



## Sermon Transcript December 2, 2018

### Behold the Servant! The Pattern for Our Lives! Isaiah 42:1-9

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on December 2, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Michael J Conserva. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

Isaiah 42:1-9

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.  
<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<sup>[a]</sup>  
till he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his law.

<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<sup>[b]</sup> 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,  
<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.”

## The Pattern for Our Lives

I want you to picture yourself in a court scene. This is not an ordinary court scene. You are simply one of the observers in this court scene. God is the judge, the jury and the prosecuting attorney. God calls all the Gentile nations to stand before the bar of judgement and He asks the nations of the earth to present their case. The issue in this court scene is, 'Who can bring about justice in the world? Who can affect justice? Who can set things right? God asks the nations, how are they going to set things right? The nations are called upon to give an answer, to give a solution to the problems that face mankind. How can we heal a broken, suffering, struggling humanity? Who can set things right? Who can bring about justice? And they have nothing to say.

*But when I look, there is no one;  
among these there is no counselor  
who, when I ask, gives an answer.  
Behold, they are all a delusion;  
their works are nothing;  
their metal images are empty wind. (Isaiah 41:28-29)*

But then another figure is introduced into the courtroom and he is the Servant of the Lord. At first God calls on us to behold the nations (41:29). But then here in chapter 42:1, He calls on us to **Behold the Servant**. And immediately we are to fix our eyes on the one he describes here as His Servant.

It begs the question, "Who is the Servant?" Well it seems pretty clear that in this passage the Servant is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, the Jews recognized that this was indeed a reference to Messiah, long before the time of Christ. Commentators are quick to point out that in almost all of the ancient translations from the Hebrew and Aramaic; they insert between the third and fourth words of verse 1 the word *Messiah*. "*Behold, My Servant, Messiah...*" *So long before Jesus ever came the Jews knew to whom this verse referred. Matthew (12:18-20) applies these words directly to the Lord and for those of us who believe the Scriptures, it is a no brainer. The Servant of the Lord here is the Lord Jesus Himself. We are called to look upon Him as the solution to every problem. He is the one who can affect justice. He is the one who can set things right. He is the one who can affect salvation. He is the one who can heal a broken suffering and struggling humanity. He is the one in whom God will accomplish his purposes for the nations. And so Isaiah writes, "Behold the Servant!"*

In the closing chapters of Isaiah, 40-66, Isaiah talks about one who is designated as the

Servant of the Lord, the Servant who will effect salvation, the one through whom God will accomplish his purposes in the nation. This is He, who is at the center of Isaiah's thinking, particularly in the section from Chapters 40 through 53, which we will be focusing on over the next four Sundays of Advent.

In this section, there are four "Servant Songs," whereby Isaiah describes the service, the suffering, and the exaltation of the Servant of the Lord, Messiah. These four Servant Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12. The servant is the one in whose birth we celebrate.

It is important to understand that initially, Isaiah identifies God's servant as Israel (41:8; 44:1-2), who was to be a light to the Gentiles, but Israel failed again and again, because she was spiritually deaf, blind (42:19) and in need of God's forgiveness (44:21-22). Contrast this with God's Servant, who is a faithful and true witness and completes all the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4), which we will see momentarily.

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
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<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. (Isaiah 42:1-4)*

Immediately the theme of justice leaps out from the pages. In just 12 lines he mentions the word justice three times and we are told the mission of the Servant of Lord, He will bring forth justice. This is the one who will set things right, who will establish justice.

In the OT there are two terms that are often found in conjunction with one another – they are the words "righteousness" and "justice." The word "righteousness" in the Old Testament means to bring a thing into conformity with a standard or a norm. In other words, they would refer to weights that were accurate as "righteous weights." They would conform to a norm, to a standard. In the Old Testament evergreen trees are described as "trees of righteousness" because they always look as a tree ought to look. They do not drop their leaves during the winter, so they are "righteous" trees. The term basically

means to bring a thing into conformity with what it ought to be, to establish it according to the right standard. In the Old Testament the standard is the character of God, so "righteousness" means bringing something into conformity with the character of God.

Justice is the outworking of righteousness. Justice is the practical application of righteousness. It is the action by which the king or some other person brings about a state of righteousness in the nation. So when Isaiah says "The Servant of the Lord will bring about justice in the world," he is saying that he will establish things according to a right standard -- things will be as they ought to be and isn't that something that we all long for. Whether we are talking about our homes, or society, the world order, or ourselves, it is the Servant of the Lord who is the only one who can get things aligned with God's standard. No one else can. There is no alternative to the Servant of the Lord.

We know that God requires justice and in this section of Isaiah we see that God's pattern to bring justice to the earth through his Servant. It is God's remedy for bringing justice to the earth.

### **The Resources the Servant Possessed (Isaiah 42:1)**

#### **First, The Servant is Upheld by God (Isaiah 42:1)**

*"Behold my Servant, whom I uphold."*

He is described here as the Servant whom the Father upholds. The term "uphold" means to take hold of something. It means to strengthen someone by taking a grip on them. That is what the Father does to the Servant, the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus derives his strength from the Father.

We normally think of the Lord in that way. Since he is God he is sufficient in himself. But the Lord Jesus derived His strength from the Father. He was completely dependent upon His Father. Ray Stedman commenting upon this text says, *"He was not strong in himself. He experienced all of the weaknesses and limitations of the flesh, apart from sin; therefore he understands our limitations. He himself had to depend on the Father for his strength. There was simply no other way that he could carry out the ministry that the Father had given to him"* to do.

In contrast look at how the nations respond when they are under stress, they say, "Let's strengthen one another." In Chapter 41, Verse 5, we read,

*The coastlands have seen and are afraid;  
the ends of the earth tremble;*

*they have drawn near and come.  
Everyone helps his neighbor  
and says to his brother, "Be strong!" (Isaiah 42:5-6)*

Interestingly, the same term is found in Chapter 42 where it says the Lord upholds, or strengthens, takes hold of, his Servant. Isn't this reminiscent of how we tend to handle problems in our own culture. We say to one another, "Be strong! Try harder! Try again! Get a grip on yourself! When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" You just have to be strong, instead of being strengthened in the Lord!

My favorite character in Charlie Brown is always Lucy, because she is so sarcastic. Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for counseling. She is sitting in her booth under her banner, "Psychiatry -- 5 cents." Charlie Brown says, "Lucy, you know how I've tried -- tell me I've tried! I've tried and I've tried and I've tried to be good!" Lucy says, "Nice try, Charlie Brown. Five cents."

## **Second, The Servant is Chosen By God (Isaiah 42:1)**

*"My chosen, in whom my soul delights"*

Next we are told that the Servant is the Father's chosen one, in whom delights the Father. *"My chosen one in whom My soul delights." Those of you men who know what it is to be a father, you can understand this. I have three sons, and they all are a great delight to me.*

The Servant was a Son whom the Father loved and had especially chosen. These are the words that were addressed to the Son at his baptism: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," (Matthew 3:17). Long before the Lord Jesus ever did a thing, before he worked a miracle, before he ever taught, before he engaged in any ministry at all, he was assured of the love, approval, and delight of the Father. That is what enabled him to endure the rejection of men. People were not delighted with him, but he could persevere in what he was doing because he was assured of the acceptance and love of the Father. Of course, the same is true of us. We are not always going to receive the praise and appreciation of people. People are not always going to understand. We won't be the delight of their eye all the time. But we, like the Son, are chosen, and we are a source of delight to the Father.*

## **Third, The Servant Possesses the Spirit of God (Isaiah 42:1)**

*"I have put my Spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations."*

We are told that the Servant is empowered because he possesses the Spirit: "I have put my Spirit upon him." In the Old Testament, the Spirit is the principle that gets things done. It is the animating principle; it is God at work. It is God. More than a principle, it is a Person. The Spirit is described in the Old Testament in terms that the people could understand. The same term that is translated *wind or breath throughout the Old Testament is also translated Spirit. People had seen the wind at work, although they couldn't see the wind. This is the way the ministry of the Son is described. He possessed the Spirit and the Spirit empowered him. Everywhere he went the wind blew. He could affect people's lives powerfully and change attitudes and have a great impact upon people because he possessed the Spirit. This is part of our way of life that we will daily ask for filling of the Holy Spirit and that we will live with the conviction that God is at work through our lives.*

These are the characteristics of the Son -- he is upheld by God, chosen by God, and empowered by the Spirit. These are the resources, the riches the Servant drew upon to carry out his ministry. Notice the last line of Verse 1 tells us that because of the resources that he possesses in the Father "He will bring forth justice to the nations." He will set things right.

## **2. The Manner of the Servant's Ministry (Isaiah 42:2-3)**

*He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street*

The second verse tells us something of the Servant's manner: "He will not cry out or lift up His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street." He didn't demand recognition. He didn't publish daily reports in the Jerusalem Post. He didn't talk about what he did, nor did he necessarily tell people how he did it. He went about doing what the Father had called him to do. He didn't promote himself, but he quietly followed the will of his Father. Then we are told in Verse 3,

*"A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench"*

This is a description of the nature of his ministry and the sort of people he was drawn to, the kind of lives that were most attractive to him. Somehow we have fallen into the mistake of thinking that God is only pleased with the strong, with those who have thought everything through spiritually, who handle all their problems and people who do not struggle. Or maybe those who are in positions of leadership, who appear to have everything together. Somehow we have convinced ourselves that those are the people

God is pleased with. We think God is sort of put off by the rest of us because we are struggling. This passage tells us that is just not true. It is the broken and the bruised and the nearly extinguished that God ministers to.

This is a very graphic picture. I can see in my mind a slender reed, crushed, half-broken, bending over, or a little lamp with a piece of flax in it, nearly extinguished, merely a glowing ember. The Lord props up the broken reed, and he fans into flame the smoking flax. That is what he was called to do. He came, he said, "as a physician to the sick," (Mark 2:17 NASB). Those were the people he was drawn to, the ones he ministered to.

Truth be known, all of us are bruised reeds, despite the front that we erect. We are all a faintly burning wick. It is these things that often draws the Lord to our aid. He wants to minister to us, to fan us back into flame, prop us up, strengthen and encourage us. And that is the ministry that we are called to, as well. We are to seek out the weak and the floundering and the struggling and to minister to them. And, by so doing, Isaiah tells us again, he will faithfully bring forth justice.

### 3. The Persistence of the Servant's (Isaiah 42:4)

*He will not grow faint or be discouraged[a]  
till he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his law.*

The term translated "grow faint" is the same word that is found in the second line of Verse 3, "**faintly burning wick**." The term translated "**discouraged**" is the same word that is translated "**bruised**" in the first line of Verse 3. The point is this; although the Servant ministers to the bruised and crushed, he himself is never bruised or crushed. He doesn't catch the disease. He doesn't give up; he doesn't become fainthearted.

We have the disease, sometimes we give up or at least feel like giving up, we grow fainthearted. But, the Servant never comes to the end of his rope. The Servant never throws in the towel, never gives up. He never says to you and I, "My grace has run, I'm not available, I can't forgive you this time."

How many times have we said, "Here I am, Lord, back again, doing the same thing. Can you ever forgive me?" Certainly he can. He never gives up. He will persist until he will bring about justice.



## Conclusion

This is the pattern that God has established to bring about justice.

This is the pattern for our lives! This is the pattern of establishing justice upon the earth. This is the pattern by which we set things right. In the same way as our Lord Jesus, we are to draw upon the rich resources we have in Christ and we are to go about quietly, without fanfare, patiently ministering to the weak and lowly, to the oppressed and downtrodden. And although, at times you feel as though your efforts are fruitless and you wonder ‘ what am I doing.’ It is through the pattern the Lord Jesus Himself demonstrated and that He has established as the pattern for our lives. **Jesus not only accomplished what He set out to do, he gave us an example to follow.**

That was our Lord’s ministry and that is our ministry as well. So if you are here this morning and you feel like a bruised and broken reed and your flax is about to go out, remember, it is the Servant of the Lord that you need to behold.



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## COMMUNITY GROUPS



### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What do you enjoy or what are you looking forward to the most during this time of the year?
2. What are some Advent family traditions you celebrate or remember? How are these meaningful to you?



### Diving Into The Word

1. Take a moment to read Isaiah 42:1-9. What has the Spirit revealed to you about the character of God through this passage or the sermon?
2. What is the overarching theme of Isaiah 42:1-4 and how does this help us to understand the meaning of Advent? Take a moment to review your understanding of Advent. Process this as a group.
3. Read Isaiah 42:1. What are the resources that the Servant Possessed? How do these resources help you to bring about justice to your family, neighbors, friends and co-workers? Try to be specific.
4. What was the nature of the Servant's Ministry in Isaiah 42 and how does that influence the manner in which we conduct ourselves in an often hostile world towards Christians?



### Taking It Home

1. Real encouragement needs to be Sincere, Specific, and Strength Focused. Try it! Turn to someone in your group and encourage them by being sincere in your encouragement, specific, and focus on a strength that you see in the other person.
2. Secondly, talk about it! What did you learn? What did you do well? What could you have done better? How comfortable were you in giving the encouragement?
3. Read Isaiah 42:2-3. This week ask God to help you be an encourager to someone else. Remember, be sincere, specific and strength focused.