

Our God Saves: Believe

The Chosen Servant

Isaiah 42

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“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. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. 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: “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, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them”” (Isa. 42:1–9).

Well, how did waiting for the Lord go for you this week?

I heard from many of you about the unique ways that you were applying Isaiah 41:10 in your life. From writing it on the mirror of your kids’ bathroom to making it a calendar reminder, I love it when we can find creative ways to make biblical truth deeply practical.

Let me encourage you to make intentional waiting a regular part of your spiritual practice, especially if you are struggling with fear and anxiety. Carve out five to fifteen minutes when you can simply quiet your heart, rehearse the five promises of Isaiah 41:10, and thank God for the promise of his provision.

As you do this, it will not only help quiet your anxious heart. If you are a Christian, it should also stun you how the desires of your heart have been and continually are transformed. What I mean is this: it’s a miracle that any human being would wait **for the Lord**.

Do you know why?

First, because waiting is not our instinct. We want to “do it.” And we want everything faster. Our repulsion for waiting is an expression of our self-sufficiency. Secondly, if we do wait for something, it’s often the wrong thing. We long for and desire things (“wait”) that give us control, make us feel safe, and fulfill us. In other words, we often wait for what the Bible calls “idols.”

Ray Ortlund, in his commentary on Isaiah, says this:

The greatest miracle in the universe is not when God hung the planets in space. The greatest miracle in the universe is when God transforms a compulsive idolater into a glad worshiper of himself alone.¹

When you wait and worship, it should create the feeling of wonder. Waiting for the Lord is a grace.

In Isaiah 42, we find the word “wait” used again. This time it reads like this:

*“He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands **wait** for his law” (Isa. 42:4).*

This verse tells us that the entire world is waiting for God’s law. The created order is waiting for a broken world to be made right.

Chapter 42 shows us a vision of what we really need, who has the power to do it, and what we’re like. It’s an invitation to be sure that we are waiting wisely.

What We Need

In this first section, we see what God’s desire and plan look like for his people and the world. Remember Isaiah 6, when the prophet was in the temple and he saw the Lord sitting upon the throne? Remember what the seraphim said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3).

That vision was the basis of Isaiah’s call to ministry (see Isa. 6:8), but it’s also the plan of God through the nation of Israel. The nation was supposed to be a blessing to the nations and a light to the world. But their disobedience and idolatry diminished their witness. We saw this last week in regard to idols:

“Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you” (Isa. 41:24).

Waiting for and trusting in idols led to the exile. Chapter 42 is an invitation to consider both the vision of God and what we really need. What’s the solution?

We’re introduced to someone with a grand announcement: “Behold, my servant. . .” (v. 1). Verses 1-9 provide a lot of detail as to what this servant is like and what he does. And I’m sure that it won’t surprise you to know that this is an Old Testament description of what was fulfilled in Jesus. There’s a lot to see here.

In verse 1, we see the servant’s connection to God:

¹ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [Isaiah: God Saves Sinners](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 276.

- He's upheld – the idea (“grip fast”) is that he's on a mission orchestrated by God himself²
- He's deeply loved – this servant is a delight to the heart of God
- He's filled with the Spirit – he receives divine empowerment for his mission

Those of you familiar with the gospels may be thinking about the baptism of Jesus. It's no wonder that Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the moment when Jesus identifies with humanity through his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on him, and we hear “You are my beloved son; with you I am well-pleased” (Luke 3:22).

Notice what he will bring: justice to the nations. This is an important theme. The word is used three times in verses 1-4. It's an important biblical word. At a basic level biblical justice is connected to what is right and true. That's why the word is used thirty times in Psalm 119 and twenty times in Deuteronomy for the law of God.³ True justice is that which fits with God's Word.

But the word is also used in Exodus 26:40 for the “plan” of God for the tabernacle. Ray Ortlund says that the word means more than legal correctness. It indicates a blueprint for human existence.⁴ Biblical justice is simply a society or a people living in a way that fits with the heart and purpose of God. It's loving God and loving your neighbor.

The book of Isaiah helps us with justice in two ways. First, it shows us that ultimate, perfect justice is something that can only be brought by the Messiah. So, we must look to the future. But secondly, we also see the people of Israel being rebuked for their lack of concern for people. Remember Isaiah 1?

“Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause” (Isa. 1:17).

Isaiah helps look for a future kingdom while at the same time praying “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This helps us avoid the ditch of “it's all up to us” or the ditch of “it's all up to him” when it comes to justice in the world in which we live.

We need a servant of the Lord to bring God's blueprint for how to live.

What's more, we need the kind of servant that leads in a way that fits with God's heart. Notice verses 2-4 and the demeanor of this servant. This is important, especially in a day when needed attention is being given to the topic of abuse. According to Alec Motyer, he's not seeking to startle, dominate, or shout others down (v. 2); instead, he's tender with the bruised reed and helpful to the faintly burning wick (v. 3). He is gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29).

² J. Alec Motyer, [Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 292.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [Isaiah: God Saves Sinners](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 272–273.

What's more, he's unrelenting. In verse 4, we see that he doesn't grow faint or get discouraged. While the whole creation is waiting for what we need, the servant of the Lord, Jesus, is not wearing out or getting anxious about the plan of God.

This is the kind of leader and Savior we need. If you lived in Isaiah's day, you could only look forward to this. But for those of us who are Christians, we can look back and be grateful because of who Jesus is. Here's the invitation from Jesus:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
(Matt. 11:28–29).

He is who we really need.

Who Will Do It?

Once again, we find that Isaiah grounds our hope and assurance in the bedrock of God's character and his power. Over ten years ago as we studied the book of Job, I made a spontaneous statement that has proven helpful to me and several of you: "the 'who?' question is more comforting than the 'why?' question."

As we are making our way through Isaiah, and as I think about issues like fear and anxiety (which seem to be a big theme in this book!), I think we could also say "the 'who?' question is more comforting than the 'what?', 'when?', and 'how?' questions."

In fact, I've changed how I read 1 Peter 5:7-8. I've focused more on the following words:

*"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the **mighty hand of God** so that at the proper time **he may exalt** you, casting **all your anxieties on him**, because **he cares for you**" (1 Pet. 5:6–7).*

Verses 5-17 are a beautiful summary of the strength and power of God. Notice the following:

- Verse 5 – God is the creator of the universe who gives life and breath to everything and everyone
- Verse 6 – God is the one who called them, he is the one who preserves them, and his plan is for the nation to be a "light for the nations"
- Verse 7- God is on a mission to bring spiritual freedom to those who are blind and trapped
- Verse 8 – God is full of glory, and it exclusively belongs to him
- Verse 9 – God is at work doing something new, and he's fulfilling his prophecies

These are biblical promises about who God is, and they're meant to be deeply encouraging.

This reminds me of one of my favorite moments in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian and Hopeful are in a dungeon within Doubting Castle and terrorized by the Giant Despair. Suddenly, Christian realizes that he has a key in his pocket. He says, "What a fool I am. . .to lay here in a stinking dungeon when I could just

as easily walk at liberty. In my coat, next to my heart, I have a Key called Promise. I am persuaded it will open any lock in Doubting Castle.”⁵

When you understand the “who?” question, you are led to worship.

Verses 10-17 are an invitation for the whole world to join in the wonder of what God is like. In 10-12, we see in specific invitation: a global vision of worship. Once again see echoes of this in the book of Revelation.

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth’” (Rev. 5:9–10).

And then we see another example of God reminding his people about his power—“like a mighty man. . . a man of war” (v. 13).

- There’s urgency in verse 14
- There’s a warning of judgment in verse 15
- There’s a promise of deliverance in verse 16

Don’t miss the short phrase in the second half of verse 16—“these are things I do, and I do not forsake them.” God is offering a way to live based upon trusting in him. Every one of these statements is designed to kindle faith-filled strength in the believer.

But this section also ends with a warning. Isaiah returns to the theme of idolatry because that’s the issue here. Isaiah makes a point to highlight the foolishness of trusting in anything other than God:

“They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, ‘You are our gods’” (Isa. 42:17).

Isaiah is desperate for the people of God to turn from their idols and believe in God’s ability to help them. This was an important issue because behind most of our decisions and much of our worry is a calculation as to what will make me “okay.” Steve Cuss, in his book *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, says:

“An idol is anything other than Jesus that you must have to be okay...Idols are not immediately easy to identify in your life, but one sure way to begin is to pay attention to when you are anxious, feeling threatened, or needing something in order to be settled.”⁶

What is the solution? To know and rehearse the “who?” question.

⁵ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress in Modern English*, (Newberry, FL: Bridge Logos, 1998), 160.

⁶ Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 66 (Kindle).

“God gave me gifts to use for God’s glory, but I turn them into idols and quickly forget the source, choosing instead to seek comfort and security from the gifts rather than the God who gave them.”⁷

What We’re Like

The forty-second chapter of Isaiah ends in a cautionary tone. After showing us the glorious hope of the servant of God and offering hope through the promise of God’s power, Isaiah concludes with a sober summary of what God’s people are really like. It’s meant to create humility.

The most important verse in this section is Isaiah 42:20:

“He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear” (Isa. 42:20).

God is concerned about the spiritual condition of the people which is characterized by blindness and deafness. But it’s addressed here as an opportunity to change.

“Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! 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?” (Isa. 42:18–19).

Now, Isaiah is referring to Israel here, not the previous “servant.” The reason is that Israel’s failure to fully be God’s servant has led to the need for another. In this respect, Jesus is the true Israel.

God’s people are presently under discipline because of their failure. Their hard-heartedness, idolatry, and lack of concern for one another led to the invasion by Assyria and then by Babylon. That’s why verses 21-23 talk about a people being plundered, looted, and trapped.

God enacted firm discipline. Notice the “who?” question again emerges in verses 23-25. God gave them the law of God. He sent them prophets. But they refused to listen. The same God who was behind the righteous provision of the law was also behind the exile.

Why is that important? Because when the people came to their senses and humbled themselves, their only hope was in the character and faithfulness of God. And the fastest path forward was the realization of who they were in light of who God is. The same is true for us today; renewal comes through repentance.

There’s no way that they would look for a deliverer if they didn’t realize how blind and deaf they truly were. But once they realized it and embrace their brokenness, they could seek renewal because of the character of their faithful, forgiving God.

We wait for the Lord.

⁷ Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 69 (Kindled Edition).

For some of you, the step of humility is putting your trust in Jesus for the first time. It's coming to terms with the fact that you really are a sinner. You cannot save yourself. Why not confess Christ as Lord today, and allow him to be your Savior and Lord?

For those of you who are Christians, let me return to a text we read earlier:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6–7).

Humility may feel a bit scary at times. You may feel a bit out of control. You may not know what's going to happen. But here's what you can do:

Wait for the Lord.

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