

Good morning. As we've heard, today, we're looking at Isaiah 42:1-9, but what I hope to do this morning is not just to focus on the text itself, but also on where it fits into Isaiah's prophecies, because I think that will help us get a clearer understanding of the importance of the text.

The book of Isaiah can be split into three parts:

1. Chapters 1-39.

The first section of the book comprises of prophecy spoken to those of the people of Judah who were alive during Isaiah's own lifetime. God warns Judah through Isaiah, telling them that although they come to his temple and make sacrifices, and although they pray and hold the appointed feasts, they have forsaken Him and are 'utterly estranged'<sup>1</sup> from him by their sin. He says he will turn his hand against them in order to restore them.<sup>2</sup>

That 'turning of God's hand' against Judah entails removal of bread and water<sup>3</sup> from them, and of their jewellery and of their arrogance and haughtiness.<sup>4</sup> Nations will come from far away<sup>5</sup> and will devour the land.<sup>6</sup> The king of Assyria will shatter Judah,<sup>7</sup> and the Syrians and the Philistines will devour Israel.<sup>8</sup>

Why all of this? Because the people have become iniquitous. They oppress, they refuse to serve justice to the needy, they rob the poor, they mistreat widows and orphans,<sup>9</sup> and they bow down before idols and worship them.<sup>10</sup>

So Isaiah prophesies the destruction of Judah, and coming judgment on the nations, and he prophesies that Judah will eventually be carried off into exile by the king of Babylon.

But remember that God says that he will do all of this in order to *restore* the Jews; the long-term goal is not punishment alone, but restoration. Speaking to Jerusalem, he says,

<sup>25</sup>I will turn my hand against you  
and will smelt away your dross as with lye  
and remove all your alloy.  
<sup>26</sup>And I will restore your judges as at the first,  
and your counselors as at the beginning.  
Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness,  
the faithful city.<sup>11</sup>

God will bring all this on Jerusalem - and he will make her righteous and faithful. In chapter nine, we read,

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.  
<sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 1:4 (ESV).

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 1:25-31.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 3:1.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 3:18-26.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 5:26-30.

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 1:7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 8:5-10.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 9:12.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 10:1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 2:8.

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 1:25-26 (ESV).

as they are glad when they divide the spoil.  
<sup>4</sup>For the yoke of his burden,  
 and the staff for his shoulder,  
 the rod of his oppressor,  
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
<sup>5</sup>For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
 and every garment rolled in blood  
 will be burned as fuel for the fire.  
<sup>6</sup>For to us a child is born,  
 to us a son is given;  
 and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
 and his name shall be called  
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
<sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and of peace  
 there will be no end,  
 on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
 to establish it and to uphold it  
 with justice and with righteousness  
 from this time forth and forevermore.  
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.<sup>12</sup>

Isaiah speaks of a coming King - a child - who will be the saviour of David's kingdom. That kingdom will be transformed, its people no more putting their trust in foreign kings but in the Lord.<sup>13</sup> The coming King will, one day, usher in the kingdom of God in its fulness:

<sup>1</sup>There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
 and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
<sup>2</sup>And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
 the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
 the Spirit of counsel and might,  
 the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
<sup>3</sup>And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
 He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
 or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
<sup>4</sup>but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
 and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
 and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
 and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
<sup>5</sup>Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
 and faithfulness the belt of his loins.  
<sup>6</sup>The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
 and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
 and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
 and a little child shall lead them.  
<sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze;  
 their young shall lie down together;  
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
<sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
 and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.  
<sup>9</sup>They shall not hurt or destroy  
 in all my holy mountain;  
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
 as the waters cover the sea.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 9:2-7 (ESV).

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 10:20.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 11:1-9 (ESV). For more on the coming king and his kingdom, see also Isaiah 16:4-5 and Isaiah 32.

So God will destroy, and God will restore - and there is a coming King who will be Israel's saviour.

## 2. Chapters 40 to 55.

The second section of the book of Isaiah is written *to the Jews in Babylonian exile* - that is, it is written to and for people living some time after Isaiah's death, and this is where our passage of scripture this morning fits in, and we will turn to that in a moment.

## 3. Chapters 56 to 64.

The third section of the book seems to address conditions in Judah after the Jews' return from exile.

I understand that you have been looking at chapter 40 of the book of Isaiah over the past couple of weeks, so I won't dwell on that except to say that in that chapter, God comforts his people: there will be restoration, the time of punishment is coming to an end, and the people of Jerusalem will be soon declare the glory of God to Judah - God, before whom the nations are as nothing,<sup>15</sup> God, the true God, creator of heaven and earth, God above all kings and rulers,<sup>16</sup> greater than any idol,<sup>17</sup> whose power is not diminished just because Jerusalem is in exile.<sup>18</sup>

In chapter 41, again, God reassures Israel: the nations may fear God, seeing his coming wrath, and bow down before their idols, but 'the worm Jacob'<sup>19</sup> should not fear: God will strengthen and help and uphold him.<sup>20</sup> He will 'make the wilderness a pool of water'.<sup>21</sup> He is no mere idol: unlike them, he speaks, and he speaks of things that were and things that are yet to be, and he acts.<sup>22</sup>

So we come to chapter 42: to the Servant in whom God delights. I take it that that Servant is the King spoken of earlier on in Isaiah: the one who will delight in the fear of the Lord, who will judge righteously and usher in justice. He is Israel's Saviour, and the Saviour of the nations. He is Jesus Christ: Jesus, meaning 'Yahweh saves', and Christ, meaning 'Messiah', or 'Saviour'. His name - Jesus Christ - is both a profession of the saving might of God, and his title. And of this Jesus, God says,

<sup>1</sup>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.

God *delights* in Jesus, and Psalm 147 tells us something about why that is:

<sup>10</sup>[The Lord's] delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,  
<sup>11</sup>but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.<sup>23</sup>

It is not Jesus' bodily stature that gives God delight, but his Godly fear - his reverencing of God, his ascribing to God his true worth, his recognition of God's place and of his own, his obedience that led him to the cross, saying, 'Not my will, but yours' - and his hope in God's steadfast love. On him God puts his Spirit, and he will bring forth justice to the nations.

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<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 40:15-17.

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 40:21-24.

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 40:18-20.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 40:27-31.

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 41:14.

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 41:10.

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 41:18 (ESV).

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 41:21-24.

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 147:10-11 (ESV).

<sup>2</sup>He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
<sup>3</sup>a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
<sup>4</sup>He will not grow faint or be discouraged  
till he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his law.

A tender ministry is his, as we're reminded later in Isaiah 57:

<sup>15</sup>For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
"I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.  
<sup>16</sup>For I will not contend for ever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for the spirit would grow faint before me,  
and the breath of life that I made.  
<sup>17</sup>Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry,  
I struck him; I hid my face and was angry,  
but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.  
<sup>18</sup>I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;  
I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners,  
<sup>19</sup> creating the fruit of the lips.  
Peace, peace, to the far and to the near," says the Lord,  
"and I will heal him.  
<sup>20</sup>But the wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot be quiet,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.  
<sup>21</sup>There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."<sup>24</sup>

God says of those who are bruised, crushed, broken by a sense of their own sin, who repent with sincerity, to those of lowly spirit - that is, a spirit that is humble, not proud or ambitious<sup>25</sup> - of them He says, 'I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry. I have seen their ways - their backsliding in the way of their hearts - but *I will heal them*. I will lead them, and restore comfort to them. Peace unto them.' And note that he contrasts the lowly with the wicked - not the good, sinless people with the wicked, but the backsliders who humble themselves before him are contrasted with the wicked. It is the humble backsliders who obtain mercy and the wicked who in the pride of their hearts believe in their own righteousness who are condemned. God is merciful, and Jesus' ministry is gentle and kind to us. That does not mean that he never corrects us, but in Luke 4 he declares that it is the year of the Lord's favour: good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and the oppressed, recovery of sight to the blind. We dwell in a time of favour and grace, under the tender ministry of the Servant, and that is reflected in what God says to his Servant:

<sup>5</sup>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:  
<sup>6</sup>"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,

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<sup>24</sup> Isaiah 57:15-21 (ESVA).

<sup>25</sup> OED.

<sup>7</sup>to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.  
<sup>8</sup>I am the Lord; that is my name;  
my glory I give to no other,  
nor my praise to carved idols.  
<sup>9</sup>Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth  
I tell you of them.”<sup>26</sup>

Jesus is given as a covenant for us all, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. What wonderful, glorious news!

But Isaiah tells us more about the ministry of the Servant than that there is hope for the prisoners. We are told in verses 1 and 4 that the Servant will 'bring forth justice to the nations', and that he will minister until he 'has established justice in the earth'.

There are two points to note here.

1. The first is that many of us have a tendency to speak about Jesus' ministry exclusively in terms of his redemption of our souls, and we think of the gospel in those terms. We would tend to summarize what Jesus did like this: he came, lived without sin, died a sacrificial death on the cross, taking our place, was resurrected, and because of what he did our sins are forgiven and we can now have fellowship with the Father. And all of this is true - but it is not the full story. There is a bigger picture. The message of Israel's redemption in Isaiah is not just a message about a Servant, but also a message about a most glorious King who brings a reign of peace - he is a *king* and he has a *reign*.

We heard earlier that the warriors' boots and the bloodied garments will be burned as fuel for the fire at the coming of the Prince of Peace - the title that Jesus is given - who establishes the kingdom with justice and righteousness, who judges the poor with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek, who slays the wicked. In his kingdom, the wolf dwells with the lamb, the leopard with the young goat, the calf with the lion, led by a little child. There shall be no hurt nor destruction in all God's holy mountain, 'for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'.

Now, we may debate precisely what the timeline of all of this is - but what is clear is that while Jesus was, in Isaiah's words, given 'as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness',<sup>27</sup> the *purpose* of that covenant is bigger than 'now you and I can know God', glorious, joyful, liberating, unspeakably wonderful as that is. There is a bigger picture. The Servant's ministry brings *justice*.

The Hebrew word which is translated as 'justice' does not just mean 'legality' - that is, God is not saying that his Servant will merely make sure that wrongdoers are punished and that the cause of the innocent is upheld, which is what we tend to mean by the word 'justice'. We say 'justice must be done', and by that we mean that people should get what they deserve - but that isn't the fulness of what the Hebrew word means. It means something much closer to 'right order'; God's Servant will establish God's 'right order' in the world; he will order the world in God's way. What does that mean? We can turn to Genesis 1 for part of the answer:

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

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<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 42:1-9 (ESV).

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 42:6-7 (ESV).

<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup>

Tom Wright makes a powerful point about these verses. It is certainly true that when God made us, he made us *like himself* in some ways. He made us capable, in principle, of loving others. That ability to love others comes from him and is a reflection of who *he* is. In that sense you might say that we are made in the image of God - we reflect God - but these verses are not just a description of what we are but of *what we are called to do*. We are called to be like angled mirrors, so that when people look at *us*, they see what *God* is like. They don't see our incapacity and weakness, but they see God's glory and abundance and capacity and righteousness and holiness and love and grace. It is as Jesus says in Matthew 5: men should see *our* good deeds and praise our *Father* who is in heaven.<sup>29</sup> We are to be walking imagers of God.

In other words, God's right order involves his glory being evident in all the world. People should look at us and give praise to God because of what they see of him in us. In God's order, we are not fighting for our own glory. 'The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord' - that means God being given his rightful place in our hearts, in our thinking, in our speaking, in our doing.

That is achieved through salvation and sanctification. We come to God, free of our burden of sin, full of joy, and we behold his glory for ourselves - in fact, that revelation of God's glory is what separates believers from non-believers<sup>30</sup> - and his Holy Spirit works in us to refine us and renew our tastes and our values and to cause us to be transformed from one degree of glory to the next, increasingly showcasing the glory of the One who saved us.

There is a bigger picture than 'now you and I can know God', for it is through our knowing God that he intends to make his glory known to the whole earth.

2. That is the second point: when Isaiah prophesies that Jesus will bring justice, that he will bring right order, it is justice 'to the nations', justice 'in the earth'. Jesus' ministry to us - to you and to me - is not just personal ministry. It is not even just ministry which must have effect in the lives of other believers. It is ministry which must have effect in the world.

It is all too easy to think of what Jesus has done as being 'for me', when the truth is that what he has done for me, he has done *in me for the sake of many*.

I do not know how you treat outreach in this church, nor how you treat it in your personal lives - but your calling as a church and as individual believers is, yes, ministry to God, and yes, ministry to believers, but it is also most emphatically to show the glory of God to the world in who and how you are.

Jesus said to his disciples,

<sup>18</sup>...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[ the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.<sup>31</sup>

When Jesus said this, he was not speaking an optional extra to make the Christian life that little bit more meaningful. I think there is an argument to be made that he was speaking of the fulfilment of the purpose of his coming: the filling of the earth with the knowledge of God, and the coming of God's right order. We are called to be part of this.

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV).

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 5:16.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV).