

This morning we are continuing in our sermon series entitled “The meaning of Christmas,” looking at the Old Testament book of Isaiah and his prophecies about the coming Messiah. During the time of Isaiah, the nation of Israel is falling away from God, and so God raises up a man named Isaiah to prophesy that they will be disciplined by a foreign nation, Assyria, and then by Babylon. As they will see in the prophecies, this exile points to the greater exile from God Himself due to their sin. But God promises to raise up a King who will be God Himself. 40-66 are prophecies to the Israelites in exile. In this section, Isaiah introduces a figure called “the servant of the Lord” who will do what Israel could not do, fulfilling God’s call and restoring the people of God to a right relationship with God and being a light to the nations, bringing salvation to the Gentiles. Let’s read Isaiah 42:1-10:

Isaiah 42:1-10 - "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." ⁵ This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. ⁸ "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. ⁹ See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." ¹⁰ Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them.

I want to highlight three things from this passage about the servant:

1) The servant will bring salvation and justice to the nations

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations

⁶ *"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the*

Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

This was Israel's calling but they had failed at it.

The Hebrew word translated as justice here is **Mishpat** – judicial order in the realm. People live with love, no more hungry, no oppression, no need for prisons or courts. Mishpat is societal order in which all concerns are addressed. There is life-giving order where the creation functions in accordance with God's design.

The servant of the Lord will establish a kingdom where justice reigns, where everything functions as it is supposed to. **Shalom**. Everything is in right relationship with everything else.

2) The servant will not bring about this justice through earthly means

³ *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.*

The nation was trusting in foreign nations and kings who would by force establish justice. And hearing this prophecy, they probably were expecting an earthly king who would restore Israel to its former glory. But there is something different about this servant. This servant will be so tender and gentle that he will not even break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick as he establishes justice.

The servant will establish this kingdom not through oppression and conquest but through humility, gentleness, and tenderness.

How is this possible? Who is this servant?

Matthew 12:15-21 - *Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, ¹⁶ warning them not to tell who he was. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰ A **bruised reed** he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. ²¹ In his name the nations will put their hope."*

The servant prophesied about in Isaiah 42 is Jesus. As he goes out healing the sick, he fulfills this prophecy. He is setting things right through His gentle, tender ministry. He will not raise his voice or break a bruised reed. His miracles are signs pointing to the way it will one day be. He has come to make things right, but he will not do it through force and violence. Consider:

John 3:16-17 - *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

The image of a bruised reed and smoldering wick is powerful for many of us. In our sin, rebellion, and pain, he has not come to condemn but to save, not to discard but to redeem. Bruised can also be translated as crushed, like a deep contusion, a bruise that doesn't show on the surface but on the inside you are suffering and dying. Jesus showed through his ministry this kind of tenderness towards bruised reeds. Think of the woman wiping his feet with her tears. The woman caught in adultery. The lepers. Those who were broken down by life received tenderness and compassion from Jesus.

The images of this verse may resonate with many of you who feel broken down by the stress and heartache of life. Or those of you who are hanging on to faith and hope like a smoldering wick. How does Jesus meet us in that place?

By his healing presence –

When a celebrity visits a hospital, it just makes them greater

Psalm 34:18 - *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Think of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, weeping with Mary:

John 11:32-36 - *When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"*

Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In His presence we are reminded that He loves us, that He is good, that He is sovereign, that He works all things together for good, that He will put an end to suffering and violence. As Jesus said to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus:

John 11:25-26 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

His NT healing is a sign pointing to that final day when he will put a final end to suffering and death.

By being bruised for our salvation

Remember in the beginning, after the fall, came this prophecy from God to the snake:

Genesis 3:15 - And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

He took the poison to save us.

Isaiah 53:5 - But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

He did not bring about salvation through earthly means. He did not conquer, he did not use politics or armies; he conquered by sacrificial love. And one day He will return to make all things right:

Revelation 22:1-2 -Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

John 16:33 - *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

3) He will send us out to heal and bring justice to others

The original intention for the people of God was to be a light to the world and to bring their salvation to the nations. They could not do it. Now, because Jesus did, we are empowered to do exactly that:

Colossians 1:15-24 - *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. ²⁴ Now I rejoice **in** what was suffered for you, and I **fill up in my** flesh what is still lacking **in** regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his **body**, which is the church.*

We may be wounded, but by the healing of Christ we are wounded healers

As Brennan Manning wrote about a play by Thornton Wilder:

There's a scene in Thornton Wilder's play "The Angel that Troubled the Waters"

The scene is a doctor comes to the pool everyday wanting to be healed of his melancholy and his gloom and his sadness. Finally the angel appears. The doctor, he's a medical doctor, goes to step into the water. The angel blocks his entrance and says, "No, step back, the healing is not for you." The doctor pleads, "But I've got to get into the water. I can't live this way." The angel says, "No, this moment is not for you." And he says, "But how can I live this way?"

The angel says to him, "Doctor, without your wounds where would your power be? It is your melancholy that makes your low voice tremble into the hearts of men and women. The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children of this earth as can one human being broken on the wheels of living. In love's service, only wounded soldiers can serve."

Because of the Lord's healing in our lives, we can enter into the pain of the world to love and bind up the bruised reeds and reignite the smoldering wicks.