

Unit II: God Promises a Just Kingdom

Seeking a Champion of Justice

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 98
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 42
PRINT PASSAGE: Isaiah 42:1-9

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)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explore the concept of “Messiah.”
- Sense the wonder of Jesus’ role as servant to the nations.
- Emulate Jesus as a servant of God who executes justice.

*Key Terms

Light (verse 6)—Hebrew: *or* (ore): bright; clear; illumination.

Servant (verse 1)—Hebrew: *Ebed* (eh’-bed): slave.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

In sports, a champion is a person or team that has defeated or surpassed all rivals in a competition. It can also be one who fights for or defends a cause on behalf of someone else. Champions are rewarded often with tangible trophies or elevated to places of status or prestige. In one way or another, we all have had experiences involving vying to best others and become champions or have championed the cause of others. Those experiencing persecution and oppression long for someone to defend them and support their desire for justice or freedom. As a people, we have had those who fought for and gave the ultimate sacrifice to secure civil rights. They were indeed champions of justice. God’s people look for champions who are committed to joining Him in His work to secure His just kingdom. Through the prophet Isaiah, the desire for a champion of justice was forecast for Judah, one who would bring hope, comfort, and blessings following the predicted judgment of their Babylonian captors.



The Biblical Context

Isaiah was a prophet in Judah who ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary of Hosea's and Micah's. His call to ministry was given and positively responded to in the year of King Uzziah's death (ca. 739 BC). Isaiah's prophetic ministry can be thematically divided into two major sections: Judgment (chapters 1–39) and Future Salvation (chapters 40–66). This second section can be further subdivided into three subsections: chapters 40–48 (the hope and comfort of a blessed future); chapters 49–57 (the prophetic and priestly functions of the coming Messiah/Servant); and chapters 58–66 (a description of the future glory of God's people). This lesson's context is the first of four “servant songs” (see Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12) referring to the promised Messiah, the future champion of justice. These “songs” reveal the servant's character and His universal mission. Isaiah 42:1-3 refers to Jesus Christ at His first Advent (see Matthew 12:18-20).

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Servant's Credentials

(Isaiah 42:1-4)

KJV

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.

NIV

“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.

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


3 “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering

wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

4 “he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

God formally presents the Servant and describes His credentials. The Servant was His personal choice and will be upheld (confirmed or supported) by Him (**verse 1a**). Additionally, because of God's great delight in Him (**verse 1b**), He has empowered Him with His Spirit (**verse 1c**). His task will be to bring long-awaited justice, not just to Israel as they expected, but to the whole world as well (**verse 1d**). Through Him God will restore the natural world order characterized by righteousness and social justice for all people. The manner in which the Servant would execute this task is also unique. His ministry would be quiet, gentle, and submissive (**verse 2**), a vast contrast to the behavior of the world's leaders; He would not use His power to harm anyone or anything (**verse 3**). Rather than harm, He would bring encouragement and comfort to the oppressed and victimized. Because of His faithfulness, justice will prevail and become a reality. Some see the fulfillment of this first servant song in Christ's healing ministry (see Matthew 12:17-21). The Servant, empowered by the Spirit of God, will never be broken or discouraged and will accomplish the task of bringing justice to all (**verse 4**). The future fulfillment of the Servant's task looks beyond His first advent to

His second coming when He will rule the earth in perfect justice. These words of hope were given to Judah (Israel) prior to their Babylonian captivity and were meant to comfort and encourage them to look forward to a blessed future despite their failure as God's chosen people. We who have experienced the blessings of salvation because of His first coming can also be encouraged by the fact that we have an eternal hope of reigning with Him in His kingdom of justice when He comes again. Our responsibility goes beyond rejoicing in this hope to living godly lives and championing the justice He desires, as we await His coming.

 **What Do You Think?** How can we successfully overcome discouragement over the injustice that we observe and experience daily and remain committed to championing justice?

The Servant's Commission (*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 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

5 This 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 to be a covenant for the people and a *light* for the Gentiles,

7 “to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

The Servant would experience difficulties in fulfilling His God-appointed tasks. God spoke directly to the Servant with personal words of assurance (**verse 5**). The basis for the Servant's success is God's sovereign control of all creation. God promised to assist the Servant in His mission because He called Him to be in His righteous will (**verse 6**). He further assured the Servant that He will successfully fulfill God's covenant promises to Israel and be a light of revelation for the Gentiles (**verse 7**). The Jews would one day be freed from physical captivity, but the Servant will be the source of their spiritual freedom and the only source of spiritual truth. Those whom God calls He also equips, empowers, and sustains. The source of success in ministry is the power of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of those whom He has called and commissioned. The community of faith has been commissioned to champion God's plan to establish justice for all. Although the fruition of His plan is a future reality, we can commit to serve as sources of encouragement to the

oppressed and disheartened, while pointing the lost to Him for freedom from spiritual bondage and blindness (see Matthew 5:13-16).

? What Do You Think? We have the assurance of success if ministry relies on the power of the Holy Spirit. What evidence is there that suggests that our ministry efforts are Spirit-controlled and not self-centered?

The Servant's Guarantor (*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.

NIV

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

9 "See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

God assured the Servant of His assistance and power to accomplish His commission. The guarantee that the Servant's work will be successfully carried into effect is the Lord Himself (**verse 8**). God pledged both His name and His honor. In this context, God declared His uniqueness above the sham gods of idolatry whom His people were guilty of worshipping. He alone had given this prophecy and this task to His Servant, and He would not let idols take the credit for what He alone could do. The former prophecies—that is, all that He had already done for Israel—were proof that what He was now speaking would certainly come to pass (**verse 9**). No lifeless gods could foretell the future. The "new things" in the future (Israel's restoration and the conversion of the Gentiles) would come to pass through the ministry of His appointed Servant/Messiah. God guarantees success in ministry that is Spirit-empowered and God-focused. He also expects that the credit goes to Him alone. Surrounded by a self-centered culture, believers must be careful that they do not fall prey to the temptation to enthrone and glorify self when ministries flourish. It must be remembered that God's name is also Jealous (see Exodus 34:14) and He will not share His glory with anyone or anything else. Glorifying God in all things is more easily said than done. This can only be accomplished by living a Spirit-filled life of obedience toward Him.

? What Do You Think? In what ways would ministry change if the focus were totally on the Servant's God-given commission?

A Closing Thought

Jesus Christ, the Servant/Messiah, was and is the champion of justice. During His first coming, He fulfilled this task through His teaching, healing, and sacrificial death. His ultimate sacrifice made


salvation possible, freeing from spiritual bondage all who accepted it. Because of our salvation, we can look forward to the future with hope for the establishment of a kingdom where justice will ultimately prevail for all who know Him as Lord.

Your Life

The Servant/Messiah Jesus Christ challenges us as the people of God to emulate Him and become models of justice for others to follow. We have access to the same power He was given by the Father to champion justice in our communities as we await His coming to make it an eternal reality for redeemed humankind.

Your World!

God’s people in the world today are surrounded by reminders that His kingdom of justice has not yet arrived. However, we have His guarantee that it will come because of the finished work of His Servant/Messiah on our behalf and His infallible Word. Our task is to practice “active waiting” by intentionally confronting injustice for the disenfranchised and discouraged among us.

 **Closing Prayer** Thank You, Father, for the hope of a kingdom where justice will one day reign supreme. As we praise and thank You for this promise, use us to make it a present reality for the suffering around us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Next week’s lesson (Easter Sunday) explores how the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, engenders hope for authentic justice. Read both Mark 16 and 1 Corinthians 15 in preparation for this study.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , April 6	“Women Find Jesus’ Tomb Empty”	(Mark 16:1-8)
TUESDAY , April 7	“Saul Meets Jesus on the Damascus Road”	(Acts 9:1-9)
WEDNESDAY , April 8	“The Free Gift of Grace and Hope”	(Romans 5:12-17)
THURSDAY , April 9	“The Dead in Christ Will Rise”	(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
FRIDAY , April 10	“All Things Are under God’s Control”	(1 Corinthians 15:24-28)
SATURDAY , April 11	“Victory through Our Lord, Jesus Christ”	(1 Corinthians 15:50-58)
SUNDAY , April 12	“All Are Made Alive in Christ”	(1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45)