

The Spirit-Empowered Servant of the Lord

~Isaiah 42:1-9

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The world, our nation and our province face many challenges even this past week. On the provincial front, the week began with the cancellation of a major project north of the oil sands. People looked forward to the creation of 7000 jobs with the project. That will no longer happen. On top of that, the provincial government released its budget and thousands gathered at the legislature on Thursday to protest it. Many of you feel or are starting to feel the budget impact. On the national front, we saw the escalation in the railway blockades. The Ontario Provincial Police moved in to take down the blockade in Belleville last Monday. More protests and blockades have flared up in response. On the world front, Coronavirus continues to spread into Southeast Asia, Europe, into BC and Ontario and maybe eventually here.

Each one of these situations requires wisdom, skill and action to address and resolve. In each situation, I've noticed leaders have appointed others to accomplish the leader's objectives. The Premier of Alberta sends his various ministers to announce and explain their budget. I heard on Thursday that President Trump appointed Vice President Pence to head up the US Coronavirus response. Our Prime Minister sent the Minister of Indigenous Affairs to meet with the chiefs opposing the pipelines. Each leader has given these issues to someone they trust.

On a smaller scale, you and I do the same. We look for people to look after our home or pets when we are away. We entrust to others our job responsibilities or our business when we are away. On the highest level we think about someone who might take care of your children if you were not able to; or your spouse; or your estate or ourselves.

Well God does the same thing. God has great purposes to fulfill in our world. God launched His kingdom with the coming of Jesus. Upon His return, this Kingdom will arrive in its fullness, God will reign over it with justice and righteousness. No war will trouble the people there because they will exist in harmony and peace. We have seen this kingdom portrayed in Isaiah. We heard these words from Isaiah 2 – "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." So, that's a picture of the coming glorious Kingdom of the Lord. It will be like a return to Eden.

But the Bible and Isaiah has taught us that we are on a journey to that kingdom. We experience it partially, but in fullness when Christ returns. Just like Adam and Eve, the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell away from the Lord. Instead of being God's light and hope to the nations, they basked in material prosperity. They ignored the needy and vulnerable among them. So God would allow Babylon to conquer them and take them into exile. But He would then do a new work to shape a new people to come into His kingdom. He could have accomplished all this with just a word from heaven. Instead He would entrust and empower someone to accomplish His kingdom purposes. Today, we will see a description of this person. We will gain a picture that answers the question **Who does God use for His kingdom purposes?** But we will not only see the kind of person God would use. We will see how we can receive God's great kingdom into our lives. Then how we can join God's great purposes for our lives and the world. I pray that you will open yourself up to God and what He has for you today through His word.

Isaiah 42:1-9 (ESV) (Page 516)

42 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.

² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,

or make it heard in the street;

^{3a} a bruised reed he will not break,

and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;

he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged^[a]

till he has established justice in the earth;

and the coastlands wait for his law.

⁵ 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:

⁶ "I am the LORD; I have called you^[b] 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,

⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,

from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to carved idols.

⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth
I tell you of them.”

Who does God use for His kingdom purposes?

Someone who is/will:

A servant (42:1) Bible Scholars call this passage the first Servant Song. It is one of four in Isaiah that focus on the Lord’s Servant. Isaiah will describe him with increasing clarity and detail. But let’s not miss the basic requirement. The Lord uses people willing to serve. So they must not be in it for themselves. They must put others first. They must not look down on serving. They must be put their own preferences aside. The Lord looks for a person willing to call God Lord and live as if God is their Lord. So that’s a pretty counter cultural requirement right from the start. Our world tells us its really all about us and our preferences. But God uses those willing to serve.

Next, we see that God uses someone **Empowered by the Spirit of the Lord (42:1)**. The Lord says, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom I delight, I have put my Spirit on him.” The Spirit is the Lord’s personal presence. God uses those who have His Spirit. Such a person will walk by the Spirit and trust the Spirit’s guidance and leadership. When they face tough situations, they will depend on the Lord’s Spirit for power to persevere. To accomplish His great purpose, God looks for servants who have the Spirit of the Lord.

Then we see that God uses people who **Persevere in faithfully bringing about justice** 42:1,3,4). It’s mentioned 3 times in the first four verses. Verse 1 – He will bring forth justice to the nations. Verse 3 – He will faithfully bring forth justice. Verse 4 – He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth. So this means this servant must have an interest in justice. But they need more than an interest or desire. They needed to actually make it happen. Though discouragement comes in the journey to justice, this person does not give up. They keep going until they have established justice on the earth. What kind of justice are we talking about? One commentator puts it like this. “The servant’s task is to make right within history all aspects and phases of human existence—whether moral, religious, spiritual, political, social, economic, and so forth—so that the prayer will be fulfilled, “Your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).” So now we’re talking about something way bigger than the oil sands and Alberta jobs; way larger than Indigenous rights and pipelines; way greater than a world-wide outbreak of a virus. This servant must establish and deliver a justice that spans all people over all time.

So you’d think this person would be some big, powerful, steamroller king that gets things done and doesn’t let people get in the way. But verse 3 tells us **He gently cares for the weak and those out of resources**. Verse 3 – “A bruised reed, he will not break [...]” A reed was a towering plant common on the river bank or in standing water. Apparently people used them maybe as walking sticks or to hold themselves up. But if it was bruised, it wasn’t much use. The bruised reed represents bruised people. Yet this servant cares for people who have been bruised maybe by life. Others might think them not worth much. But He takes great care not to break them.

A flickering wick referred to lamps or candles that were just about out of oil or wick – that string that the flame burns. So it lacked the resources to keep burning. It would be easy to blow out a light like that. Some people are like that. They have few resources. So it’s easy to blow by them and not even notice them. But the servant will be careful not to blow them out.

In fact, he will bring justice for them. There’s a play on words that might miss in English. Verse 4 – “He will not grow faint.” We’ve just seen that he won’t blow out a faintly burning wick. So, he himself will not burn out or grow faint as He brings forth justice. But notice the next words in verse 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged. Discouraged can also be translated “or be bruised.” So He won’t break a bruised reed and he won’t himself be bruised to the point where it prevents him from establishing justice.

There’s one more characteristic of this Servant. **He brings God’s light and hope to the nations (42:6-7)**. The Lord addresses the servant in verses 6-7. He says “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 prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” So this servant will announce the coming of God’s kingdom and invite people to enter into it. This message will go out to people of all nations. This is God’s big purpose. He will entrust this mission to this servant.

So from the first 7 verses of Isaiah 42, who does God use to accomplish His purposes? Someone willing to serve and depend on His Spirit. Someone must persevere in establishing justice while gently caring for the weak and vulnerable. They will bring God's good news and invite others into the kingdom.

Now many of you know the rest of the story. **Jesus Christ fulfills these criteria and becomes the Ultimate Servant of the Lord.** When John baptized Jesus, the Spirit of the Lord descended upon Him to empower Him for ministry. So Matthew 3:16 says "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him." There we see the Lord God putting His Spirit upon Jesus in fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1. When Jesus withdrew from public debate with the Pharisees for a time, Matthew sees this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42. In Matthew 12:15-21, he quotes the first few verses of Isaiah 42. Matthew presents Jesus as the gentle, Spirit-empowered, suffering servant who advanced God's mission of justice to the nations.

That's great, but God didn't do all this so we could sit back and watch God's servant and His ministry. He calls us to imitate Christ. He calls us to join Jesus in God's great mission of bringing hope and justice to the world. He calls us to grow as servants of the Lord. **Where are you at in your growth as a servant of the Lord?** I want to give you some questions to help in self-evaluation.

Have I received the Lord's Servant (Jesus Christ) into my life as Lord? He purchased justice for your sins by dying on the cross in your place. He will treat you with gentleness as He attends to the bruises you've received in life. He will carefully look after you as He tends to your flickering wick. He begins to repair and heal the entirety of your life over the time you walk with Him. One author writes this - "In Genesis 3, we see that sin put us in contradiction to God, our true selves, others and even nature. We are out of alignment . . . so our normal human state consists of spiritual emptiness, inner anxiety, crises of identity, conflicts with others and with our world. But God's salvation repairs our hearts and our behavior. Spiritually we reconcile with and grow close to God. Psychologically we come to understand ourselves and find our feelings and actions coming more under the Spirit's control. Relationally we discover the added depth and dimension that common faith can add to human friendship. Socially we find ways to serve neighbors and the broader community, no longer captive to political ideologies. Salvation is not merely forgiveness and admission to heaven. It

means life is healed by God slowly but surely in all its dimensions.” Tim Keller, Proverbs, Feb 27 , Prov 16 20, 58. So we need to receive Christ as Lord. Then we need to receive His ministry.

Am I bored with Christ? Maybe you became a Christian many years ago. Your passion for Christ is not that high right now. We can identify this in ourselves when are more excited about what we’re going to do as soon as this service is over than about Christ. If we’re honest, this might be true for some of us today. Why? One reason might be that we have allowed our world to shape and shrivel our soul. This can especially happen when we allow our lives to be saturated by the images of our world – movies; tv; social media; sporting events. I’m not saying that these are evil. But we can allow them to shape our hearts and even our desires. Tony Reinke, in his book *Competing Spectacles* writes this. “Spectacles of the earth can suffocate our hearts from the supreme spectacle of the universe – Jesus Christ and the cross. We begin to live inside the world of our images. Over time, spectacles taken in unwisely will make our hearts cold, sluggish and dull to unseen eternal delights.”

Can you relate to that? If we’re more excited about a movie, a professional sporting event, your computer game, scrolling social media or getting back to some show you’re watching than you are about Christ, this might describe us. Reinke also writes “We have all been digitally stupid with our time and attention. But we are free in Christ to live for something greater. We are free to center our lives on him and enjoy Him by fixing our attention on things above. But, when we don’t resist, our lives become one endless carnival. So boredom with Christ becomes a grave threat. When our souls become bored we make peace with sin. Whoever would make himself a best friend of digital spectacles would make himself an enemy of God.”

So the Christian’s high calling is to guard his/her hearts love and desires for Christ. Matt Chandler says – “The deepest possible treasures available to man are found in Christ Jesus. We must be very serious about pursuing joy – not cheap, transient, here for the moment but gone in the next moment joys – eternal, soul saturating, life transforming joys.” Reinke writes “The Christian’s battle in this media age can only be won by the explosive power of a superior spectacle. Christ is our only hope in life and death, the age to come and this media age. (Tony Reinke – *Competing Spectacles* – Section 30). Are we bored with Christ? If yes, we need to confess that to him and then begin refocusing on Him and His greatness.

Am I walking by and being filled with the Holy Spirit? (Galatians 5:16, 25; Ephesians 5:18). If yes, continue to walk by and keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25) If no, ask for the Holy Spirit's filling and power to walk according to God's ways. Sometimes we think that walking by or being filled by the Spirit can only happen during a time of worship where we get goose bumps. But that doesn't seem to be the emphasis of the New Testament. We walk by and are filled with the Spirit when our lives look more and more like Christs. When we see the Fruit of the Spirit growing in our lives, we can be pretty sure we're walking by the Spirit.

Am I troubled by the injustice I see around me? If yes, then ask for the Lord's wisdom and strength to do your part in addressing the injustice. If no, then ask the Lord for His eyes to help you see injustice around you.

Do I gently care for the weak and those out of resources? If yes, then continue in God's wisdom and power to care for those in need. If no, then ask the Holy Spirit to grow the fruit of gentleness in you. (Galatians 5:23).

Do I talk about my faith with those living in darkness or trapped in dungeons? If yes, then continue to ask for wisdom of when to speak and what to say. If no, then ask for God to give you spiritual eyes for the lost and trapped around you – and courage to share God's hope with them.

God sent the ultimate servant of the Lord to accomplish His great kingdom purposes. So we must receive the Lord and His blessings. Then we must join in growing as His servants through our whole lives until His Kingdom comes in all its fullness