

Isaiah 42:1-7. "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." ⁵ This is what God the LORD says— he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

What kind of God do we have?

We have a compassionate Savior.

We have a faithful God.

Epiphany means to reveal or make known. On the heels of pondering the mystery and the marvel of Christmas it is good for us to consider: Who will this child born in Bethlehem turn out to be? Who exactly is this Jesus sent from God, born of Mary? What kind of Savior do we have? What kind of God do we have? Today we rejoice as he once again reveals those answers to us. **Through the Prophet Isaiah the LORD reveals: We have a compassionate Savior. We have a faithful God.**

Long before Mary and Joseph made the trip down to Bethlehem, long before Magi made their incredible journey to visit the Christ child, long before John pointed to Jesus revealing Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the LORD spoke through his prophet Isaiah to give his people a wonderful foretaste, a sneak peek, of who the Savior would be. In Isaiah chapter 42, and in a number of other beautiful chapters of this Old Testament book, the Savior is described as the Servant of the LORD, or the Suffering Servant. Through these descriptions, the coming Savior is revealed to God's people. The people are given a sneak peek of what is to come.

Even though we live in a time of instant information we can appreciate a good sneak still today. For example, if you are looking forward to a movie that is coming out, you might watch a trailer that gives you a taste of what is to come. Usually a trailer consists of several short clips that present revealing scenes from the movie. It gives you a general idea of what is to come, but not a complete picture. It might confirm what you already thought was coming. It might reveal something that you didn't know about the film. It might get you more excited for what is to come. You might even watch a trailer of movie that you already have seen and remember just how good the film was.

Through the power of the Spirit Isaiah gives God's people a glorious sneak peek concerning what is to come. As expected, God would send his Servant, our Savior. But what kind of Savior is this? For those waiting for the promised Messiah God creates excitement and joy and wonderful anticipation for the coming Savior; for those of us who are privileged to know how these promises were fulfilled we are reminded of just how wonderful how God's plan of salvation is.

God speaks through the prophet to set the captivating scene. The Servant of the LORD would be the one who brings righteousness and justice. God is pleased to send him. He chose

him for this very purpose, to bring justice or judgment to the nations, to all people. And God will give him his Spirit. This will be a powerful figure, chosen by God, bestowed with the Spirit of God. He will not falter. Despite opposition and suffering he will not be discouraged, he will remain faithful, the LORD will sustain him, the LORD will uphold him, and the Spirit will help him accomplish his goal.

But this is where there may be an unexpected twist. This great hero does not come with overt pomp and circumstance. He comes with power, but not with a show of force. He does not come with heavy fist or even a bullhorn or a loudspeaker. He comes in humility. He comes as a servant to preach, to proclaim. To speak to large groups of people, to pull people aside and speak to them one on one. He brings judgment, but his judgment includes the justice that we might not expect and certainly judgment that we don't deserve; for his judgment includes the verdict of NOT guilty for those who believe in him. Listen as the LORD describes his coming servant. Picture in your mind the servant whom God in his mercy and grace would send. ***"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."*** God's servant comes to faithfully carry out his saving work. He does not yell and scream or cause a scene. He does not draw attention to himself for the sake of drawing attention to himself. Rather he faithfully preaches judgment on those who refuse to believe, and yet the underserved judgment of pardon and peace is also on his lips. The verdict of innocent and righteousness is given to those who believe in him. Made bold by the Spirit he comes to preach the word, he teaches with authority, he is relentless and faultless in his path. He is the hero of salvation and yet his called servant. In this brilliant real life story of redemption, this humble hero will be bold but his nature and his path is predominantly characterized by gentleness and compassion. Remember that stunning description that Isaiah gives here: ***³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.***

As New Testament Christians, we have the foresight of having seen the whole picture. We know so well how this promise, this sneak peek, is fulfilled. And yet there are times that we forget or neglect how the story goes. Our memory is tainted by the things we see around us, by hearts and feelings that betray and assault our faith. Perhaps it is the critic in us that questions and alters how we see God on a daily basis. Or what we think about God is tainted and corrupted as we go through the ups and downs of life. Or maybe it is feelings of inadequacy, or guilt over things done or left undone that lead us to be dubious of God's love for us, to doubt or forget the description of himself that God gives to us.

Whatever our changing situation it would do us well to hear these unchanging words of God spoken through the prophet and recall how God fulfilled this description so perfectly in Christ Jesus. Like watching our favorite movie over again we remember with joy each line, each detail, sometimes we may even discover something we hadn't ever seen or considered before. In this case, we remember with great fondness who our Savior is. Our Savior is full of compassion and abounding in love and faithfulness. Occasionally Jesus had to thunder down with words of judgment and woe upon the hard-hearted Pharisees, teachers of the law, and others who had closed their hearts and minds to the promises of God. The bulk of his ministry, however, is the very essence of what was so beautifully described by the prophet in this picturesque way: ***a bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*** So often he speaks to those broken and trampled by sin, so often he speaks to the spiritually sick and ailing and he

doesn't pronounce the verdict of *dead, beyond help, and not worth saving*, instead he speaks the truth of God's great and amazing love. He comes to the outcast, to the forlorn, to the forgotten, he comes to you broken and trampled by sin and he comes to mend, to restore. The one who stoops down to heal the paralyzed and blind, comes to you who are hurting, you who are sick, you who are sinners, and he comes to you and me with his trademark compassion. He comes not to condemn and to crush, to ignore or forsake, but he comes with words of both loving rebuke and sweet relief. He comes with words of concerned warning and words of absolute assurance. As the book of Isaiah also announces he comes to bind up the broken-hearted, to give sight to the spiritually blind, to make dreadful sinners at one with the holy God.

He comes bestowed with the Spirit to speak of and to accomplish a reconciliation between rebellious beings and the eternal LORD. The Savior, in his kindness and power, takes us from at odds with the almighty and makes us at peace with God and one of the family by becoming one of us. As he stands in our flesh, and stands in our place he lifts up the hand of God and rescues us from underneath God's thumb. As our rescuer, our deliverer, our hero, this servant comes in compassion and humility to rescue us not only from God's wrath, but from ourselves, from the grasp of sin, and from the prison hall of hell. Our hero, our Savior sets us free from the power of our enemy Satan who wants nothing more than to see us crushed and abandoned, left in some sorry puddle of despair. Our Savior, our hero Jesus, comes to lift us up out of all of that. He comes to set us free from the prison of such horrible darkness and he pick us up and he gently places us in the palm of God's fatherly hands, in the light of his love, in the warm embrace of being God's child. Christ stands in our lowly place and because of his mercy and grace he allows us to stand in his place of honor, in his place of righteousness.

In Christ, we are beloved sons and daughters of God. Through faith in Jesus, God's promises to his faithful servant, to Jesus the Christ, are graciously transferred to those who bear his name as Christian. At your baptism, he put his mark on you, he made you his own, and in those gentle yet mighty waters he promised, *I will lift you up. I will support you. You are mine. With you I am well pleased.* In Christ, we are loved by God, and because of the salvation that Jesus wins for you at the cross the magnificent blessing that would thunder down from the heavens at Jesus' baptism becomes ours as a wonderful gift of faith. You are My Son! You are My child! With you I am well pleased.

Again, we have the advantage of seeing how this all played out. We know just how faithful and faultless Jesus was in carrying out our salvation. This is the Savior that is revealed to us in the pages of Scripture, in the prophecies of Isaiah, in the waters of the Jordan river, and at the cross of Calvary. This is the Savior personally revealed to us through the study of the Scriptures and in the reality of our baptism. In his great compassion, he stands in our place, he takes our sins, washes them away, and he gives us his righteousness and perfection. What sweet relief, what a joyful opportunity we have to revisit those wonderful scenes of salvation.

To you who wonder to yourselves, "*how could God ever love a sinner like me?*" Your compassionate Savior is graciously revealed! To you who wonder if you have faltered and gone astray too far, to you who are discouraged by your inability to be the kind of person, the kind of faithful Christian you want to be, look as your God is revealed as ever faithful to his promises. Look at the faithful servant, the unfaltering Savior, foretold and sent for you. He stands in your place. He takes your burden, your guilt, and He washes it away. This is the kind of Savior you have.

This may seem like it has happened such a long time ago in land so far, far, away. But we are assured that this happened just as promised, and this Savior was sent for you. And so just as God foretold, with the help of his Spirit we who live in this distant land put our hope in the Savior that is so wonderfully revealed in his Holy Word. ***In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.*** We who are far away from Bethlehem, far away in time and distance from the River Jordan, put our hope in Jesus the Christ, because God in his goodness has brought us to faith through the power of his Word, through the gift of his Holy Spirit. And that faith and that hope is confirmed and refreshed every time we revisit these promises of God fulfilled in Jesus the Christ.

Our ears together with our souls are blessed to hear both the words of the prophet Isaiah and the holy evangelist Matthew; and in our minds we are transported to the banks of the Jordan as our Savior is revealed. In a world broken by sin, a faultless and determined Savior comes as promised. As he steps onto the battlefield of salvation, as he steps out into the public eye of his public ministry, first he steps into the Jordan carrying our sins. The perfect Son of God took on our flesh, lived in our world so that he might carry our sins. By the Gift of the Holy Spirit we believe in this Savior, the Christ, the one chosen from eternity is now revealed in such a splendid way. In faith and thanksgiving we watch the wondrous scenes unfold once again. The Savior comes forth to serve us, to be our substitute, the Baptist consents, the voice from heaven confirms the prophecies. The Father lifts up and encourages his Son and makes him ready for his all-important work. God the Father blesses his beloved Son with this unforgettable blessing so that he may be encouraged and lifted up to accomplish his lofty task. God's righteous plan and the words of God given through the prophets are fulfilled. Jesus will emerge from the River Jordan to preach and teach his healing message of salvation. He will emerge from the Jordan River as the Christ who was sent to march toward Calvary's cross to pay for the sins of the world in full.

As the LORD describes his Servant and the mission he is going to take on, the LORD God also describes himself. What kind of God do we have? The one who stretched out the heavens and the earth is a God of compassion and care. He is the God of unmatched power and amazing grace. As the LORD describes the work of his servant he reveals the kindness of his character, his tender faithfulness, his remarkable power and love. Our God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to be our servant to rescue us from the prison house of sin and darkness, and he like he did for his Son, he will do for us his children by faith. He who called us to be his own will uphold us through life's troubles. He will sustain us and keep us all our days. He will take us by the hand and lead us until our time here on earth is ended and he brings us safely to his side.

Like a favorite movie, the scenes are revealed one after the other in a memorable and enjoyable way, and we are reminded of how awesome this actual real life plan of salvation is. We remember how awesome the works of the LORD are. We remember how awesome our God is. Yes, through the Prophet Isaiah the LORD once again reveals that we have a wonderfully compassionate Savior and we have a wonderfully faithful God. Amen.