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“The Glory of the Spirit-Filled Servant”

Isaiah 42:1-9

Series: *The Glory of Christmas*

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 42.

Of all of the wonderful things about this season of the year, one of the best is the music. Some of the best music ever written combines theologically rich words with beautifully fitting music to tell the account of God coming to Earth through the incarnation of Jesus. The best of Christmas music combines the themes of God’s great work through Christ and the glory due to God because of this great work. You’re familiar with the hymn “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” Listen to the last 2 verses of this great song:

Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation; O sing, all ye bright hosts of heav’n above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him – Christ,
the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we great thee, born this happy morn’g; Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv’n:
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!

O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him – Christ,
the Lord!

That is exactly what we intend to do over the next four weeks as we march our way towards our celebration of our Lord’s birth. We intend to come and adore Him – Christ the Lord! And in doing this we will see the glory of Christmas as we gaze upon the glory of our Lord. In particular we are going to focus our attention on the prophecies about our Lord which so clearly and accurately foretold his coming. And of all the prophecies we could consider in the Old Testament we will zero in on the prophecies of Isaiah.

Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament, and his prophecies are filled with rich and riveting imagery which capture the core doctrinal themes of the Christian faith. The book of Isaiah is 66 chapters long and these chapters thematically reflect the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. The first 39 chapters are filled with the reality of God’s promised judgment because of the unbelief of his people. These chapters are sprinkled with prophecies of hope that God will send a Son, born of a virgin and his name shall be Immanuel. And that Son will be more than a Son – He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace – and there will be no end to the increase of his kingdom which will be established with righteousness and justice and will bring peace. This shoot from the stump of Jesse will have the

Spirit of God upon him and he will be full of wisdom and understanding. But that is about the extent of what we are told about this coming one – the promised one – this anointed one, the Messiah. From chapters 13-34 we are told of the coming judgment upon the nations for their unbelief and for their rebellion against the one true God. Throughout these oracles of judgment there are notes of hope struck for the future salvation and restoration of Israel, but over and over again we read of the stubborn hearts of God's rebellious people. In fact, you could say that this is what is at stake in the book as a whole – who are the people of God to put their hope and trust in as they face a turbulent present and an unknown future?

Isaiah is writing at a time when the political world of the day is in turmoil. Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon are all struggling for world domination. For most of Isaiah's life and ministry, Assyria is the dominant world power, and Israel falls into their hands in 721 BC and the 10 northern tribes are carried off into captivity and exile. But Isaiah is a prophet in the 2 southern tribes known as Judah and his main message is – return to the Lord and trust in Him alone because He alone is your only hope. But they often did not listen. They trusted in alliances they made with other kings and they trusted in the idols of other nations and they trusted in their own leaders, but they failed to trust in God by taking Him at his word.

That is why, in Isaiah 6 he was given the vision of the Heavenly throne room in the very year of King Uzziah's death. They were not to put their trust in an earthly king, even one appointed by God. But rather, they were to see God in Heaven as their King, the one around whom seraphim fly and constantly repeat, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory!" This high and Holy King will send His anointed one and God's people are to confidently trust in Him alone.

And so, in chapter 40 the prophet turns a corner and for the next 27 chapters he describes the plan of God to save and rescue his people through his chosen servant. The section starts with the forerunner's message, just like the New Testament starts. And it ends with a vision of the Eternal Kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. It gloriously and accurately reflects the message of the New Testament. And in those 27 chapters there are 4 unique sections which each describe a different aspect of this chosen servant of the Lord who is coming as the anointed one, as the Messiah. These have typically been called the 4 servant songs of Isaiah, and each one gives us a little more clarity about the position, practice, and purpose of this Messiah. And the whole point is to lay before God's people in every age the glory of God as seen in the person and work of His servant – the Lord Jesus – who is the Christ! So, let's come and adore this Messiah, this Son, this Mighty God, this Servant sent by the Lord. Isaiah 42:1-9 says this about him.

The book of Isaiah has been the focus of many critics of the Scriptures. But like a heavyweight champion it has withstood every blow. The main reason the scholars like to attack Isaiah is that there is no way in their thinking that someone could write hundreds of years before the event with so much accuracy and clarity. They instead think that there were several authors of this book who wrote after the events happened because no prophet could be this accurate. But from chapter 1 through to chapter 66 that is exactly how it goes – one accurate prophetic word after another. What we find in this word from the Lord through Isaiah is an accurate interpretation of

the past, a thorough exegesis of the present, and a sure prophecy about the future. If God was right in the past, Isaiah's book says, then he can certainly be trusted for the present and the future. Instead of hoping in other foreign powers or in other so-called gods or in your own strength – you must trust in the Lord your God.

This is the message of Christmas isn't it? We are hard-wired as humans to put our trust in someone. We often choose poorly and we put our trust in someone who is present or near to us and so we walk by faith and not by sight. And we find ourselves constantly disappointed in their failure to be the rescuer we need. We need someone greater and stronger and more able to save. And all mankind inherently knows this. We inherently know we have a great problem and we need a great Savior. And so God says in 42:1 – Behold, my servant! If you look back at the end of chapter 41 you will see that this is in contrast to the false hope of idols who have proven completely unable to do anything of any value for them. So he says in verse 29, "Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind." Behold, my servant! The empty wind of metal images is contrasted with the great glory of God's servant who will be filled with His Spirit and will accomplish great things for His people. These 9 verses put before us the glory of this Spirit filled servant by explaining his exalted position, his exalted person, and his exalted purpose.

I. His Exalted Position – vs. 1

- a. Do you remember in Acts 8 when the Ethiopian eunuch is reading the prophet Isaiah and God brings Philip to him and the Ethiopian asks him as he read from Isaiah 53 – who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? That is the 4th servant song we will consider, but that has been the question throughout the centuries of these servant songs. Who is Isaiah prophesying about? Himself? The nation of Israel? Or some anointed and special person within the nation of Israel? Some of the confusion is easy to understand because there are texts in Isaiah where Israel is referred to as God's servant. But you will quickly see in these 4 songs that there is someone greater, someone more exalted than the nation of Israel who is being described here.
- b. This servant is seen as exalted in his position in verse 1. He is God's servant. There is singular ownership there. He is slave to the authority and command of the God of Heaven. He is in a unique relationship with God in that he is upheld by God and chosen by God and delighted in by God because He is God's servant. All of those things are true of God's people in the Old and New Testament. But God's people have failed to walk in faithful love of their Master and Lord. Therefore, out of them there had to be a chosen slave who would bring justice to the Earth, light to the nations, and salvation to the captive.
- c. In order for that to be true he had to be uniquely related to God. He had to be positioned in such a way that no other man ever was. He must have an exalted position. And this exalted position would be marked by the Spirit of the Lord being upon him so that he would fully accomplish God's plans for bringing justice to the nations. Unlike the idols representing false spirits who are nothing

more than empty winds, this chosen servant of God will be filled with God's Spirit.

- d. This connects us then back to Isaiah 11 where the prophet said, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 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. 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. (Isa. 11:1-5 ESV)
- e. And again in Isaiah 61 the text says "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;" (Isa. 61:1-2 ESV)
- f. This is a uniquely positioned ruler of righteousness. This is a man who is gifted by God and anointed by God to accomplish a worldwide mission of salvation and restoration of His people. This anointed one is uniquely given God's Spirit. Well, who is this branch of Jesse? Who is this chosen servant? Because we are given the New Testament witness we are not left to wonder. Turn with me over to Matthew 3. At the baptism of Jesus of Nazareth at the start of his public ministry we are told of this exalted position and this unique anointing of the Spirit of God. *Read Matthew 3:16-17.*
- g. This is such a familiar passage to you that you might miss the grand significance here. Think about the words which came out of Isaiah's pen some 750 years earlier. Now, in Matthew 3 the heavens open and God speaks audibly for all present to hear and the Spirit of God descends upon Him in a visible form. This was not for Jesus. This was for the crowd and for the Gospel writers and for us. This was so that we would know that Jesus of Nazareth is the chosen servant of God from the prophecy of Isaiah. God the Father is well-pleased with Him as His beloved Son. He is not merely a man, but he is truly man and he is truly God – both in one person. And he is uniquely positioned and set apart by God to accomplish God's mission. And here in Matthew 3 the Spirit of God publicly approves and validates that this Jesus of Nazareth is the uniquely chosen servant. He is the one upon whom the Spirit will descend and reside. So, the Father and the Spirit agree here in their public testimony – Jesus is the chosen servant of Isaiah's prophecy. Now flip over a few pages to Matthew 12. In a heated moment of public confrontation with the Pharisees Jesus so provokes their hatred of him by speaking the truth that they went and plotted against him how they could destroy him. Now, look at verses 15. *Read Mt. 12:15-21.*

- h. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus here goes on record to say that he agrees with the Father and the Spirit – He is the chosen servant of Isaiah’s prophecy. This is a triune public testimony to the great uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Spirit-filled servant sent by God and chosen by God and well-pleasing to God who will accomplish the purpose of God. This prophecy of the exalted position of the chosen servant points to only one possibility – Jesus of Nazareth.

II. His Exalted Person – vs. 2-4

- a. Not only is he exalted in his position, but he is exalted in his person. That is the testimony, back in Isaiah 42:2-4. This Spirit-filled servant will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street. In other words, he will not be a boisterous and pompous man who draws attention to himself every where he goes. He will not hire trumpeters to go before him and herald his every move. He will not be like every other political leader the world has ever known who has drawn attention every time he enters the room. This does not mean that he wouldn’t boldly and clearly proclaim the truth and preach the gospel of the Kingdom, but it means that he will not draw needless attention to himself. This is why when you are reading the gospel accounts you often find Jesus trying to get out of the limelight of popular opinion. He did not come the first time to receive the fickle praise of men for his oratory skills or even for his healing ability. He came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. He came to give his life as a ransom for many and to die under the condemnation of sin. This is why, as Peter will later say, when he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he was yelled at and accused and beaten based on those false accusations, he did not yell back even to defend himself. As the fourth servant song will say – “he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” This is a servant with an exalted character and nature. He is unlike any other man.
- b. Verse 3 tells us that he will not break a bruised reed, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. In other words, he will be gentle to the oppressed and the hurting. He who himself will suffer and be oppressed will have a special care and attention for those who are suffering. He will not destroy the weak and trample over those whose faith is barely alive. This is seen in Jesus’ life over and over and over. He was moved with compassion for the crowds because he saw them in their true need – they were like sheep without a shepherd. He saw the poor and the blind and the deaf and the dumb and even the physically dead and he was moved to help them and to restore to them the life and health they had lost. His ear was always attuned to the cry of the needy and the hungry and the hurting. He was no respecter of persons and he did not trample over the least and the lost. But this was especially true of the weak spiritually. He saw the weak faith of Peter and so he prayed for him. He knew Satan wanted to sift him like wheat and so he pleaded with the Father for the faithfulness of Peter. And then Jesus gently restored him after his betrayal. If ever there was a bruised reed it was Peter. And

what did Jesus' healing touch do? It launched a life of faithful and fervent and sacrificial service as an apostle of the Church.

- c. And what about Thomas? If ever there was a faintly burning wick, wouldn't it be Thomas after the resurrection? He has heard of the resurrected Jesus, but hasn't seen him and so he says, I won't believe unless I see him with my own eyes and touch him with my own hands. Beloved, if you were Jesus how would you respond to that? Maybe send lightning or a sudden illness and have Thomas die right on the spot to teach everyone a lesson about not doubting the resurrection of Christ? But what does Jesus do? He shows up in the room and tells Thomas to touch his hands and his side. That faintly burning wick suddenly lit with a new flame! "My Lord and My God" Thomas said! This is the exalted person of this Spirit-filled servant.
- d. And not only will he be gentle to those who are bruised and about to break, but verse 4 tells us that he himself will never break. As one commentator said, "His zeal will not be extinguished, nor will anything break His strength, till He shall have secured for right a firm standing on the earth."¹ He won't quit until his mission is accomplished. His meek character is not a weak character. His concern for the poor and needy, the lost and lonely, the destitute and discouraged is not a sign that he is himself a hopeless Savior. Rather, this compassionate servant of God will be firm to the end. He will bring justice in accordance with the truth and he will make sure it reaches to every coastland of the world. His zeal and his strength will be coupled with his humility and his compassion.
- e. How different the person and nature of this Spirit-filled servant will be from any other dominant ruler that has ever governed mankind. In Isaiah's own day there was the ruler of Assyria, Sennacherib himself. He was a fearless and ruthless man. He overran the world through power and military might. He would enter into a region and overwhelm them with the power of his army. He would subject them completely to his rule and authority, and if they even smelled like they would revolt he would take many of them into captivity and send people from his own empire to settle their land. That is what he did to the 10 tribes of the North in Israel. They rebelled and he swooped in and smacked them into submission like a bully on a playground. Then, just to guarantee no future rebellion he left some of them there and took many of them into exile. Then he settled their land with people from other parts of his empire – thereby polluting the gene pool and squashing the will of the people to rebel against his authority. In Isaiah's day he sent his military leaders to set siege to Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. It's such an important even in God's mind that it is recorded twice for us in Scripture, almost word for word – once in 2 Kings 19 and once in Isaiah 36-39. Do you remember the threat of the Rabshakeh as they set siege to Jerusalem? He told them to not let Hezekiah convince them that God would save them because no god of any other nation had saved anyone else. The nation of Assyria had basically had its way with everyone else, so why would Israel be any different?

¹ Keil-Delitzsch, *The Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah; Vol. 7; pg. 176.*

- f. Do you see the arrogance and the haughtiness and the self-exalting nature of this world ruler? Do you see the injustice he spread? Do you see the poor he squashed in his way? Do you see the oppressed and the downtrodden that he drove into the grave? Do you see the kingdom he built by the might of his own power? Do you see the difference between him and God's chosen, Spirit-filled servant? And isn't Sennacherib more or less a picture of every human ruler? Maybe not to the same degree as he was, but do any of them show the character qualities described here in verses 2-4? Of course not! This chosen servant of God has an exalted person, and this chosen servant is Jesus Christ the Lord!

III. His Exalted Purpose – vs. 5-9

- a. Lastly, notice this glory as seen in his exalted purpose. That is what we find described in verses 5-9. He was given a unique purpose as the chosen one of God. Notice how verse 5 frames this purpose in the context of God's power to create all things. It is God who created the heavens and stretched them out. It is God who spread out the earth and designed what would come from it. It is God who gives breath to all people and the spirit of life to all who walk in his world. This is reminiscent of that grand text in Isaiah 40, just a few chapters before where the greatness of God is seen in the grandeur of his creation. It is this God, the one who measured the mountains in a balance and the waters of the oceans in the hollow of his hand – it is this God who has purposed and planned to redeem his people. This is reminiscent of the book of Genesis isn't it? The first 2 chapters of creation account give way to the disastrous fall into sin in chapter 3 which is quickly coupled with the redemptive promise of this Creator God. He who made us is not willing to abandon us to our own sinfulness. He will make a way for our salvation, and this way will be through this chosen servant.
- b. In verse 6, this chosen servant is called in righteousness and is held and kept by God. This plan for redemption is birthed out of the holy and righteous character of God. The same God who was seen as holy, holy, holy in Isaiah 6 is the God whose angel cleansed the prophet's sinful lips. The same servant of God who will bring justice and will judge the nations is the servant who will be bruised and afflicted by God for His sheep to redeem them. He will be condemned in their place so that they can be declared righteous with Him.
- c. This servant is given as a covenant for the people and as a light for the nations. He is a fulfillment of the covenants of the Old Testament and He is the security of the New Covenant yet to be fulfilled in the days to come. As 2 Corinthians 1 says, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."
- d. And these covenant blessings secured by this servant of God are not just for Israel, but they are for the nations. He is a light to the nations – meaning he is to open their blind eyes and bring them out of their dark dungeons of captivity. This is obviously a spiritual darkness and blindness and captivity. As Zechariah prophesied in Luke 1:79, this child was to be born to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Jesus himself said in John 8, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will

not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Paul says in Ephesians 4 that Jesus ascended on high and he led a host of captives in his train. And Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9 that we are called out of darkness into his marvelous light by the excellencies of the grace of this Jesus.

- e. Again, take notice how different this chosen servant of God is compared to all other rulers who come in displays of power and authority. They take prisoners and bind captives. They create jails and dungeons for the fiercest political opponents. They put out the eyes and cut off the fingers of those who would oppose them. They bring darkness and not light. They cast a shadow of evil rather than burn a torch of righteousness. They are a light for themselves bringing their own freedom in expression of their power, but they are captivity to everyone else. But not Jesus. He sets the captives free and restores sight to the blind and raises the spiritually dead unto eternal life. He is unique and exalted as God’s servant in accomplishing God’s unique plan!
- f. And this all results in the glorification of God. This God who created and this God who chose this Servant and this God who planned this redemption is the God whose glory will be all the more seen through it all. So, verse 8 says, “I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and the new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”
- g. In other words, do not trust in the deceptive lies of the idolatrous nations around you. Trust only in me, the Lord your God. I have rightly predicted the past. I have told you what would happen and it has come to pass. Therefore, don’t look to another to tell you what will come in the future. Look only to me, I am your only trustworthy source. There is no other! He alone is full of glory. That is why in verses 10-13 you have a doxological command for this God of glory to be praised with a new song in every part of the earth. He has chosen this servant and he will bring him at the perfect moment and he will accomplish the salvation of his people – therefore, he must be praised!

Conclusion: Beloved, as you come into this season of remembering and celebrating our Lord’s birth, you must remember that it has all happened according to plan. God was not a liar. He did not misspeak. He did not get lucky with some of his predictions, but then was shown to be haphazard with some others. No, it has all gone just like he said it would. Therefore, look to Him alone in confident faith. Take him at his word today for what will come tomorrow! And more specifically, look to him in confident faith by raising your eyes from the oppression and difficulty of sin and look to the coming king of who has promised to complete our redemption and set us completely free from our condemnation. Look to this light of salvation and be set free from the captivity of your sin!