THE SERVANT SONGS

The Servant Songs: Magnify Jesus From The Book of Isaiah

A servant who will not break a bruised reed

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, November 8, 2020
PASSAGES	Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 12:15-21; Matthew 3:16-17; Isaiah 6:1-3; Luke 4:18; John 14:16-17; Acts 2:1-4; Mark 10:45; Matthew 28:19; Romans 8:15
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:50:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Isaiah, writing about 750 years before Jesus was born, saw God's chosen servant – upheld by God, delighted in, anointed with the Spirit – who would bring *mishpat*, everything rightly related, to the nations. He would do it without shouting, without crushing anyone, so gently he would not snap a bruised reed. That servant is Jesus, and his mission continues through a church that walks in his quiet, hidden, Spirit-led way.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than any other Old Testament book, and the first followers of Jesus read its four Servant Songs and said, "Isaiah was talking about Jesus."
- "Servant" is a title of honor here: the one God has chosen, upholds and delights in. At Jesus' baptism the Father says almost exactly those words.
- There is no such thing as the people of God apart from the Spirit of God. The Spirit who rested on Jesus has been poured out on his followers.
- Biblical justice is far more than a bumper sticker: a life-giving order in which the concerns of all, especially the marginalized, are addressed.

- Jesus did not come to run a campaign or found a political party. He withdrew from confrontation and healed them all.
- The servant's power is the Holy Spirit, working most often in small, quiet settings, not in the machinery of big organizations.
- The servant's mission is not finished. We are called to walk in it – relationship to relationship, conversation to conversation.

▶ 0:50:38

Geno thanked the volunteers who make Hope run – the worship team, and the sound, lights and livestream crew he jokingly called "the Illuminati." "Very few of us are paid," he said; the ministry would not exist without people giving their time to serve Christ. Then he announced something a little different: magnifying Jesus from the Old Testament.

Isaiah, a giant among the prophets

▶ 0:54:27

"It's an amazingly powerful thing," Geno said, "that 750 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah, with his prophetic gift, could look down the corridors of time and describe what this magnificent messianic hero would be like." Isaiah is among the most important books in the Bible, admired even by readers outside the faith. The New Testament quotes it more than any other Old Testament book, Psalms second, "and nobody else is even close."

▶ 0:56:08

Many scholars think Isaiah served at court in Jerusalem, perhaps educated royalty with access to kings and high priests. His ministry ran from around 750 to 680 BC. Early on, the long-reigning, powerful King Uzziah died, "and in the year that King Uzziah died" Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, and the seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:1–3).

▶ 0:57:48

Isaiah lived through decades of upheaval: Assyria rising in the north and clashing with Egypt, Israel crushed and Judah nearly so. But he came out of the temple changed, knowing his trust belonged not to Uzziah but to a God who was no regional deity but Lord of the nations. Late in life he foresaw Babylon taking Judah captive – and saw God doing something new in that suffering. One scholar notes that after the exile idolatry was never again a problem for Israel. "We should listen to that and be warned, dearly beloved." Isaiah also began to speak of a hero, an anointed one, who would champion the people and work of God.

▶ 1:01:23

Four passages in Isaiah are called the Servant Songs, and the first-century disciples, thinking about the life they had witnessed, said, "Oh, Isaiah was talking about Jesus." Geno would spend this Sunday and the next three on them, hoping Jesus would be magnified even more – one hero, "our beautiful Jesus," across centuries of Scripture.

▶ 1:02:36

> "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. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 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 ↗

Justice, three times. "The justice of God will be established in the earth."

1. My servant, my chosen, my delight

▶ 1:03:42

God is speaking, and he has an unusual affection for this one. "Servant" is not a diminishing word: to be the servant of God was a position of honor, representing him, not merely doing his will like a slave. "Whom I uphold" means "my wind is at his back" – a special relationship, which the disciples recognized in the one who said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." "My chosen" – his elect one. And "in whom my soul delights": not only chosen and upheld, but delighted in.

▶ 1:06:12

> "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"
>
> MATTHEW 3:16–17 ↗

▶ 1:06:37

"Not just 'this is my son' – this is my *beloved* Son." Scholars say the words allude to the first verse of this Servant Song. "That's not just me saying that."

2. I have put my Spirit upon him

▶ 1:07:20

The Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary's womb; from conception he was the Messiah, the anointed one. The Spirit directed him in his youth, descended on him at his baptism, and accompanied him through his ministry, his trial, torture, execution, death and resurrection. Jesus promised "another Helper" who was with the disciples and would be in them (John 14:16–17). In Nazareth he unrolled the Isaiah scroll and read:
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."
"This is the singular mark that sets Jesus apart as the anointed one of God."

▶ 1:09:19

Then Jesus breathed on his disciples, told them to wait in Jerusalem for power from on high, and poured out the Spirit at Pentecost, and the church was born (Acts 2). "In an ultimate sense, a fundamental sense, there's no such thing as the people of God apart from the Spirit of God." Anyone who says "I'm a follower of Christ" should be aware of the Spirit's ministry among us and learn to follow him with dedication.

3. He will bring forth justice to the nations

▶ 1:11:04

"Now you're thinking, man, we've got three more verses, we're going to be here all morning." No – but verse 1 needed taking apart. The Hebrew word is *mishpat*. It means justice "only in a bumper-sticker kind of way." It means something more like everything rightly related to God and to everything else, things as they ought to be, much as *shalom* means wholeness and not only peace.

▶ 1:11:29

Geno read John Oswalt, longtime professor at Asbury Seminary: in its broadest sense *mishpat* is "societal order in which the concerns of all are addressed," the marginalized especially. A society without it is one where "the only rule is brute force used to aggrandize the few." So the servant's *mishpat* is "nothing less than the salvation of God defined in its broadest sense" – not merely a privatized forgiveness of sins, nor a humanly designed system of redistribution, but "the life-giving order which exists when the creation is functioning in accordance with the design of the Lord."

▶ 1:13:23

And it is for the nations. A Jewish prophet in Jerusalem saw the servant taking God's justice beyond Israel's borders, beyond Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome – to Jew and Gentile, female and male, slave and free, poor and rich, broken and healthy. "I want to say this very, very softly. If you

can imagine everything rightly related – us to God, to ourselves, to our families, our neighbors, our communities, nations rightly relating to one another – that's heaven, for sure. This is the glory of God: things as they ought to be."

4. A bruised reed he will not break

▶ 1:15:26

The servant is anointed with an amazing call, "but the way of the servant is unlike anyone that's come before him." He will not cry aloud or make his voice heard in the street. The more Isaiah says, Geno observed, the closer the description comes to the Jesus we know. Jesus did not draw attention to himself; more than once he told the healed to keep quiet. Matthew records the famous case. After Jesus healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees began plotting to kill him.

▶ 1:17:24

> "Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope.'"
>
> MATTHEW 12:15–21 ↗

▶ 1:17:59

He did not confront the Pharisees or call his followers to jump them outside the synagogue. He withdrew, "and he healed them all." He could have sent them back to "give them the what-for – that's what we say in Central Texas." He told them not to tell anyone. And Matthew renders Isaiah's "coastlands wait for his law" as "in his name the Gentiles will hope."

▶ 1:19:37

Oswalt again: where every other royal figure has set up justice "through a gleeful use of their power to smash and rebuild," this one "is so far from smashing the mighty that he will not even break off the reed that is bent over and cracked; rather, he will support it and straighten it. He will not even puff out the most dimly guttering lampwick; rather, he will trim it and rest it more deeply in the oil." God's answer to oppression is not more oppression, nor to arrogance more arrogance: "in quietness,

humility and simplicity he will take all of the evil into himself and return only grace." "That is power," Geno said – "the power of God, not to confront or crush or oppress in any way, but only to heal."

5. Not a campaign

▶ 1:21:31

Jesus did not come to establish a political party or run a campaign – a word Geno credited to his friend Steve Hawthorne. "Aren't you glad Jesus is not in the campaigning business? I'm sick of campaigns, aren't you?" A campaign is easy to crush: kill the people in the street and the movement is over. Jesus did not come to found a justice movement or even a religious movement, "void of spiritual power." He came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), and "to set in motion a disciples-making-disciples work that is largely underground, hidden, intimate and personal." He read the sentence twice. "Yes, I wrote that sentence. I think it's pretty good."

▶ 1:23:26

That work does break out into organizations and buildings, which we religious people boast about, but there is no power in the structure. "The irresistible power of the servant is still the work of the Holy Spirit" – who convicts and saves, never crushes but uplifts, and works most often in small, quiet settings. He was quick to add he is not against big churches – "may God continue to bless the world with large church organizations, well run, full of godly people" – but even their leaders know they must organize their people into small settings for the kingdom to grow.

6. The mission is still underway

▶ 1:24:45

"He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth" – implying he will meet opposition and overcome it. Then a rhetorical question, "please don't answer": do you see the justice of God across the earth? Everyone rightly related to God and one another? Nations at peace? Inevitably the answer is no. So did Jesus fail?

▶ 1:26:40

The question was "actually pretty unfair," he admitted. The body of Christ, with Jesus as head, is still carrying out the work. Christ did not intend to complete the mission during his days on earth; he set in motion a work that will be completed when he returns. Meanwhile we walk as those wrapped up in the servant, led by the Spirit as sons and daughters crying "Abba" (Romans 8:15) – "relationship to relationship, conversation to conversation, prayer to prayer, Bible study to Bible study. His ways: quiet,

hidden, intimate, personal." The command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19) is perfectly aligned with what Isaiah saw.

▶ 1:29:07

It is God's mission, empowered by his Spirit. We may think we are pulling God behind us "like a Radio Flyer wagon," but one day we wake up and realize, "It hasn't been me at all, has it?" – and the Lord says, "It's been me all along, working through you, in spite of you." Our message is one of *mishpat*: right relationship, the goodness of God, freedom from sin and brokenness, repentance – and yes, ultimately judgment against what opposes God. "But frankly our message is not a message of judgment. It's a message of freedom and deliverance, a message of grace and glory."

▶ 1:30:59

Some are called to the nations, like a young man who served as an EMT in Austin and is now becoming a doctor in a Middle Eastern country, speaking its language. "He did not set out to become a doctor. He just served God one thing at a time." Anyone sensing that call should talk to Geno or Hope's missions leaders. "Most of us, however, are called to our neighbor across the street, our family member." He prayed to the servant of God – upheld by the Father, anointed by the Spirit, still bringing justice to the nations with grace and peace – "may you be glorified, Lord, in our obedience."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Isaiah 6:1–3
- Isaiah 42:1–4
- Matthew 3:16–17
- John 14:16–17
- Luke 4:18
- Acts 2:1–4
- Matthew 12:15–21
- Mark 10:45
- Romans 8:15
- Matthew 28:19

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What does it do for your faith that Isaiah described Jesus some 750 years before he was born?
2. Geno said there is no such thing as the people of God apart from the Spirit of God. What would learning to follow the Spirit "with dedication" look like for you?
3. How does mishpat – everything rightly related, the concerns of all addressed – stretch or challenge the way you usually think about justice?
4. Who is the "bruised reed" or "smoldering wick" in your life right now, and how might Jesus' gentleness shape the way you treat them?
5. If the servant's work is "underground, hidden, intimate and personal," which relationship or conversation is God inviting you to step into this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt opened a four-week series on Isaiah's Servant Songs with this November 2020 message. He describes Hope Chapel as a volunteer organization with very few paid staff, leans on the commentary of Asbury Seminary professor John Oswalt, and credits his friend Steve Hawthorne with the line that Jesus did not come to run a campaign.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI6VyIEDmEA&t=3038s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.