

Early on in our study of the book of Acts, we read these words talking about the thousands of new believers in Jesus in the early days of the Christian church: *'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.'* Acts 2:42.

This morning we're privileged to be doing these same things – we've come together because we as a family of God's people, believers in Jesus, want to know **more** of that same Lord and Saviour in our lives. And that **only** comes through devotion to the teaching of the Word of God, fellowship for mutual encouragement and upbuilding, to the taking of the bread and wine, and to prayer.

These are the vital things for Christians to be doing. 'Vital', comes from the Latin word 'vita' meaning 'life' – these are the things which are **vital** to us, the things necessary for the Christian life.

It's important to remember the crucial aspects of faith – and there is **nothing** more crucial than the Cross of Jesus. In fact the Cross gives us the word 'crucial' – 'cruX' is the Latin word for 'cross'. Because the Christian faith has the Cross at its centre, because Christianity says that salvation is only possible through Jesus' work on the Cross, now we say that anything which is so important that it is totally necessary, is **crucial**. The word 'crucial' is defined as 'of extreme importance; vital to the resolution of a crisis'. There's no **greater** crisis than the broken relationship between God and man. So what is vital to resolve this crisis? The cross of Christ.

It's crucial, then, that all we think about this morning is focused on Jesus, and as we take the bread and wine later, we are remembering the most important thing that is **crucial** to our salvation – the Cross.

The gospel of salvation is found throughout the Bible – it was within God's purpose and plan before creation began – so I want us to read this morning from the old Testament, from the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 42. [P..... blue Bible]

The name Isaiah means 'the Lord is salvation', so it's apt that his writings tell of the coming salvation. And he is a **prophet**, this is **prophecy** – it's not just history; here is **God** – who obviously knows the future – revealing parts of his **plan for the future** through a messenger. God speaking to man, so that we can believe he **is** God. So we do well to listen.

[Read Isaiah 42:1-7]

A couple bought a house and were angry when they found out that the previous owners had left a **right** mess in the attic – loads of junk that needed sorting and throwing away. As they were going through the piles of rubbish, they came across this old painting, hidden away in the corner. Although it was old and dull and it had a tear in one corner, there was something about it that made them put it to one side. Something said to them there was more to this than met the eye.

So they put it in an Asda carrier bag and took it to the local art dealer, who was **astounded**. When he looked closely, in the bottom corner he could just make out the name ‘Rembrandt’. You can imagine this couple’s **delight** when the dealer told them the Belgian artist’s painting could be worth millions. But there was that tear in the corner – that would take **thousands** to repair. Was it worth repairing and restoring? Of course the couple said ‘Yes!’

I’ve already said that there is a crisis that needs resolving – the broken relationship between God and man needs restoring. Is it worth repairing and restoring? Of course God says ‘Yes!’ God made man in his **own image**, man is a **masterpiece** created by God in his own **likeness**. God says we’re worth restoring, no matter **what** the cost.

The cost is his servant.

Verse 1 says, ‘*Here is my servant.*’ The term servant is used in different ways in the book of Isaiah: for example, Isaiah himself was referred to as God’s servant in chapter 20; all the people of Israel as a unit are referred to as God’s servant in chapter 21, as they share in God’s mission to the world – they are his chosen people – called out of all the peoples of the world.

But we sense here that there is something different about **this** servant in verse 1. ‘*Here is my servant, whom I uphold,*’ God says, ‘*my chosen one, in whom I delight.*’ Of all the servants God has spoken about in Isaiah, **this** one is different – ‘*this servant is my chosen one.*’ His use of the term servant up till now has been leading up to this announcement in chapter 42. ‘***Here is my servant***’.

God has referred to Isaiah and Israel as his servant, but I want us to see this morning the different nature of **this** servant, and his different mission - **this** servant is very different from those people; **this** servant has a different mission.

Firstly we need to ask ourselves ‘What are God’s **people** like at this time?’ Well, they’re not a great advert for followers of God, to say the least. In chapter 40, verse 27, for example, we see that despite all God’s goodness to them and providing for them even in difficult situations, they are a bunch of complainers and moaners. We read there, ‘*Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God.*’ They complain that God is not doing things the way they want. Things aren’t going **their** way, so they start complaining.

Ring any bells? It does with me. I think we take the gold medal for complaining in this country. We – I’m talking in gross generalisations here of course – delight in complaining, in being negative, in bringing down rather than building up. It’s easy to criticise, isn’t it – if Gordon Brown does something right, or something well, the opposition and the media don’t give him credit, they suggest he’s got ulterior motives, or they ignore it and focus on some other mistake he’s made instead.

Things not going our way? Do we accept that God’s working his purposes out, or do we complain, stamp our feet and kick up a fuss. Haiti was a prime example here – people around the world used the earthquake and disaster there to raise their voices against **God** again; if there **is** a God, why does he allow these things to happen?

But what did we see from the Haitians themselves? We saw **them thanking** God, as they were pulled out from the rubble, we heard on the News that the church is now stronger, **they** recognise that only **God** can help them in this situation.

Israel are complainers. But are **we** any different?

They are also fearful and dismayed, we read in chapter 41, verse 10, ‘*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.*’ They are God’s chosen people, but they are afraid about what is happening to them, they are worried.

More than that, chapter 42 verse 18 says, ‘*Hear, you deaf; look you blind, and see!*’ And because they don’t hear or see their God, they are disobedient – verse 24 of chapter 42, ‘*Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his laws.*’

God's servant Israel – it doesn't look very promising does it? Not listening to God, not seeing his will, not going his way, in fact going against him. But how about **us**? Are **we** listening? Are **we** seeing? Are **we** going God's way? [Pause]

This servant in chapter 41, verse 1 is announced against this backdrop. A total contrast. This servant is different. The people of Israel were supposed to be God's servant in making him known to the nations, but they weren't all they should have been – this servant is going to **remedy** that, the antidote to their weakness and failure. Here is God's **chosen** servant, God's **perfect** servant. How the world needs God's perfect servant today.

Let's take a look. Let's listen, let's see, let's know and go God's way. Let's look closer at this passage, then.

We find three distinct parts here: verses 1-4 are addressed to Israel, and God is telling them **about** his servant; in verses 5-7 we find God actually speaking **to** the servant – the 'you' in verse 6 (*'I have called you in righteousness'*) is **singular**, one person, God speaks to the servant; and verses 8-9 are God speaking to his **people** once more, the new things of verse 9 will be announced to 'you', plural. But the **main** message of all three parts is the servant's mission – why is God's servant to come?

1. The second half of verse 1: *'I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.'* Second half of verse 3: *'In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.'*

I got a new toy for Christmas this year, something that I would **really** enjoy if I only had the time to get my teeth stuck into it. It's a concordance of the Bible, it lists all the words used in the Bible. But as well as that it has references to the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words of the original scripts. Marvellous! I'm a linguist, so words fascinate me, where they come from and how they've influenced our language. I find this absolutely fascinating – sad, I know, but it keeps me off the streets! But what greater way to put this to use than in the study of the Word of God. Great!

In the first four verses of this chapter we find the word in the English translated as 'justice'. The servant comes to bring justice. We hear this word all the time in today's world, don't we: justice for all, justice for victims, justice for those badly done by, justice for fathers, justice for soldiers, justice for families who've suffered loss. And we recognise that justice is **right**., don't we? 4

We've often said that when someone receives a lenient sentence for a crime, we naturally feel angry, don't we. We see family members outside the court, "Call that justice?" they say. Justice is important, so we'd **agree** that the servant coming to bring justice to the nations is a **good** thing.

But the original Hebrew word here translated as justice is 'mishpat', and this word goes further than just **this** idea of justice. Included in this word mishpat is the idea of God's sovereignty – his rightful place (41:1), God's way – the way that is right (40:14), and man's rightful position and relationship with God (40:27). All these are included in full justice. This is **true** justice – **God's** true justice, God in sovereign control, his **ways** right and just, and man in his rightful relationship with God. This is true and full justice. As well as justice being what's right, it includes being right with God. Justice.

'In his faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.' This is the servant's mission – to bring justice, a **restoration** of the relationship between God and man. A masterpiece worth restoring. A huge mission – to put God's plans for his people into action, to make the truth about God known throughout the nations everywhere, that he is the almighty, sovereign, creator and Lord of history. Whatever the cost – *'he will not falter'*.

2. In the second section of our passage, we see God talking to his servant [read verses 6, 7]. At the end of verse 5 we read that God gives life and breath to the world's people. He is their **Creator** and he is committed to **sustaining** them – he gives them every breath.

The servant is to be '*a covenant for the people*' – in creation God made a covenant with his people, the servant is to be the embodiment of that covenant, his **commitment** to his people. He is to be '*a light for the Gentiles*', for all people everywhere. God will reveal his purposes through his servant, and he'll do this by **opening** blind eyes, freeing **captives**, releasing those who sit in darkness.

So the servant will come with a mission to undo all the horrible and disastrous effects of sin, man going his own way and ending up lost. The servant will come, this passage says, to open people's eyes to the truth, the truth about **God**, but also he's going to do what's necessary to release people from their slavery to a world without God, and to bring them freedom in restored relationships with their creator God. Could there **be** a more wonderful mission?

This is what the servant, God's chosen one, will achieve. Giving people the power to become **children of God**.

3. In verse 9 we're told that the coming of the servant is a new chapter in God's relationship with the world – '*new things I declare*'. God's glory will be revealed, but in a new way, a far better way than in the past. He'll reveal his glory in his servant. His servant will start a **new** work, make a **new** covenant, he will bring a **new** life. And ultimately, we're told this in chapter 65:17, '*Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth, The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.*' This will all lead to God creating new heavens and a new earth. The past will be remembered **no more**, because the **new** will come. This all starts with the work of the servant.

[Break – sing 'The servant king']

Our passage is looking forward from Old Testament times to the coming of God's servant. But how does it say he will come? The people of Israel were expecting a great warrior king, but our text here doesn't give that impression.

We're told in verse 1 that the source of his strength will be the Spirit of God, and verse 4 tells us that he will rule according to God's law, the Word of God; but he will not be overbearing, he will be loving, compassionate, gentle – verse 3, '*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.*' He isn't a cruel warrior, but a compassionate, long-suffering God, committed to the salvation of his people. And in verse 4, where it says the servant '*will not falter or be discouraged*' I think there is more than a hint that he will need to **suffer** to bring justice to the nations. [Pause]

So where do we see the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy? I'm sure you've gone ahead of me, but you'll remember the occasion recorded in Luke 4, when Jesus was in a synagogue in Nazareth, and he stood up to read from Isaiah 61, and he read, '*The Spirit of the Lord is on **me**, because he anointed **me** to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*' Then Jesus said, '*Today this scripture is **fulfilled** in your hearing.*' Jesus applies the prophecy of the servant to himself.

And people who were there seeing him working miracles and bringing the good news about the kingdom of God **also** applied this prophecy to him. Look at Matthew 12, verse 15 onwards: [read Matthew 12:15-21].

People recognised that **here** was the one who was chosen by God to bring release and freedom as it had been prophesied by Isaiah, all those years before.

Up to now, we've seen Israel looking forward to release from captivity, but now we see Jesus using those same words to state that he is the Servant of God that was promised, and he has come to address man's deepest need. In the gospels we see him ministering to everyone he sees, revealing God to everyone. He goes around working miracles and healing people.

In Isaiah we see God setting his people free from physical captivity and hardship; in the New Testament we see that Jesus is the servant who has come to release from **spiritual** captivity, from slavery to **sin** as well as physical sickness.

Jesus' mission was to come to resolve that crisis we were talking about earlier – the broken relationship between God and man – he came to bring release from spiritual blindness and spiritual darkness. When John Newton writes in his song of his chains falling off, those weren't physical chains, those were **spiritual** chains. He was made spiritually free by recognising that Jesus, the chosen servant of God, the only Son of God came to release him from the guilt of his sin. No more condemnation. The crisis resolved. The broken relationship healed. The masterpiece worth restoring.

The blind can see. Jesus said in John 8:12, *'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'* Jesus said of his teaching, *'Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'* John 8:32.

Jesus came to bring justice, to bring a right understanding of who God is, of his righteous ways, and of man's standing before and relationship with God. But he didn't need to just come and **tell** it how it is – he needed to bring a way that this justice could be **restored**, the way of **healing** that broken relationship. He had to **bring** the means of salvation.

And that's why we're here this morning, about to gather around this table, and take the bread and the wine. He **took away** the cause of that broken relationship.

He **took away** the punishment for the sin that separated man from God, by taking it upon **himself** as he suffered on the cross. He didn't falter, he wasn't discouraged, he established justice on earth for all the nations. **He** suffered so we don't **need** to. He **healed** our broken relationship with God.

Earlier on I said that there was a crisis that needed resolving – the broken relationship between God and you needed restoring. God and man torn apart. Was that split worth repairing and restoring? God says 'Yes, of course!' God made you in his own image, you are a masterpiece created by God in his own likeness. God **wants** you to be in relationship with him. Are **you** worth restoring? God says 'Of course you're worth restoring, no matter what the cost.'

The cost was his servant. The cost was Jesus.