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Isaiah 42:1-4

Fifth Message

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# WHERE IS JUSTICE TO BE FOUND?

*SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE*

Last summer, as I was traveling with one of our elders on a train from Romania to Vienna, during a stop in Bucharest a young Iranian man got on the train and sat opposite us. We began to converse with him, and we learned that he was in the process of escaping from Iran. We have been corresponding since last year, and I want to share with you this morning from a letter he wrote to me:

I must say my English language is not very well...in Iran the Islamic Republic doesn't give any praise for teaching English to students. I have learned English language only with some guide-books without teacher's help. So I hope you pardon me if you are seeing very wrong words or grammar in my letter.

I became politically active against my government in Iran. At first, my government did not let me continue my studies at the University of Tehran. They sent me out of the university. After this, they were searching for me, but before they could catch me, I escaped from Iran. I came out of Iran illegally. I escaped over the mountains and through numerous forests. I passed from the frontier between Iran and Turkey. I went from Turkey to the Eastern Europe, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. At last I arrived in Austria the same time as you. I must say I did not have a true passport, My passport was a counterfeit, since in Iran if you conduct political activity the Islamic government won't issue a passport to leave Iran.

My brother was killed in the Iran land nearby the Basreh (the harbor in the Persian Gulf). He was killed with a chemical bomb. Iranian soldiers, searching for killed soldiers could not find him for almost two weeks. After this long time they found him and brought him behind the war square for relatives to identify bodies. The chemical bomb and the intense sunshine in that burning field decomposed his body.

Now that I am writing this letter I remember my brother's remains. My parents and I could not recognize him in the refrigeration room. We did a great trying, at last we could recognize him. I will never forget that sight. Just now, in my eyes tears have gathered.

We shared with this young man the fact that his country, Persia, is mentioned in the Old Testament. From the book of Isaiah we shared with him the account of the Persian King Cyrus' assault and destruction of Babylon. But he said, "I don't want God in my life. If there is a God, where is justice to be found in Iran today?"

How would you answer that question? Where is justice to be found in Jerusalem this week, as Jew and Palestinian seek to kill each other? Where is justice to be found in the killing fields of Cambodia? Where is justice to be found in racially divided South Africa? Where is justice to be found in the United States, where we are discovering widespread abuse being practiced in family after family? If God is truly sovereign, where is justice to be found?

This is the question which the prophet Isaiah will answer for the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Israel is in exile. Her temple lies in ruins, burned with fire. She who was to be a light to all the nations languishes under the torment of idolatrous Babylon. Israel's God is mocked. His people are derided among the nations. How long will this continue? Does Israel have a future? Will she be forever lost and relegated to lay in the dust of broken dreams? When will God vindicate his people and bring his justice to bear?

Out of the ashes of Israel's captivity come the words of Isaiah. There is a bright future for God's people, says the prophet. It lies with the One who will take on the role of his Servant, Israel. This One will not only bring restoration to his people, but he will bring justice to all the nations.

This Servant's life and ministry are poetically described in four Servant Songs (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-9; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12), each of which builds in beauty and intensity. In all of Scripture there is no better place to discover the glory of Jesus Christ than in these songs.

We will begin this morning by reading the first of the Servant Songs, from Isaiah 42:1-4:

**"Behold, My servant, whom I uphold,  
My chosen one, in whom My soul delights;  
I have put My Spirit upon Him,  
He will bring forth justice to the nations  
He will not cry out or raise His voice,  
Nor make His voice heard in the street.  
A bruised reed He will not break,  
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;  
He will faithfully bring forth justice.  
He will not grow dim or be crushed,  
Until He has established justice in the earth;  
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."** (NASB)

## I. The instrument of justice: The Servant of the Lord (42:1)

First, we will look at the identity, the credentials, and the task of this Servant.

### A. The identity of the Servant

This song of the ideal Servant uses much of the same language which Isaiah uses to describe Israel as the servant of the Lord. Isaiah 41:8-10:

**"But you, Israel, My servant,  
Jacob whom I have chosen,  
Descendent of Abraham My friend,  
You whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth,  
And called from its remotest parts,  
And said to you, 'You are My servant,  
I have chosen you and not rejected you.**

**Do not fear, for I am with you;  
Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,  
Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”**

But this Servant is not the nation Israel. “He is not identified as such (Isaiah 41:8; 44:2; 45:4); his role is active, not passive; he ministers to Israel (see v. 6) and he suffers willingly and obediently (v. 2). He is identified with Jesus Christ in the New Testament (Matthew 12:15-21)” (Bruce Waltke). Thus, he will bring universal justice and light to the nations (v. 4), and an everlasting covenant (v. 6), doing what Israel failed to do. To the age-old question, “Where will justice be found?” Isaiah answers, “Justice is found in the ministry of the Servant of the Lord.”

### **B. The credentials of the Servant: Backed by God himself**

**“Behold, My servant whom I uphold,  
My chosen one, in whom My soul delights;”**

The title, “My Servant” (verse 1), is the highest accolade given in the Old Testament. It was bestowed on very few individuals, just three, in fact—Moses, David, and Job. It refers to an honored individual, one who is chosen as an instrument to further the kingdom of God, one who serves God with his whole heart. The parallel term in Scripture, “I uphold,” is used of God’s unique relationship to his Messianic King. It carries the idea of being strengthened and placed in the intimate protection of God because of the King’s integrity.

Secondly, this Servant is called “My chosen one, in whom My soul delights.” Like Israel, this Servant is uniquely chosen by God. Israel was a particular people who were chosen by God to bless all peoples, but the nation failed in that assignment. God was still faithful to his promise, however. Out of the ashes of the nation he is now creating something new—a new Servant. This One will encompass in his person everything Israel was intended to be. He will be a light to the nations; and he will inaugurate a new covenant which will stand forever. Unlike Israel, this chosen One is righteous, thus God delights in him: “Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased” (Luke 3:22). The implication is clear: If you reject this Servant, you are rejecting the Father.

Thirdly, Isaiah tells of the task which this Servant will accomplish.

### **C. The task of the servant: Worldwide justice**

**“I have put My Spirit upon Him,  
He will bring forth justice to the nations.”**

The basic concept behind the Hebrew word for justice, *mishpat*, involves three parties: the oppressed party, the oppressor, and a third party who intervenes to judge the oppressor and free the oppressed. This judgment, which punishes one party and liberates the other, is called “justice.” Here we have the theme of the book of Judges: Oppressed Israel cries out to God, and he is moved in pity to send a judge who punishes the oppressor and sets the nation free. Given her situation in Babylon, Israel might have expected God to destroy the Gentile nations. This was what the Zealots of Jesus’ day hoped for—that the Messiah would save Israel by destroying Rome. But here Isaiah is referring to a new, different kind of justice. What good was accomplished by God’s delivering of Israel in the past? It did not succeed in changing the wicked heart of the nation. In the words of C. S. Lewis, “No arrangement of bad eggs makes a good omelet.”

But in this text, Isaiah has a new definition for justice: “He will bring forth justice to the nations.” In the words “bring forth,” the

verb form and tense speak of birthing something new. In Exodus, God brought the nation out of Egypt and birthed them as a brand new nation (Exod 3:10-12; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:11; 18:1; 20:2). Isaiah says that this Servant will establish a deeper and richer justice.

In earlier chapters, the prophet presents the Lord in a legal setting as he examines the idols of the Gentiles, and then proves their worthlessness (Isa 41:5-7, 21-29). They are the real oppressors of life; they enslave the human heart and soul. Justice in this context reveals that, rather than destroying the nations, God will judge their idols and invite the Gentile world to participate in the Servant’s salvation. The Zealots wanted Jesus to destroy Rome, but Rome was far too small an enemy for this Servant.

Once, when a man asked Jesus to arbitrate between him and his brother, who was oppressing him, Jesus replied, “Who appointed me a judge over you?” Think about that for a moment. The Messiah was to bring justice and judgment, but on this occasion Jesus went on to issue a warning against greed. Both brothers were greedy, so no matter how their inheritance was divided, justice would not be done; their hearts were still enslaved to greed and idolatry. At times, couples come to me for marriage counseling, hoping to make me a referee between them to solve their grievances. If this is the spirit they demonstrate, it takes but a moment to discern that they cannot be helped. If, however, they face up to their own wickedness, and if they confess their bitterness and anger towards each other, then there is hope for reconciliation.

This is the kind of justice which this Servant will accomplish. I told my Iranian friend that he would not see justice accomplished externally among the nations. It was to be found only in a Person, in Jesus Christ. “Get a copy of the gospel of John,” I told him, “and come to know this Person, then you will find justice in the heart.”

“I have put My Spirit upon Him,” says our text. The Servant has the full measure of God’s Spirit upon him to bring forth his kingdom. This theme is reminiscent of Moses, who had the Spirit in such great measure that a mere portion of it caused seventy men to prophesy (Num 11:25). By that Spirit, Moses gave birth to the nation Israel. This Servant will be greater indeed than Moses (Heb 3:3), for he will give birth to a new nation of both Jews and Gentiles who by the Spirit will have the law written on their hearts.

Justice will come to the nations through the Servant of the Lord, who has the unique credentials as Israel’s Messiah. His justice will be far deeper than physical justice, for it will be a justice that frees the human heart from idolatry.

And how will this Servant implement justice?

## **II. The implementation of justice: Suffering (42:2-3)**

**“He will not cry out (from oppression) nor lift up (his voice)  
Nor make His voice heard in the street.  
A bruised reed He will not break,  
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;  
He will faithfully bring forth justice.”**

### **A. He will not seek his own justice (42:2)**

This servant will be oppressed, as Israel was oppressed, but he will not respond like Israel—“He will not cry out...in the streets.” The verb “to cry out” was often used as a cry for help in distress or oppression (Isa 19:20; 33:7; 42:1; 46:7; 65:14). In her distress, Israel cried out in the public places and her voice could be heard all the way to Jahaz:

**In their streets they have girded themselves with sackcloth;  
On their housetops and in their squares,  
Everyone is wailing, dissolved in tears.  
Hesbon and Elealeh also cry out,  
Their voice is heard all the way to Jahaz. (Isa 15:3-4a)**

Even today when Israel is oppressed, her voice can be heard crying out all over the world. But this Servant does not cry out because he does not seek his own justice. He suffers in absolute silence.

**He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,  
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth. (Isa 53:7)**

If you want to enter into the ministry of this Servant, do not be a noisy lobbyist for your own rights. Although he will be oppressed, this Servant will not cry out. On the contrary,

#### **B. He will seek justice for others (42:3)**

**“A bruised reed He will not break,  
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;  
He will faithfully bring forth justice.”**

He will lift up the poor and needy: “A bruised reed He will not break.” He will carry injustice in the soul, and this will allow him to liberate others. He won’t break you, or lay anything on you, rather, he will take your burden, as Matthew declares, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for you souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light” (Matt 11:28-30). To the prostitute, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” To Matthew, the compromiser who sought financial security and betrayed his nation, the man who lived with prostitutes and brigands, Jesus said, “I want to come to your home for dinner.” He did not add one thing to the load which they bore. Oppression had taught him this.

And he will give light and faith to those in darkness: “A dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.” A “dimly burning wick” speaks figuratively of people who have almost lost their spiritual resources of faith and hope (Bruce Waltke). This Servant fans the faith of those who are hurting. In Mark 9:24, the father of the demon-possessed boy said to Jesus, “If you can, you can heal my son.” Jesus replied, “If I can? All things are possible to those who believe.” The man said, “I do believe, help my unbelief!” “Come to me on my terms,” in other words, “I know nothing of theology. Take me as I am.” And that is what Jesus did. He never rebuked or laid an additional burden on anyone who came to him by faith. That is the kind of Servant we have. He never sought justice for himself, rather he remained silent in the face of abuse. This is what qualified him to seek out the bruised reeds and the dimly burning wicks from among the multitudes. I shared this with my Iranian friend, telling him, “Like you, this Servant has undergone great pain and injustice, so he can lift your burden of pain.”

The implementation of justice will come through suffering. Rather than seeking his own vindication, however, this Servant will use the oppression which he suffered in order to bring salvation to others. Oswald Chambers wrote, “One of the great stirring truths of the Bible is that the man who looks for justice from others is a fool. In moral and spiritual life, if a man has a sense of injustice, he ceases to be of value to his fellow man. Our Lord teaches us not to look

for justice, but never cease to give it. That is not common sense, it is either madness or Christianity.”

Finally, Isaiah tells us of the perfection of justice by the Servant.

### **III. The perfection of justice (42:1d, 3c, 4b,c)**

**“He will not grow dim or be crushed,  
Until He has established justice in the earth;  
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”**

#### **A. He will not be crushed until... (42:4a)**

When I am around dimly burning wicks and crushed reeds, I too become dim and crushed. But not this Servant. When he encounters these kinds of people, his faith is not extinguished. And he is not crushed. His life will be spent, but every ounce of his energies will be successful.

On the cross, as God was pouring out his holy wrath on his Servant, the devil and sin were robbed on their power; the grip of idolatry was broken. The story of the thief on the cross is not about last-minute conversions. The spotlight in that incident is on the Servant. Even in his last hours of life he is not trying to vindicate himself or seek what is rightly his. What he wants instead is to liberate someone else. Next to him on the cross was a rebel, one who epitomized everything that Israel had become, a revolutionary grasping for the kingdom. But with just a few words, the Servant accomplished the liberation of this rebel, and took him to heaven with him. This is how successful this Servant is. He is forever surrounded by the dim and the crushed, but he will not be dimmed or crushed “until he has established justice in the earth.” Here we have a hint that he himself will be crushed. And he was indeed crushed by the cross; his light did go out, but not until justice had been established.

Next, Isaiah describes the perfection of justice.

#### **B. Justice is perfected (42:1d, 3c, 4b,c)**

**“He will bring forth justice to the nations...  
He will faithfully bring forth justice...  
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”**

This new justice will be universal. It will not be limited to Israel, but will extend to the nations. We can go anywhere and offer it.

And it will be everlasting. “Faithfully” literally means, “according to the truth.” In Hebrew, truth and faithfulness are closely related, because truth stands forever. This text may be alluding to the everlasting covenant which Jesus would inaugurate (Heb 8:6-13; 13:20). There will never ever be any need for another sacrifice because what Jesus did was done at the level of the spirit. It’s over, done with, finished!

And finally, it will be long-awaited for: “The coastlands will wait expectantly for His law [instruction].” “Coastlands” and “islands” were terms used to indicate the most remote places on the earth from Israel’s standpoint. This deep spiritual hunger among the nations is anticipated even in the gospels (Mark 7:24-30). The coastlands were not waiting for a law, but for this Servant to instruct them. Thus, when Jesus commissioned his disciples to make disciples of all nations, they were to go forth in expectation that the nations were already longing for this good news.

I did not have to tell my Iranian friend that there was a spiritual issue in his life that needed to be faced. He was already prepared. He wrote to me from Austria, saying, “Here I am. I risked my life to be free, and I am free politically, but I have discovered there is

deep prejudice against foreigners. So I'm still not free." He is hungering for another kind of justice, where people's hearts are set free in love and unity. This is what the Servant is accomplishing in a new humanity which loves from the heart. His justice will be perfect, universal, and everlasting.

In this song, the Servant is put forward by God himself as the One who will bring universal justice to the nations. God fully provides his credentials, and he responds by not seeking his own justice, but the justice of others. In the process, oppression does not crush him, but is used to perfect justice. Justice is found in no one else!

## Implications for ministry

### A. Proper credentials for ministry

Although the term "servant of the Lord" is used but a few times in the Old Testament as a title of highest accolade, Paul uses it to describe himself as an apostle. By implication, all Christians are "servants of the Lord" by virtue of our being "in Christ." Therefore, his credentials must be our credentials. Before we can begin to minister we also must take great delight that he has chosen us to be in Christ (Eph 1:3-4), and poured his Spirit into our hearts. With the gift of the Spirit we also receive divine gifts (1 Cor 12, Rom 12, Eph 4) which enable us to minister the life of Christ to others. It is essential that a Christian learn to minister through the power of the Holy Spirit, by the divine gifts of the Spirit, and not in his own strength.

### B. Proper goal for ministry

The apostles used the ministry of Jesus as the model for our ministry (1 Pet 2:21-25), therefore his task and method must be ours. This is not an option. Like Jesus, we must seek "true" justice in the world by proclaiming "release to the captives" through the gospel. Our goal is not merely social justice, but a deeper justice that allows us to go through unjust suffering (injustice) to make the gospel known, and thus liberate the captives from the real bondage of idolatry.

Let us follow the example of Jesus. He refused to act as a judge between two brothers who were seeking physical justice, but rather pointed them to a higher justice by showing them that greed in their own hearts was the real enemy, not their brother (see Luke 12:13-15).

### C. Proper expectations and demeanor

As servants of the Lord we must have proper expectations from this life. As our Lord suffered so shall we, for "the slave is not greater than his master." And like Jesus, we must adopt the proper response to suffering, and not seek our own justice but the justice of others (Matt 20:25-28). Let us be like Christ, not clamoring for our rights, but silently looking to our Heavenly Father, the true Judge, for our vindication.

## D. Proper focus in ministry

As Jesus' rejection and suffering opened up the door of ministry, so shall it be with us. Let us ask God to use our suffering to benefit others who are downtrodden and despairing. Ministry is not programs but availability to people. Peter tells us of the great open door for ministry that is open to us when we suffer for righteousness, for it is then that "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet 4:14).

Finally, our text reveals that God has already created an intense longing for the New Covenant in the hearts of many. Let us therefore trust him to lead us to those whom he has already prepared, just as Philip was led by the Spirit to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff).

I will close by reading the last paragraph of my friend's letter:

You had written in your letter, Jesus is creating a brand new humanity that loves and is filled with his peace, and one day this will culminate in a whole new heavens and a new earth. I really hope and will wish that your opinions become certain. In my opinion these expressions are certain. I think in that time there is no disagreeable morality or enmity and all the people of the world will live in peace and tranquility. You had written me if I can, to buy John's book [the gospel of John; I should have told him the New Testament], but I have searched for finding that, but I was not able to find John's book in three cities that are nearby my pension. I hope I can find that book in the future [there is one in the mail right now!].

Please write me again. I remain yours truly, —————

There are multitudes of people like my Iranian friend out there waiting to be liberated. Will you take on the ministry of the Servant and offer them the true justice of the kingdom, a justice of the heart?

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