

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Proclamation of Deliverance and Restoration
Isaiah 41 & 42
December 16, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

Isaiah 39 concluded the first half of the book, foreshadowing the coming of the Babylonian exile. Chapter 40 begins a whole new look at the history of Israel in which Isaiah puts himself in the middle of the Jews returning from 70 years in exile. The reason for the exile was sin, the solution to the problem is the Messiah. Chapters 40-66 focus on these more spiritual concerns.

In the next five chapters, which we'll divide into two weeks, Isaiah pictures the Jews returning from exile in Babylon, specifically through the assistance of a man named Cyrus, who turns out to be the king of Persia. But that return, portrayed in terms that are reminiscent of the exodus from Egypt, is also a call to return to God on spiritual terms.

Let's study Isaiah's preaching...

COASTLANDS CALLED AS WITNESSES - 41:1-4:

Verse 1 begins with a call to the "coastlands." This might be a call to the Gentile world to hear what Isaiah has to say, suggested also by the parallel with "peoples." It might also be a way of stressing the universal call to the Jews, wherever they were. At the point of the return, Jews were scattered throughout the Mediterranean world - from Babylon and Assyria, to Egypt.

God wants them all to listen and take note - There is one coming from the east who will serve God's plans. The whole point of this paragraph is to show and argue that God is in control of everything. This individual is Cyrus the Great of Persia. He conquered Babylon in 539 B. C. Isaiah preached around 700 B. C., so we see that Isaiah is seeing well over a century into the future. This is a significant point because one of the criticisms Isaiah makes of idols is that they cannot see into the future, let alone control the future, but God can. Verse 4 emphasizes that God is in control.

God has also used Assyria (37:26ff). "God had used Assyria and Babylon as his instruments of judgment, and now he would use Cyrus as his instrument of blessing" (Beyer, 172).

COASTLANDS TREMBLE IN FEAR - 41:5-7:

In the face of God's work in history, the coastlands ought to fear, specifically those who make, bow down, and worship idols!

ISRAEL, THE LORD'S SERVANT - 41:8-20:

Observe the word "servant" here in verse 8. Isaiah has used the term "servant" before to refer to Israel or certain other individuals. He used it 9 times in 1-39. He will use it extensively from here on - 31 times. Sometimes, the word refers to Israel as a whole, as it does here. Sometimes, it refers to the remnant of Israel, the faithful. Sometimes, it refers to an individual, notably the Messiah. When Jesus refers to Himself as a servant, one who came not to be served but to serve, He uses this designation from Isaiah - the "Suffering Servant."

God reminds Israel of His choice of them above all the nations of the earth - vs 9.

God calls on them not to fear or be anxious - vs 10. God will take care of the Jews' enemies - vss 11-12. Again, in verses 13-14, God reminds Israel not to fear. God is Israel's "redeemer" (a term Isaiah uses 13 times; and when applied to Jesus, signifies that *He* is divine). God will make the Jewish nation like a threshing sledge (a heavy wooden platform with sharp blades underneath) and they will pulverize the mountains (vs 15). In this way, the Jews as a whole will lead the nations to the mountain of the house of the Lord.

God will provide for the hurting - the thirsty. He will open rivers for them, as He brought out water from a rock in the wilderness. In verses 19-20, God will turn the desert which the Jews feel they are experiencing into a pleasant wooded area.

THE LORD'S CHALLENGE TO FALSE GODS - 41:21-24:

Here is another sharp critique of the idolatry among the Jews. Notice God refers to Himself as the "King of Jacob" (vs 21). They are to bring for their arguments for worshiping idols and trusting in idols. Present your case.

Verse 22 is referring to the idols predicting the future or predicting what they are going to do. Listen to the sarcasm in Isaiah's voice in verse 23. Observe also in verse 24 that the one who chooses an idol over God is an "abomination."

THE LORD'S PRESENTATION OF HIS OWN WORKS - 41:25-27:

In contrast with the idols who know nothing and can do nothing, God does something. God is going to bring someone from the north - we know it is Cyrus the Great - who will call on God's name, that is, who will serve God's purpose. That's ironic, isn't it? A Gentile fulfilling the purpose of God?

Notice how emphatically negative verse 26 is. No one but God could predict all of this. He is the one who told Zion (vs 27), "Behold, here they are." God is the one who sent to Jerusalem a messenger of Good News.

THE LORD'S CONCLUSION - 41:28-29:

The bottom line is that neither man nor idol can do what God does because no man nor idol knows what God knows. All the idols are false and their works are worthless, wind and emptiness.

Why trust in idols?

In contrast to the "servant" who is Israel, there is another Servant who *does* fulfill *all* that God commands. He will be the Israelite of all Israelites - the Messiah.

THE SERVANT'S MINISTRY - 42:1-4:

This is a different servant than just Israel. This one is empowered by God but also has a unique personality. He will be empowered by God through the Spirit of God (vs 1). He will bring justice, that is, a "society that functions according to God's design" (Beyer, 176).

Notice what a tender heart and compassion hand this Servant has - verses 2-4. There are seven negative phrases showing what the Messiah will not do. What we see pictured here is an individual who patiently endures with others, is humble, and is steadfast.

"...whereas all the other royal figures who have claimed to set up justice on the earth have done so through a gleeful use of their power to smash and rebuild, this one will be

radically different. ...The point is plain: like the child of ch. 9 and the branch of ch. 11, God's answer to the oppressors of the world is not more oppression, nor is his answer to arrogance more arrogance; rather, in quietness, humility, and simplicity, he will take all of the evil into himself and return only grace. That is power" (Oswalt, 111).

He will establish justice in the earth and the coastlands will "wait expectantly for His law." That law will go forth from Jerusalem, the mountain of the house of the Lord (2:1-4). Isaiah has been persistent in saying that justice would characterize this Messianic King and the kingdom He would establish: 9:7; 11:3-4; 32:1; Psalms 72:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15.

THE SERVANT'S LORD - 42:5-9:

The Lord God of the Servant defines Himself in verse 5 as the Creator, Sustainer, and the One who empowers man through the breath of His mouth. He calls the Servant in righteousness. "Thus the Servant's mission is rooted and grounded in God's righteousness" (Young, 118). He makes Him to be "a covenant to the people" (vs 6). What a strong figure of speech! A metaphor is one of the strongest figures of speech. Jesus is more than just the executor of a new covenant. He *is* the new covenant! A light to the nations - notice the universal nature of this covenant.

"To say that the servant is a covenant is to say that all the blessings of the covenant are embodied in, have their root and origin in, and are dispensed by him" (Young, 120).

The works the Servant does is mentioned in verse 7. God will not give His glory to another (vs 8). Therefore, when God *gives* His glory to Jesus Christ, we have a theological argument for the deity of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2:11; 17:5). God, in contrast to idols, knows the future and can predict the future - "new things" (vs 9).

The New Testament is clear that this Servant refers to Jesus Christ - Matthew 3:17; 12:17-21; 17:5.

A HYMN OF TRIUMPH - 42:10-13:

Due to the power, blessings, and control that God exercises, Isaiah here calls on Israel to sing - to sing a "new song." A song new for its quality and content - they are returning from exile and they have something new to sing about! The words "sing" or "song" are found in Isaiah eighteen times!

They are also encouraged to sing praises to the Lord from one end of the earth to the other, verse 12. "Coastlands" is used twelve times by Isaiah.

Israel is reminded in verse 13 that God is a warrior who fights for Israel. He fights with "zeal" (6 times) like a man of war. God will win against His enemies. God is frequently pictured as such a warrior in Jewish texts like Exodus 15 and Judges 5. "But when this mighty, delivering warrior appears to destroy the enemies of God, whose blood is it that stains his garments? It is his own. The Servant takes on himself the sins of God's enemies, and in his own death destroys those sins (the fourth Servant Song, 52:13-53:12)" (Oswalt, 125).

The same message is true today; it is the message of the book of Revelation. It doesn't matter who fights against the church of Jesus Christ, they will lose. The Gospel must and will continue to be preached; souls will continue to be saved; Satan is eventually going to be cast into the fires of hell. That is truly worth singing about!

GOD'S JUDGMENT - 42:14-17:

We see again God's special wrath and hatred for those who worship idols. The people have willfully been blind for a long time and those who persistently refuse to see will receive the wrath and judgment of God. "Idols" is used by Isaiah 18 times while "images" is used 14 times. Clearly it was a serious problem for Israel.

AN INDICTMENT OF GOD'S (OTHER) SERVANT - 42:18-25:

So, Isaiah calls on the "deaf" of Israel to hear and for the blind to see - vs 18. Note the close parallel with 6:9-10. Clearly this servant is not the servant who will bring justice to the nations. The blind cannot lead the blind.

The "blind" is Israel, whom Isaiah here calls God's "servant." Certainly this "servant" is different than the "Servant" in the first half of the chapter. Israel was supposed to be God's messenger (vs 19); we'll see in 43:10 and other verses that Israel was supposed to be God's witnesses. But if they persist in polytheism, their existence has become pointless.

"Today the Western concept of history is in desperate trouble because we no longer believe in one, transcendent, personal, righteous, purposeful God. Yet we still talk about human accountability and responsibility, as if those concepts could long survive the loss of the entire ground on which they rest" (Oswalt, 132).

Verse 21 shows us that the law of Moses is the foundation for God's relationship with Israel. God had made it "great and glorious," but Israel refused to respect it. That's why God has allowed other nations to "plunder" and "despoil" Israel. Generally speaking, neither people then nor people today really appreciate the fact that God has given His law to man. "This revelation was a glorious gift of God. Pss 19:7-14 and 119 celebrate the blessedness of having God's revelation as a guide" (Smith, 186).

Who is going to listen? Who will pay attention? It is the Lord who gave Israel up for plunder and despoiling, please observe verse 24: "against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they were not willing to walk, and whose law they did not obey."

That's why God's wrath came on Israel but, sadly, "he paid no attention" (vs 25). "Unfortunately the people did not seem to understand why they were consumed with the fire of God's wrath. ...this spiritual blindness is not a trait that is limited to people in the distant past; it is present in some [most, p.h.] people in every generation" (Smith, 189).

Notice that 43:1 starts with a sharp contrast: "But now." Isaiah will turn once again to the positive side of his message, which we'll study next week.