

# The Servant of the Lord

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well folks, great to see you today. Let me invite you to grab your Bibles and to turn to that Old Testament book of Isaiah. And this is where we're going to be over the next few weeks as we gear up for Easter.

And I'm aware that some of us will be really familiar with this part of our Bibles. And I'm aware some of us will have never ventured here before in our lives.

Maybe this is the first time you've ever heard from the book of Isaiah. But what we're going to see over the next few weeks, I pray, is not only is this a book that contains some quite breathtaking descriptions of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it's a book that explains why you and I in 21st century Scotland on a rainy Sunday morning have bothered to come to church. It's that big what's going on in Isaiah.

So with that in your mind, park it in your mind and come with me to this book of Isaiah. And let's try and get into this book together. To get us into it, I'm going to put some song lyrics up on the screen.

[ 1 : 08 ] And if you were around in the 70s, you'll recognize these song lyrics, I'm sure. And you'll probably be humming them throughout the rest of the sermon. But just keep it quiet if you're going to do that.

OK, so songs, they have a wonderful way of capturing moments in history. I was thinking about it this week. I remember the version of Candle in the Wind that Elton John wrote for Diana's funeral back in 1997.

Do you remember that one? Just captured that moment so wonderfully well. I remember hearing for the first time U2's song Sunday Bloody Sunday that captured the emotions of that dreadful day in Northern Ireland in 1972.

Songs have a way of capturing moments in history. And here's another song that captures a moment in history. It goes like this. By the rivers of Babylon.

There we sat down. Yeah, we wept. As we remembered Zion. When the wicked carried us away in captivity required from us a song.

[ 2 : 13 ] Now, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Words made famous by Boney M, who sang it in 1970.

But words that are taken from Psalm 137. And Boney M, if you probably humming that song in your head. I am even up here. It's so annoying. Boney M made that song sound very upbeat.

But it's original. We have to understand Psalm 137. It's original. These words are anything other than upbeat. Because Psalm 137 is a psalm that's filled with pain.

And it's filled with tears. And it's filled with massive questions about where is God in our lives.

Because it's a psalm that's written by a generation of God's people living at some point.

We'll just call it after 600 BC. And they have been so painfully defeated and carried away from their homeland. And they're living some 500 miles away from Israel, from Judah, in this place called Babylon.

[ 3 : 18 ] Now Babylon is the cultural and religious capital of the ancient world. I was reading about it this week. Historians tell us that this place is home to some 1200 temples which are dedicated to pagan gods.

And the people of Israel, they're being taunted by their enemies as they sit here by the rivers of Babylon. They're being taunted and people are saying to them, where is your God now?

Where has he gone? I'll tell you where he is. He's absolutely nowhere because we defeated him.

Because in this day, to defeat a nation, it's also thought that you've defeated their God.

So these people are being taunted, where is your God? Where is he? And so they're sitting there.

They're saying, remember the days when we used to sing the Lord's song in Zion. What incredible

days.

What days seem like a million miles away from where we are just now. And the question you have to ask as you come to Isaiah is, why has this happened? Why has this happened?

[ 4 : 21 ] Well, the first big section of this book, chapters 1 to 39, answer that question, why? Chapters 1 to 39, answer that question, why?

It's often said that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. And that's exactly what's going on for Israel in the background here.

You see, Isaiah, he's speaking to a generation of God's people who are still living in their homeland. And one of the things that the Lord has said through Isaiah was that this exile to Babylon from Judah is coming because of the people's flagrant rebellion and idolatry.

This is why it's coming. Their hypocritical and their token worship of him, their exploitation of the poor and vulnerable who are living in the land. The fact that they're looking to political alliances with surrounding superpowers to try and secure their future as a nation.

The fact that they're having love affairs with the idols of the nations who are round about them, who they are looking to for their security and their satisfaction rather than God. And their idolatry is a double whammy, really.

[ 5 : 36 ] If you want to think about it like this, idolatry, it always is looking for something else to fill the hole apart from God. Because by cutting themselves off from God, not only are they cutting themselves off from the source of living and fresh water.

It's able to give life to their souls. But they are now drinking from contaminated water because they are filling their lives with these false promises and hopes of lifeless idols, of these God pretenders of the nations round about them.

It's a double whammy. You know, we're trying to sell our flat at the minute and every time we know people are coming round, what we do is we fill it with fresh flowers.

That's what the estate agent told us to do, so we're doing it. Fill it with fresh flowers. And those flowers, when we buy them, they look great, they smell great, they make the flat look fresh and vibrant.

But see, six days later, we even cleared it up this morning, the petals have fallen off. And they go in the bin. And I was thinking about it this week.

[ 6 : 44 ] Do you know when those flowers died? They didn't die when I put them in the bin. They didn't die when we bought them from the shop. Those flowers started dying the minute they were cut off from their life source.

Their only hope is that they get reconnected with the thing that gives them life. And that's exactly true of what's going on in the lives of these Israelites.

And that's exactly what's true of us for each of us here today. As we stand before a holy God, that if we have rejected Jesus Christ, we have cut ourselves off from the source of life.

And we're dying. Without him, without this God, this God of grace, we're just about to see in a minute, we are dying. You see, the exile is not some kind of unexpected world event.

It's the sovereign act of a holy God who's used this nation of Babylon to bring his judgment to pass on his people for their willful rejection of him.

[ 7 : 50 ] So the people, they sit there in Babylon and they're singing, lamenting, in the mud of the road mess, hearing the taunts of their enemies.

And they're probably thinking, is this curtains for us as a people? Is this it? Have we had it? What have they got?

Where do they run? Well, what they have got, the only card that they've got, is the grace card. What they have, is they have a God of grace who's committed himself to them.

And who speaks words of comfort to them. And says, stop looking to idols. Stop looking to things that will not give you life and come back to me. Come back to me.

Return to me. That's where chapter 40 breaks in. Comfort, comfort my people, says the Lord.

Comfort them. Speak words of truth about what I'm going to do to act, to reverse this situation.

[ 8 : 51 ] You see, God in this first half of this book, 1 to 39, he's made some pronouncing judgments about what he's going to do because of the people's sin. But he's made some massive promises about what he's going to do for his people.

Promises that he's going to act to save them from their mess. Lead them to the land that he's promised them. Cleanse them from their sin.

Rebuild them as a people and give them renewed hearts that beat for him alone, that joyfully obey him and want to worship him. And get this, through them, his renewed people, God's people, he's going to, through them, bless the nations.

And they'll also come to worship him and enjoy him forever as their God. Huge promises. And huge promises that God will bring to pass through this figure who's right at the heart of this book, who he speaks about and who he calls my servant.

My servant. And God is saying to a generation of people who will soon find themselves despairing in exile, he's saying, don't fear. I've not abandoned you.

[10:04] Don't base your life on how things feel. Don't base your life on how things seem. Don't base your life on your ability to fathom. Don't base your life on alliances with outside nations.

Base your life on what I've said is true about you and about me and about the world in which you live. Trust me. This is what he's saying. Trust me. And trust particularly that I'm going to send, trust that I'm going to send this servant.

I'm going to send him to save you. And so we get these four songs in this book about God's servant. And these are the songs that we're going to be thinking about over the next few Sundays that were fulfilled some 700 years later after these words were spoken in the coming of Jesus Christ.

And so the invitation today, whoever you are, whatever you think about this God, whatever's going on in your life right now, is to come and maybe even for the first time today, take a fresh look at Jesus.

And come with me then to these spectacular words of Isaiah 42. And this is where we first meet this servant. Into this dark background.

[11:21] As the people are sitting there in Babylon, they're meant to recall these words that God spoke about his servant. And what we see firstly, verses 1 to 4, is that this servant has a mission on his mind. Here is God's view of his servant.

If we pick it up at verse 1. He wants them and he wants you and he wants me to know how he feels about his servant. His man. The guy he's got for his mission.

Get my servant into your bloodstreams. This is what he's saying. You see, God the Father hasn't simply just chosen his servant. Do you see the word at verse 1? He delights in his servant.

Now I don't know what you do when you buy a book. But what I usually do is I go into Waterstones and I pick up a book and I look at the price and I think, nope, I'll go with Amazon.

That's what I do. I'm everything wrong. Everything that's going wrong with the British High Street today. But the first thing I look for when I pick up a book is who is recommending this book?

[12:22] Do you do that as well? Who's recommending this book? Who's telling me that I should buy this book? Is it worth buying? The thing to see here, this servant, not only could there not be a better recommendation of him to us, but this recommendation could not come from a better source.

God the Father says, here is my servant in whom I delight. Do you see it? This is my guy, says God. This is the one in whom I delight. I sing over him.

I rejoice knowing everything that I will send him to do and accomplish. Everything that he's going to do. It's exactly what we see in Jesus' baptism, isn't it? Comes up.

He's baptized. John the Baptist. He comes up and God says, this is my son whom I love. This is what he says. We saw earlier in the kids talk of the transfiguration. This is my son. Listen to him. How incredible is this? God is declaring, here is my son. This is who I'm going to send. And with him, I am well pleased. And so the invitation is you and I sit in here all these years later, looking at the swelling heart of God filled with love for his servant.

[13:36] Surely it's to come and to breathe him in. To understand who he is and what he's done and then to lighten him too. This is God's servant.

He is the one to whom, do you see, God will give his spirit. To empower him. To get the job done. Lovely little Trinitarian reference there, showing us that the Father, the Son and the Spirit, all three members of the Godhead are joyously in on this divine mission to rescue sinners.

Now what's the mission? Well, you'll see the word justice there three times in those opening verses. Do you see? Verse one, talking about this servant, he will bring forth justice.

Again, verse three, he will bring forth justice. Again, verse four, he will establish, justice. Now, biblical justice isn't talking about getting rid of poverty or tackling human trafficking and other good things like that, that we as God's people should be massively concerned about and working for.

Biblical justice is primarily about God restoring things to the way that they were originally created to be. The way that this sin has so badly disrupted.

[15:05] This way where sin is dealt with, where wrongs are righted, where tears are wiped, and where hurts are healed, and where creature and creation live in harmony and live to give praise to creator.

This is biblical justice. This is what God's servant is coming to do. He's coming to establish this. This is the kingdom that he's coming to inaugurate. And God loves it.

Do you get his heart here? God loves it. And equally stunning is that, is how this servant will go about his business.

Now, our world is full, isn't it, of power hungry dictators who demand authority by shouting. I was hearing this week that Venezuela's Hugo Chavez once spoke live to the nation on TV for eight hours without breaks.

Fidel Castro similarly spoke for four and a half hours, and I'm told that Gaddafi made it to 95 minutes. Shouting at people, obey me.

[16:26] But how different God's servant here? He will be gentle. His life will be marked by meekness.

That's how he's going to get the job done. Not by shouting. Do you see the descriptions that Isaiah gives us here, or God gives us rather through Isaiah? A bruised reed he will not break. A smoldering wick, which is just a flickering candle.

Tiny little flickering candle. He will not snuff out. In other words, this servant lives not to put people down. He lifts, he lives to lift up the humble. What wonderful words that speak about the tender compassion and the love and the care that this servant will have for human beings.

I got the train back from Glasgow on Monday. And I got to the station in Glasgow, and I remember looking at the screen, and it occurred to me that I had eight minutes to wait for my connecting train. And inside, I was livid, right? Livid. I'm thinking, do they not, does Scott Rail not know that I've got things to do? Does Scott Rail not know that I've got places to be? Has somebody not told them?

[17:46] Why is this train not here now? Why is Bell's Hill train station in Glasgow, if you've ever been there, with its boarded up cafe and its single shelter, why is this not running like the London Underground?

Thank goodness that this servant is impatient like me. Where would we be, friends, if that was the case?

Particularly, if you think about it, the times in life, in our lives, when we are like bruised reeds, and we are like flickering flames, and maybe that's you, you're here right now, and you're feeling like that.

You're fragile, tearful, doubting, delicate, and at the end of our resources. Praise God that Jesus isn't like a baseball umpire, who says strike one, strike two, strike three, and you're out of here. Remember, you used to have an English teacher at school who used to do that. One strike was an LTD. You know what's got LTDs? Lunchtime Detention. You needed to go around and pick up litter in the playground. Three LTDs meant a detention.

[19:01] You were out of there. Praise God that Jesus isn't like this. Praise God that Jesus doesn't stand over me in my lowest moments and shout, shanks, why are you not better? Why are you not better?

Because you're seriously going to have to up your act, up your game, if you want to be in my team. No, Jesus says, don't trust in your own resources. Don't look to idols, but rather he stoops to care and says, come to me, lift your eyes to me, and as we were singing earlier, find in me, you're all in all.

That's why, and you can check this out later, Matthew in his gospel at chapter 12, if you want to scribble that down, check it out later. Matthew tells us that Jesus healed many. He came to him and he just healed them.

He had compassion on them. He loved them. And then Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42, these verses, as if to say, this servant that God said he would send us, us, a broken people, everything that we've done, he would send us.

He's here. And he's here in the person of Jesus Christ. The words of that great old hymn written by Annie J. Flint. His love has no limits.

[ 20 : 19 ] His grace has no measure. His power no boundary known unto men. For out of his infinite riches in Jesus, he giveth and giveth and giveth again.

Israel's only hope is that this God is a God of grace and praise him that he is. Our only hope, friends, you and I, is that this God is a God of grace. And this servant will go about his business like this.

And this servant will be resolute in his desire. He will be faced like Flint. We'll see this next week. I gave the game away there. He will be resolute in his desire to fulfill and to carry out the mission of the Lord.

You see the descriptions here? He will not grow faint. He will not grow discouraged. In other words, this servant will be marked by a steely determination that will push him through the pain barrier, that will see him endure a cost to get this job done.

What a servant. What a servant. And so at verse 5, it's almost as if God moves from talking to us about his servant to talking to his servant about what God is going to do through him.

[ 21 : 42 ] And as he does that, verses 5 to 9, we see the God who has the nations on his heart. But first, it's almost as if Isaiah reminds us who this God is. He's not a defeated deity.

He is the Lord Almighty. Do you see the description of him from verse 5? This God is the first cause of everything. He is the creator of all things.

He is the giver of life. He is the God that spoke. And things came into existence. Love that bit in Genesis. What does it say after God created? He made the stars.

It's as if they were an afterthought to him. The seas, the mountains, and he made us. This God is not only the God who gives life, this is the God who sustains life by the power of his word.

Now, I don't know how your week has been. But for me this week, I know there have been times when worry has really pressed into my soul. And fear. But do you know what?

[ 22 : 49 ] See, taking this passage in has caused me in those times just to go outside, to go for a run, go for a walk, and just to look up. And to say, this is my God, the God who created all things.

This God is big enough to handle my worries. And he's big enough to handle our nation's worries. Surely the Lord is saying here that if you grasp that I'm this big, little Judah, 21st century Brunford Evangelical Church, if you grasp that I'm this big, then you can trust that I've got the world in my hands.

You can trust that I'm going to do exactly what I say I'll do because I'm not lacking in resources or power. You see, this God, friends, isn't in the habit of writing checks that he can't cash.

The promises of this God aren't like money, money off vouchers you get for Asda or Tesco that are going to one day expire and run out. This God says, he promises, and he delivers.

You can trust me with the future, says this God. You can trust that I've got it. Do you see verse 9? God says, I'm telling you what's going to happen before it happens so that when it happens, you'll know that I made it happen.

[ 24 : 05 ] Okay, there's a lot of happening, so let me say it again. I'm telling you it's going to happen before it happens so that when it happens, you'll know that I made it happen. God, this God is sovereign over Babylon and he's sovereign over, if you just want to flick back a little bit to the end of chapter 41, he's sovereign over Cyrus, the Persian king who will later conquer Babylon and allow these Jewish exiles to return home.

God's got it all sorted. As we say to this generation, come to me and trust me. Now this God has history in his fingertips. He's got it.

And no matter what the political events of this week have caused you and I to think, the world's future is in this God's control, sovereign control.

And it's a story that's going somewhere and it's a story that he's writing for his glory and for his purposes. But you see, God's aim in all of this is not simply just to take a group of people back to a small bit of land in the Middle East.

He wants the brightness of his glory to fan out into the nations of the earth. Do you see how often the nations are referred to here? Verse one, the servant will bring justice to whom?

[ 25 : 25 ] The nations, the world. Verse six, he will be what? A light to the nations. So God's goal is to draw people from around the world to himself and to say, come and be made right with me through my servant, through his work.

Come and worship and enjoy me forever. And God's going to do this all through this servant. He's going to do it all through this servant. The one who, verse six, God will give.

The coming of Christ, such a gracious gift from a good God. Grace isn't a thing, it's a person. The servant God will give to the sin, sick world full of people who spiritually cannot see, are lost in darkness, are facing death and judgment and who cannot save themselves.

God will give his servant to rescue them, to be a covenant for them. Do you see that word? To be a covenant for them. In other words, this servant will step in and will shed his blood to permanently broker the peace deal by which sinful people can live in communion with this gloriously loving and holy God permanently.

That's what this servant has come to do. What a servant. As I remember, I asked you at the start that this was going to tell us why we were at church this morning.

[ 26 : 57 ] The reason that we were at church this morning, the reason Brunsford Evangelical Church even exists in Edinburgh in 21st century Scotland is because God is this kind of God.

That's why you and I are here today. Because God is this kind of God with a heart for the nations that beats that they would come to know him and be made right with him. Here's the servant with this mission on his mind.

And here's the God of the Bible who has the nations on his heart. And so again, think back to what we saw at the start, the darkest of backdrops.

Here is God's glorious salvation plan. And here it is in marvelous technicolor. So you can hum it now, okay?

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yes, we, it's hard not to say yeah, isn't it? Yes, we wept when we remembered Zion.

[ 28 : 03 ] This is the song that God's people are singing by the rivers in Babylon with tears in their eyes, with pain in their hearts, with questions in their mind. Where is our God? But you'll see if you scan your eyes down to verse 10, that Isaiah, as he responds to what he's just heard God declare, what God is going to do for his sinful and wicked people to bring them back to him, Isaiah sings a new song of praise.

A song that God's people, as they respond to the news of this servant, a song that God's people are invited to join in with. So just as we finish and before I pray, I thought it would be great as we respond to say this song of praise together.

As we've responded to what God has said through his word this morning. This is the song that's supposed to be on our lips as we respond and take to heart who this servant is. So let's say this together. If you can get it up on the screen.

Sing to the Lord a new song. His praise from the ends of the earth. You who go down to the sea and all that is in it. You islands and all who live in them.

Let the wilderness and its towns raise their voices. Let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Selah sing for joy.

[ 29 : 33 ] Let them shout from the mountaintops. Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim his praise in the islands. The Lord will march out like a champion and a warrior will tear up his zeal.

With a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. God's going to do this through the work of his servant. 700 years later after this Jesus shows up.

This servant friends is an offer for us this morning to come and put our faith and our trust in him.

And we're going to love this series as we journey up to Easter seeing the servant proclaimed to us through the words of Isaiah.

Let's pray together. Father we thank you for the incredible grace that you have shown us in giving us the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Lord I pray just for a few moments now as we respond to this that your spirit would be at work in our hearts as we savor your words in our hearts this morning.

[ 30 : 44 ] And so we ask that these words that were spoken through Isaiah about the Lord Jesus Christ they would last long in our hearts and in our minds. We pray that you would help not let the evil one snatch them away but we pray that you would help us to cherish them and to love him more than anything else in our lives this week we ask and pray.

Thank you for our time together dear Heavenly Father and we commit it to you in Jesus' precious name. Amen.