

The Servant Songs of Isaiah

There are five Servant Songs in Isaiah, each one speaking of a different aspect of the service of the Lord Jesus.

Scripture	Subject
Isaiah 42.1-9	His Disposition (His character and service)
Isaiah 49.1-8	His Rejection
Isaiah 50.4-11	His Affliction
Isaiah 52.13-53.12	His Salvation
Isaiah 61.1-3	His Consolation (the comfort that Christ alone can bring)

The first song sets forth the **person** of the Servant (vv.1-4) and the **purpose** of the Servant (vv.5-9). In this song, God speaks **of** His Servant (vv.1-4) and **to** His Servant (vv.5-9).

The Person of the Servant (vv.1-4)

This section can be divided into three. His character Godward (v.1), selfward (v.2) and manward (vv.3-4).

1 ¶ Behold my servant, whom I uphold (hold fast); mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment (justice) to the Gentiles.

Divine Acknowledgement "Behold my Servant". The Messiah is presented by the LORD Himself (i.e. God the Father) and we are to gaze upon Him. Note that He is acknowledged by God as HIS. He delighted, demonstrated and glorified His Father in every respect. Isaiah is a prophecy which encourages us to gaze at the Lord Jesus (cf. Isaiah 52.13, 59.1 also):

- Isaiah 7.14: **Behold**, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
- Isaiah 28.16: **Behold**, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.
- Isaiah 32.1: **Behold**, a king shall reign in righteousness.
- Isaiah 35.4: Be strong, fear not: **behold**, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.
- Isaiah 62.11: **Behold**, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

Christ is the "servant" of God. In Isaiah He is the Wise Servant (Isaiah 52.13), Righteous Servant (Isaiah 53.11) and Elect Servant (Isaiah 42.1).

Divine Authority "Whom I uphold". God upholds or 'sustains' Him. Christ was not governed by self-will but was utterly dependent upon His Father's authority (Isaiah 50.4, John 6.57, 7.16, 8.28, 8.38). The word also indicates 'to be lifted up'. The Father always sought to glorify the Son, as the Son always sought to glorify the Father (John 13.31, 2 Peter 1.16-18).

Divine Appointment "Mine elect". Christ is the chosen One (Ephesians 1.3-4, 1 Peter 2.4, 6). He was not chosen to be saved (!), but rather was chosen to complete a work on the basis of **who He is** (His pre-eminence, His preciousness, 1 Peter 2.6, and His belovedness, Matthew 12.18). **Only He** could accomplish the mighty work of redemption. The Hebrew indicates One who has been chosen and continues in the character of a chosen one.

Divine Approval "In Whom My soul delighteth". The Father delights in His Son; this is the unqualified approval of God. This declaration was made by the Father twice during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus; once at His baptism and once at His transfiguration (see **Table 1** in Appendix).

Divine Ability "I have put My Spirit upon Him". The qualification for His work is that "the Spirit is upon Him" (see **Table 2** in Appendix). This refers primarily to the **baptism** of the Lord Jesus when the Spirit descended upon Him. There are three great references in Isaiah to the Holy Spirit and Christ. The other two refer to His **incarnation** (Isaiah 11.2) and the **beginning of His public ministry** (Isaiah 61.1). It is worth noting that the Lord Jesus always possessed the Spirit in Himself, but here the Spirit came upon Him. The difference is seen in connection with the oil of the meal offering which was poured "upon it" (Leviticus 2.1) and "mingled with" it (Leviticus 2.4-5). Internal oil speaks of absolute possession and external oil speaks of anointing for specific service.

Divine Accomplishment *"He shall bring forth justice to the Gentiles"*. The word "judgment" should really be 'justice' and indicates three things:

- Firstly, in the context of the court scene of Isaiah 41, this indicates that the Servant will carry to the world the message that there is only ONE, TRUE God in contrast to false idols.
- Second, the word speaks of those things that God has authoritatively settled, i.e. His WORD. It is a summary word for His revealed truth and its requirements.
- Thirdly, it also means the 'righting of wrongs' and 'the establishment of a just order'. This is something which the Lord Jesus will establish at His coming to reign (Psalm 72.4, 96.11-13).

All these things will be brought to the Gentiles (cf. Isaiah 2.1-4).

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

The Lord Jesus shall not "cry". This Hebrew word signifies a cry of 'distress' or cry for 'vengeance' (Genesis 4.10, 41.55, cf. 1 Peter 2.23). It is not the cry of victory or triumph (Isaiah 42.13). He did not cry out harshly (making a din) or argue vehemently (Matthew 12.19). He also did not "lift up", that is 'raise His voice' but spoke calmly, softly and quietly. There was a spirit about the Lord Jesus which was in contrast to prominence, pomp and circumstance. Like Him, we should seek the lowest place and not seek pre-eminence like Diotrophes (3 John 9).

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench (extinguish): he shall bring forth judgment ~~unto~~ (according to) truth.

A "reed" grew in the river bank and was in itself weak, but often further weakened (broken) by the wind. This reed has lost its ability to be strong or support the weight of fruitfulness (2 Kings 18.21, Isaiah 36.6, Genesis 41.5, 22). Christ certainly would not further break (or 'destroy') such a fragile, injured reed. Rather He would care for and strengthen it, e.g. Widow of Nain, Woman in Simon's House (Luke 7), Woman with an Issue of Blood (Luke 8). The "smoking flax" was a burning wick which was almost extinguished. Christ would not quench such flame, but rather would fan it into bright flame. This speaks of heaviness and sorrow dimming the light of testimony, e.g. Peter in denial (Matthew 26), doubting Thomas (John 20), two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Praise God, Christ is the answer to our every need. Do we have hands hanging down? Do we have feeble knees? Then we should look to Him (Hebrews 12)! *Note. Christ is interested in the sound (a tune can be played on a reed) and light of His people.* Not only this, but the Lord Jesus used the Word of Righteousness (Hebrews 5.13) and Word of Truth to cut men to the heart (Matthew 22.22, John 8.9-10, Luke 13.17: *These words reduced his opponents to shame, but the crowd was thrilled at all the glorious things he did*).

4 He shall not fail (burn low) nor be discouraged (be broken), till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Although the pressures and blows of life might cause others to 'burn low' or 'be broken', they would not deter Him. He was and will be steadfast to accomplish the task set before Him (Luke 9.51). His work is to establish justice in the earth. Christ is steadfastly set on accomplishing the will of God. He will reign in righteousness and earth's remotest bounds ("isles", cf. Isaiah 40.15) will long ("wait") for His truth and His Word (Isaiah 2.1-4, 32.1, 1 Corinthians 15.24-25).

The Purpose of the Servant (vv.5-9)

Verse 5 declares God to be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is the universal life-giver and has a universal plan of salvation available for all (vv.6-7). This truth forms the basis of His promises and purposes outlined in vv.6-7.

6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness (for a righteous purpose), and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give (appoint) thee for (as) a covenant of (belonging to) the people, for (as) a light of the Gentiles.

The Lord Jesus was "called.. in righteousness", that is, He was called to accomplish God's righteous purposes (Romans 3.25-26, Galatians 1.4). He would not be left alone in this, but was given three promises of the Father:

- "will hold thine hand" (presence). The Father would always be with Him and would sustain Him (John 16.32).
- "will keep thee" (preservation). The Divine Servant would be watched over with a jealous eye. Nothing could impede or hinder His progress (John 7.30, 10.39). The word "keep" can also mean 'fashion', that is, God would pass Him through experiences to make Him exactly fitted for the task (Hebrews 5.8).
- "give thee". Christ IS the Covenant and Christ IS the Light. The covenant speaks of salvation to the "people" (i.e. nation of Israel) and light speaks of salvation to the Gentiles (Luke 2.32, Acts 13.47-48). The covenant is a covenant of peace (Isaiah 54.10) and forgiveness (Jeremiah 31.31-34) which is eternal (Isaiah 61.8). As Christ is this covenant, all its blessings are embodied in, and have their root and origin in HIM. He is also the Light. Not

only does He bring light and lead into light, but the light has its origin and root in Him. He is the means by which people come into the light!

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

The result of this bringing of salvation is the **opening of blind eyes**, and **liberating of bound souls**. Christ proclaimed liberty and freedom from bondage (John 8.31-37) and brought physical and spiritual sight to the blind. Praise God, we who once were in bondage to the world (Gal 1.4, 4.3), sin (Romans 6.18, 22, John 8.34), the law (Gal 3), the flesh (Rom 7) and the fear of death (Heb 2.15) can now know liberation in Christ. *John 8.36: If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

Appendix

Table 1: The Declarations of the Father

Scripture	Occasion	Statement	
Matthew 3.17	Baptism	This is my beloved Son	In whom I am well pleased
Matthew 17.5	Mount of Transfiguration	This is my beloved Son	In whom I am well pleased Hear ye Him
Mark 1.11	Baptism	Thou art my beloved Son	In whom I am well pleased
Mark 9.7	Mount of Transfiguration	This is my beloved Son	Hear Him
Luke 3.22	Baptism	Thou art my beloved Son	In thee I am well pleased
Luke 9.35	Mount of Transfiguration	This is my beloved Son	Hear Him

Note. "This is" is the Father expressing His delight in the Son **to John and the apostles**. "Thou art" is the Father expressing His delight in the Son to His Son. In Luke 3.22, God commends His Son's life prior to His public ministry. On the Mount there is a commendation of His subsequent life of perfect ministry. Peter emphasises the fact that the voice came from the sublime glory of Heaven and therefore honoured and glorified Christ (2 Peter 1.16-18).

Table 2: The Ministry of the Spirit in Relation to Christ

Scripture	Reference to the Spirit	Context
Isaiah 42.1 Isaiah 61.1, Luke 4.18	Spirit upon Him	He shall bring forth justice Anointed to preach good tidings
Matthew 3.16, Mark 1.10 John 1.32-33	Spirit descending and resting upon Him Spirit descending and abiding upon Him	Anointing for public service
Matthew 4.1 Mark 1.12 Luke 4.1	Led (taken or brought up) of the Spirit Driven (cast or sent) by the Spirit Led (brought or carried) by the Spirit	Wilderness temptations
Matthew 12.28 Luke 4.14	In the power of the Spirit	Cast out demons Teaching in the synagogue
Luke 4.1 John 3.34	Full of the Spirit	Obedient to the Spirit's leading In relation to His words and authority
Acts 1.2 Hebrews 9.14	Through the Spirit	Gave commandments to the Apostles Offered Himself
Acts 10.38	Anointed with the Spirit	Living a life of power and beauty