to be with us (Matthew 28:20)!

In his Christmas Day broadcast of 1939, when for many this was Britain’s first Christmas at war, King George VI quoted M. Louise Haskins: *“And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown’. And he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way’”*. With God holding our hand, we will not go astray!

But we need to notice especially the greatness of the work that God’s perfect Servant would accomplish: *“I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles”* (Isaiah 42:6). *“A covenant to the people”* would be the blessing that would come to the house of Israel. Today, that blessing is available on an individual basis through personal faith in Christ as Saviour. In a coming day, when God again takes up His people, Israel, that blessing will be on a national basis. *“As a light to the Gentiles”* would cover the blessing that has come to us Gentiles through Christ. The basis of all blessing, for Jew and Gentile alike, is the redemptive work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. That must be cause for our rejoicing, both now and in eternity!

In Isaiah 42:7, we have detailed the work that this Servant would do: *“To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.”* These aspects of His work were clearly before the Lord Jesus as He stood up in the synagogue for the first time in His home town of Nazareth, and read from Isaiah 61:1-2: *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the LORD”* (Luke 4:17-19).

#### ***“To open blind eyes”***

Several times in the ministry of the Lord Jesus we read of Him giving sight to those who were physically blind (see Matthew 9:27-31; Mark 10:46-52; John 9:1-41). The testimony of the man in John 9 after he was given his sight is worth repeating: *“One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see”* (John 9:25).

The blessing that the Lord Jesus came to bring, however, covers not only physical blindness but, perhaps more importantly, spiritual blindness. Paul writes, *“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this world has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them”* (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Listener, has the light of the good news of Jesus Christ the Saviour shone into your blindness? Then you, too, will be able to rejoice with the blind man we were considering in John 9!

#### ***“To bring out prisoners from the prison”***

The Lord Jesus brought blessing to many who were in the prison of demon possession. Mark tells us about one of the saddest cases: *“Then they brought him to [Jesus]. And when he saw [Jesus], immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So [Jesus] asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I*

*believe, help my unbelief!' When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, 'You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him, and enter him no more!' Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose" (Mark 9:20-27).*

***"Those who sit in darkness from the prison house"***

The words of the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus are still relevant for us today: *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).* The Lord Jesus came into the world to be the light of the world and His promise is still true: *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).*

As we bring this first talk on the Servant songs in Isaiah to an end, I trust that each one of us may have a deeper appreciation of His worth and His work so that we might the better serve Him!

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