

A Just Servant

You are a Christian, Darrin. I still do not understand why you want to help me,” said Abdul. The two were in Darrin’s car headed to an appointment with an attorney.

“That’s exactly why,” smiled Darrin. “It’s not right that they seem hesitant to rent to you.”

Darrin and Abdul had recently graduated from college together and had remained in contact. Abdul told his friend that he was moving out from his parents’ home, and Darrin told him about his nice condominium in an upscale area.

While there were no openings in Darrin’s building, there were several vacancies in others nearby. Abdul had run into difficulty in getting his rent applications approved. When Abdul’s turban-wearing father and hijab-wearing mother accompanied him apartment hunting, one real estate rental manager made snide, disparaging comments about Muslims when she thought she was out of earshot of the family.

After several fruitless efforts to get the housing that Abdul really wanted, he mentioned it to Darrin. Darrin then suggested that they consult his uncle’s attorney.

“God is for all people,” Darrin said. “He doesn’t want anyone to be wrongly treated.”

“Yes, I believe that is true,” Abdul said. “But when you say God, you also mean Jesus? Why would Jesus want to help a Muslim?”

“Christ came to bring love, freedom, and justice,” said Darrin. “His goodness, mercy, and grace are for everyone who will receive it.”

- 1.** *Why would you celebrate justice happening to others?*
- 2.** *Why is celebrating justice being done important?*
- 3.** *Why is Jesus the only one who could bring true justice to the world?*

The Servant's Mission

Isaiah 42:1-4, KJV

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Isaiah 42:1-4, NIV

¹“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.

²He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

³A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

⁴he will not falter or be discouraged

till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

Chapters 40 and 41 of Isaiah reassured God’s people that, regardless of a turbulent political atmosphere and terrible afflictions to come, their nation was firmly in His hands—He alone controlled the destiny of His people, along with that of the world. God directed His people to focus on His true Servant, whom He would choose and strengthen to do His will. Also, the Spirit would indwell the Servant in full measure. Moreover, unlike oppressive earthly kings, the Servant would bring justice to the nations and establish a righteous world order.

Verses 1-4 are quoted in Matthew 12:18-21 with reference to Jesus. The first-century expectations of the Messiah included political agendas and military campaigns, but Matthew 12 quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 to stress that the Messiah was not this type of king. Instead, as the Palm Sunday accounts about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem indicate, He would be a quiet, gentle Ruler who brings justice to the nations. Also, as God’s chosen Servant, He would be noted for His encouragement and truth.

He would not call attention to Himself with a brash voice or flashy rhetoric, but patiently and humbly point people to God.

This Servant would also be characterized by meekness in His dealings with people. The Servant would be careful not to crush a “bruised reed” (vs. 3), and He would be mindful not to snuff out a “smoldering wick.” So, He would deal compassionately with the weak and would mend lives, not smash them.

The Servant would remain loyal and undeterred in establishing “justice” on the earth. Regardless of how difficult this task is for human rulers, the Messiah would succeed. The Servant’s goal was to ensure that those who were wronged would experience real equity. And, verse 4 discloses that the Servant would work untiringly to guarantee that “justice” prevailed around the world. God’s truth and righteousness will flourish even in faraway coastlands. Isaiah envisioned a future day when the Messiah would permanently end all forms of tyranny and exploitation and “bring justice to the nations” (vs. 1).

4. *What was God’s attitude toward His Servant?*

5. *What virtue would most typify the Servant’s ministry?*

6. *What attitude would the Servant display in His ministry?*

The Summons to Serve

Isaiah 42:5-7, KJV

5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep

Isaiah 42:5-7, NIV

⁵⁵This is what God the LORD says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

⁶“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;

I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you

KJV

thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

NIV

to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."

Beginning with verse 5, the Lord spoke directly to His Servant and revealed what He would enable the Servant to do. God created and sustained the "heavens" and the "earth," and gave "breath" and a living spirit to all "people." When Isaiah prophesied, those living in Judah faced enormous uncertainty. Isaiah wanted them to know that God's promises concerning His Servant would come to pass. Isaiah stressed that the Lord brought all things into existence, so He would be able to fulfill His redemptive plans for His people through His Servant.

God declared that He had summoned the Servant to demonstrate His "righteousness" (vs. 6). He alone would sustain and protect His Servant in His ministry. The Lord would appoint the Messiah as a "covenant for the people." As such, He would fulfill every redemptive promise that God made to Israel. God's Servant would also be a "light," or source of truth and deliverance, to Gentile believers. So, through the Messiah, the scope of God's revelation would include both saved Jews and Gentiles.

A key aspect of the Servant's ministry would be to "open the eyes that are blind" (vs. 7) and to "free captives from prison." This verse apparently has both a literal and a spiritual meaning. God would certainly heal the exiles physically and set them free from Babylon's prisons. Yet, the Servant would also open spiritually blind eyes and set free those bound in the dungeon of sin and "darkness"—as Jesus did in His earthly ministry.

7. *Upon what basis did God commission His Servant?*

8. *What notions are suggested by the mention of "light" in Isaiah 42:6?*

9. *What did Isaiah 42:7 mean by its reference to "darkness"?*

The Lord's Glory

Isaiah 42:8-9, KJV

8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.

Isaiah 42:8-9, NIV

⁸"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another

or my praise to idols.

⁹See, the former things have taken place,

and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

God declared that His "name" (Isa. 42:8) is the "LORD," or in Hebrew, *Yahweh*. Though God worked through powerful rulers, such as King Cyrus (44:28; 45:1), to deliver His people from bondage, He nonetheless would not share His "glory" (vs. 8) or majestic splendor with any rulers or "idols." He would receive the "praise" only He deserved.

God alone was the source of the prophecies concerning His Servant. No pagan deity or ruler could claim the honor that was God's sole possession.

The Lord affirmed that earlier predictions—referred to as "former things" (vs. 9)—had come to pass for His people. For example, Isaiah himself had given the Lord's prophecy to King Hezekiah that Judah would be taken captive by the Babylonians—and it had happened (Isa. 39). Now, new prophecies, such as those about the Servant, would take place as well. God announced in advance that these proclamations would happen. Indeed, unlike any earthly entity, the Lord alone could foretell and fulfill what He had declared to His people.

The second half of verse 9 is literally rendered, "before they sprout up." This is an agricultural metaphor that Isaiah's peers would understand. The liberating work of God's Servant was like a seed a farmer planted in the earth. This seed would one day germinate above the ground and bring new life to God's people, just as the Lord had decreed.

10. *Why did God declare that He is the "LORD" (Isa. 42:8)?*

Celebrate Forever!

On November 3, 2016, fans of the Chicago Cubs celebrated in the streets of Chicago, for their beloved Cubs had finally won the World Series after a 71-year drought. Some have called Game 7 the greatest Game 7 in World Series history. And yet, despite their exalted elation, when the next spring training came around, both the team and their fans were then focused on becoming champions again.

In November of 1989, the Berlin Wall finally was torn down after it had divided Germany for more than 28 years. The Germans celebrated their unification as they had never done before. The Germans who witnessed this historic event will never forget this momentous occasion. In time, future generations will recall it as a historic event but not with the euphoria of those who experienced it.

Like these examples, when we experience personal or social justice, we can't help but celebrate, and the euphoria may last a few moments, a few weeks, or even a lifetime. But whatever that justice is, as long as it's temporal, both its effects and the euphoria will fade.

What Jesus has done during His earthly ministry to establish justice, however, is permanent. As God's Servant and Son, Jesus defeated evil on the Cross and death in His resurrection. He has washed away our sins, given us a new life, clothed us with His righteousness, and made us God's children to live forever with Him. Therefore, we can forever celebrate with these words: "In faithfulness [Jesus] will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth" (Isa. 42:3-4).

11. *When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the people celebrated His coming by welcoming Him with palm leaves. What kind of justice did they expect Him to bring?*

12. *How are our expectations for justice from the Lord similar to theirs?*

13. *Why does short-term, make-me-happy "justice," at times, steer our focus away from the permanent justice that God's Servant has established for us?*

God's Servant Does Not Fail Us

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed the coming of God's Servant who would bring true justice to His people. God fulfilled His promise, but not in the way the Jews expected. At times, we expect God to provide instant answers to our prayers and then are disappointed because the Lord seemingly has not responded to our prayers in the way we want. This lesson teaches us that we should focus not on what we want but on what Jesus has done for us.

► *Celebrate God's establishment of justice by reading the "Hosannas" the people shouted at Jesus' triumphal entry in Mark 11:9-10 as well as the description of His eternal justice in Hebrews 1:8.*

KEY VERSE

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. —Isaiah 42:1, KJV

"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." — Isaiah 42:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 6 through April 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Mark 16:1-8—Women Find Jesus' Tomb Empty.
- Tues.** Acts 9:1-9—Jesus Appears to Saul on the Damascus Road.
- Wed.** Romans 5:12-17—Free Gift of Grace and Hope.
- Thurs.** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—The Dead in Christ Will Rise.
- Fri.** 1 Corinthians 15:24-29—All Things under God's Control.
- Sat.** 1 Corinthians 15:50-58—Victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Sun.** 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45—All Are Made Alive in Christ.