

The Baptism of our Lord

Text: Isaiah 42:1-7

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. 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 law the islands will put their hope.” ⁵ This is what God the LORD says— he who 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 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.

Theme: God Himself a Servant Form Puts on

Imagine what God is like. What do you think of when you think of God? Things like power, majesty, glory, and love often come to mind. But do you ever think of a servant? Today I would like to look at how God puts on a servant form in order to save His people.

I. God had many servants in the Bible.

Some of them were willing servants. King David is called the servant of the Lord more than anyone else. Moses is referred to as God’s servant the second most. Others like Abraham, (Gn 26:24), Caleb (Num 14:24) or Job (Job 1:8) are also called God’s servants. You might remember how God told satan at the beginning of the book of Job, *“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; his is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”* All of these people served God in their lives. Abraham followed God’s command to move to the promised land. Caleb said that the land of Canaan was good. King David trusted in the Lord, and Moses led the people of Israel from their bondage to the promised land. They all loved the Lord and served Him because He was their God. They knew that God would provide them with all that they needed.

But none of them were perfect servants. Abraham doubted God’s promise of a son and had a child through His wife’s servant. Moses never wanted to lead the children of Israel in the first place. He pleaded that God would find someone else. King David committed adultery with a married woman and had her husband killed. Job struggled to understand why he was suffering so much.

As Christians we are all a lot like them. We are imperfect servants. We all have our flaws. We have our weaknesses. We are sinners. We want to serve God, but we fall into temptation and do things that we know are wrong. We sometimes doubt God’s goodness. We think that we are smarter than God and could do things better. Sometimes we would rather that God would choose someone else. None of us are perfect servants. God has been so good to us, and we haven’t responded in kind.

Some servants are unwilling servants. The Old Testament also mentions some of them. Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem and carried the people into exile in Babylon is called God’s servant. God used him to carry out His wrath against His people. Nebuchadnezzar did not

know the Lord. In fact, he probably thought that he had conquered Israel's God when he destroyed their temple. But little did he know that this was all according to God's plan. King Cyrus of Persia is also called God's servant. God used him to return the exiles back to the promised land. Isaiah 45:4 prophesies about him, *"For the sake of Jacob my servant of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me."*

This shows that even unbelievers become God's unwilling servants. They might not know God. They might fight against God and His people, but God even uses what they do to serve His purposes. Everything works according to His will in the end.

But there is one person, who is the perfect servant of God. He is introduced in 4 servant songs in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 42 begins, *"Here is My Servant whom I uphold; My chosen One in whom I delight."* These songs speak of the perfect Servant of God. It was at Jesus' baptism when God pointed Jesus out as His chosen Servant, as His beloved Son. As our text says, He put His Spirit on Jesus to give Him the gifts necessary to accomplish our salvation. Just as we see all three persons of the Trinity when Jesus was baptized, the Father who spoke, the Son who was baptized, and the Holy Spirit who came in the form of a dove, these verses also speak of the Father who announces the Servant, the Servant who is the Son, and the Spirit who is put on the Servant. When Jesus was baptized, John declared that He was sinless. Jesus is the fulfillment of this perfect servant of God.

II. Isaiah describes two things that God's Servant brings.

The first is justice. He writes in verse 1, *"He will bring justice to the nations."* It says in verse 3, *"In faithfulness He will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till He established justice on earth."* The word for "justice" is one of the most important words in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is the word "mishpat." This word describes the judgements that a judge makes or that a ruler rules his land justly. This describes how Christ acts. He is just in everything that He does. He is able to discern what is good and what is wrong. He can look right into the heart. It's interesting when it says, *"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."* Each of these things is very delicate, but He will not break the reed which is damaged or snuff out the candle that is about to go out. He is gentle and humble. He is a servant. He especially looks out for those who are most vulnerable. Jesus showed how He fulfilled this when He said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Jesus is the righteous judge. He knows our hearts. He will judge us with faithfulness. This part gives us the assurance that He will never leave us or forsake us. We can always count on Him and His Word. Verse 4 says, *"In His law the islands will put their hope."* We might feel weak and worn out, even as though our lives are falling apart. Jesus is the perfect servant of God who came to save us and deliver us from every evil.

He is also righteous. Verse 6 says, *"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 to the Gentiles".* The Hebrew word for righteousness is another of those important words. It is tzedakah. While justice describes how the Servant acts. Righteousness describes His character. He is righteous. In Him there is no sin nor any kind of evil. He is the opposite of us. Isaiah writes that we are all unrighteous. All of our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Is 64:6)

But God's Servant is righteous. He didn't need to be baptized like the rest of the people. However, the righteous Servant of God took our place. He bore our sins. He suffered our punishment. The servant song in Isaiah 53 describes it graphically when it says, "*But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.*" It sums up His work when it says, "*After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge my **righteous** servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.*" (53:11)

We are all imperfect servants. We are so bad, that we should be called God's enemies, rather than His servants, but Christ, the Righteous One, has born all of our sins. He takes them away, and covers us with His righteousness. God has made a new covenant through the blood of His servant, which is based on the forgiveness of all of our sins. We don't need to live in guilt and regret, for Christ, the righteous Servant of God has taken away the sins of the world.

Christ is the perfect servant of God, the One who works justice for all and who justifies those who trust in His forgiving love. We look at ourselves and see our imperfections and our weaknesses, but we thank God for the greatest Servant of all, who have given us God's mercy and showered us with His grace.

Amen.

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