6-16-24

Isaiah 42:1-9

In the book of the prophet Isaiah, there are four passages that speak of Jesus as a servant. These are called the “Servant Songs”. Verses 1-4 here comprise the first of these passages. Each of these songs is followed by some verses that reenforce what has been said in the song passages and that is what we have in verses 5-9.

There is much in the Old Testament that tells us that the Messiah will come as a conqueror. And that is what the Jewish people focused on. But there are also prophecies that He would come as a servant; even as a suffering servant. And this is why so many of them missed Jesus. They looked for the coming conquering Messiah and believed that the servant prophecies were about the prophets themselves.

What we understand now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is that there are two separate sets of prophecies in the Old Testament. Indeed, there are two separate comings of the Messiah. The servant portions of the prophecies have been fulfilled. Jesus came to this earth as an infant human-being and was nurtured into a man. As a man, He taught and proclaimed righteousness while giving ample evidence that He was the Messiah through miraculous works and wisdom. He paid the price for our sins and ascended into heaven to be once more with His Father. In all these things, He completed the work of redemption that God the Father had sent Him to do.

The second set of prophecies have not yet been fulfilled. Jesus will come back with great power. He will be the conquering Messiah the Jewish people were looking for. The New Testament reenforces what the Old Testament predicts; that Christ will come as King and sovereign ruler. Embedded in this is the warning for us: Do not be deceived. Many will now come claiming to be the Christ, possessing great knowledge and being very persuasive; they might even perform miracles. But the Bible is clear that when Jesus returns it will be very visible to the ends of the earth. There will be lots of noise and light. And He will be accompanied by angels and His redeemed. So do not be deceived; when He comes all the world will know it. And for those who do not belong to Him it will be too late.

In the first four verses of this chapter, the Servant Song, we see that the servant is not one God is angry with even though He is going to suffer, but He is one in whom God delights. Think of Matthew 3:17 where God says about Jesus, “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*” God says through the prophet Isaiah that He will put His Spirit upon His servant; and we read in the same passage of Matthew that the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Even though Jesus was God, while He was here on the earth, He laid His Godhood aside and did all His works by the power of the Holy Spirit.

While Jesus was here, He did not break bruised reeds or quench those whose light of life was about to go out. Instead He strengthened them and gave them new life. He taught and cared for those who were weak and trapped in sin; He showed them the true way to God. He was the servant of God and the servant of man. In obedience to the Father and in love for us He served us.

How different this sounds from the conquering King who will return to rule with a rod of iron. Yet it is the same Saviour; it is the same God. And He is no different now than He was in the past. God hates sin and He does not tolerate idolatry; yet He loves His creation and has made a way for us to avoid destruction and be with Him forever. Verses 5-9 briefly remind us that He is God and He has the power and right to do these things.

Verse 5 begins with “*Thus says God the LORD*.” That is emphatic; He is God. He is the one and only all-powerful deity. He is not just one god among many. He is far and above anything else that mankind chooses to worship. Throughout history, mankind has made idols: they might be gold or silver or stone or wood; they might be images of human shaped beings or animals; while these are still there today, we are more likely to encounter ideas that become idols. And all these idols have a tremendous influence over people; and that is because they have demonic spirits associated with them.

But God reminds us that He is God and He even gives us His name: Yahweh. He is not an idea or a presence; He is more real than you or I. In 1 John 4:8 and 16, we are told that “*God is love*” and this is sometimes taken out of context. People will assert that God is simply the emotion of love. While the statement that “*God is love*” is absolutely true, it is not the whole picture. Love is just one characteristic of God; one characteristic of our amazing and infinite Creator.

And God is the Creator. The account we are given in Genesis of His creative activity is true; it is not just a parable or a metaphor. He is the One who placed all the stars in the sky; in fact, He created the sky. He created the earth. And I want to give just a little personal testimony about God’s glorious creation.

We just got back from a trip out west and one of the things we got to see was the Grand Canyon. We only got to see a few miles of it but it is very properly named. As any of you who have seen it can attest, it is breathtaking in its vastness, and the cliffs and rock formations that are so prevalent there. Pictures don’t do it justice; the images just can’t capture what it’s like. Even our own eyes can’t take it all in. The more we look, the more we see; and often when we look it turns out that something isn’t what we thought it was. A small looking flat spot on the side of a rock turns out to be a cliff a hundred feet tall.

One of the interesting things I noticed there was the quietness. Now, there were lots of people there and they were moving around and talking. But it wasn’t boisterous; there was no loud laughing or shouting. I overheard one group of about four people, and one of them was telling the others all about things he knew about the Grand Canyon. He wasn’t obnoxious, he was just talking. I next hear one member of the group ask, “Why are we whispering?”

There was quietness and whispering because we, through His creation, were in the presence of the majesty of God. He had made this canyon and it demonstrated what He can do. Although I’m sure many there did not recognize what was going on, that’s what was happening. And if God can create something so majestic, how majestic must God be.

Of course, there were plaques and markers and explanations all along the trail that explained how over millions of years the Colorado river had formed this canyon. My first question then is why haven’t all the rest of the rivers in the world formed canyons? No, the Grand Canyon was formed by the finger of God. And so were all the amazing mesas in the desert; the tall rocky mountains that still had snow on the tops. He made all the plains of the mid-west. And He made all the beautiful wooded mountains that surround us here in West Virginia.

These mountains are just as grand as the ones out west; I think we just get used to them and fail to give God the praise He is due for creating them. Our God is a creator God and His creation demonstrates His glory. Paul assures us of this in Romans 1:20, “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made.*” It is clear that we live in God’s creation; to give credit to evolution or a big bang is idolatry and blasphemy.

As soon as Isaiah speaks of the creation of the heavens and the earth, he speaks of people. And he speaks of people as God’s creation. The theory of evolution is a slap in the face of God. The whole idea of a primordial ooze taking a lightning strike and creating an amoeba with life is absurd. That’s pretty much the idea behind the story of Frankenstein. Then to have the amoeba learn to breath air, develop into a monkey, and eventually become a human-being is preposterous. If you think about it, it truly makes no sense.

But Isaiah points out the power of God, “*Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it.*” The account of creation in Genesis shows how special people are in God’s creation. He spoke the earth and heavens into existence; He called the earth to bring forth plants and then He told the earth to bring forth living creatures, the animals that walk about on the earth. But man, God formed him out of the dirt with His own hands. And then God, “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*”

Now the Hebrew word here can mean: wind, breath, or spirit; and sometimes it can indicate more that one of these. That is the case here as Isaiah shows us. God gave breath (or life) to people, and further more He gave them a spirit. We are the only creatures of God’s creation made in this way. We are different from the rest of creation; His breath gives us life and He gave us a spirit. Our spirit is some intangible part of us that is real and will live forever. We must never put animals on the same level as people. That doesn’t mean we treat them cruelly; we are to have good dominion over the rest of God’s creation. But they are not as we are.

In spite of all this, we have a problem and it is called sin. Sin affects all of God’s creation. That is why you can see erosion and piles of rocks in the Grand Canyon. That is why there are scars on our mountains where so many trees have died. That is why we get sick and have problems and die. That is why our spirits are separated from God. That is why we are so attracted to idols and demons have so much influence over us. Sin has become part of our basic human nature and left to ourselves, sin will bring about our eternal destruction.

So, beginning in verse 6, God speaks through Isaiah; once more He tells us that He has the solution to our problem of sin and we can see by His phenomenal creation that He has the power to bring it about. He does this by talking to the Messiah, to the Redeemer; He does this by talking to Jesus.

First off, He once again tells us the He is no simple man-made god; He is Yahweh. And as Yahweh, He calls Jesus to go to the earth as a suffering servant in righteousness. This is not some form of cosmic child abuse as some so arrogantly claim. This is a righteous act, by a righteous God; and it is the only way to save us from sin.

God tells Jesus that He will hold Him by the hand and He will watch over Him. We see this in the Gospel accounts. Jesus was able to depend entirely on His Father and Yahweh always provided for Him; He was never left hanging with a miracle or with what to say. There were only a few hours during the crucifixion where the man Jesus felt the separation from His Father. This was necessary for Jesus to experience the punishment that we deserve. Still, this was part of the plan for our salvation; and God was watching.

Yahweh tells Jesus that He will be *a covenant to the people*. The wording is important there: Jesus doesn’t simply bring the covenant; He *is* the covenant. As Jesus said in Luke 22 during the Last Supper: *This cup is the new covenant in My blood*. This is a mystery to us, but it demonstrates the importance of being in Jesus and having Christ in us.

Next we see what all powerful God will do through Jesus who is our covenant with Yahweh. And the first thing we see is that He is a light to the nations. That is, salvation to the Gentiles. As we look through the covenants that God has made from the beginning, we can see that He planned to save more than just the chosen people. In the Garden of Eden, God made a covenant that He would provide if only the people would obey Him. Granted, there were only two people, but it was all the nations at the time.

We see it again in the covenant with Noah. God said He would not destroy the earth with water again and He said in chapter 9 verse 9, “*Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you.*” Remember that all people from then on were descendants of Noah.

God narrowed things down with Abraham giving special consideration to his descendants; still, God also said that through Abraham all nations would be blessed. The covenant through Moses was strictly for the people of Israel; but provision was made even then for any who wanted to join them. And part of their responsibility was to bring others into relationship with Yahweh.

Finally, Jesus was sent by God as the covenant that would actually redeem any of mankind who would have Him as Saviour. God is faithful and He is powerful enough to do what He says He will. Through Jesus, anyone can receive salvation if they will submit to Him. He will open blind eyes; eyes that are spiritually blind due to sin and cannot see the light of Christ.

Without Christ, we are all hopeless prisoners of satan and he keeps us in the dark dungeon of sin. Jesus will free us of our hopeless imprisonment and torment if we will just follow Him.

And God has done this, so He deserves all the glory and credit for the salvation of mankind. And because He so righteously deserves it, He will not share His glory with any idol. We cannot have anything before God in Jesus in our lives. Jesus has set us free, don’t let the idols of darkness bind you again.

Yahweh is glorious God and He has made a way for us to be with Him forever. His past actions have shown that He can and will keep His promises. Look at God’s wonderful creation and praise Him. Consider how absolutely lost and hopeless we were without Christ and know that it is the God of love who has cared for us and made us His special people.

Prayer

Merciful God, how blessed we are that You are merciful and kind, that You have compassion on Your creation, that You have grace to extend to us. We are blessed because You are also all-powerful and You are absolutely just; You will not overlook sin. All of us deserve eternal separation from You; yet in Your great love for us, You have given Your Son.

You would be perfectly just in condemning us all and no one could argue Your sentence. So we bless You, Lord God, for Your great mercy that You have bestowed upon us. At great cost to Yourself in Your Son Jesus, You have made a way for us and we shall be eternally grateful.

We will praise and worship You perfectly in eternity as You deserve, but only because of the work of Jesus on the cross. We owe all to Him for His obedience and love. We owe all to You as our God and Saviour.

We offer these prayers in Jesus’ name

Amen