

## Bible Passage

Isaiah 42:1-9

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.  
<sup>2</sup> He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,  
 or make it heard in the street;  
<sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break,  
 and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
 he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
<sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be discouraged  
 till he has established justice in the earth;  
 and the coastlands wait for his law.  
<sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the Lord,  
 who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
 who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
 who gives breath to the people on it  
 and spirit to those who walk in it:  
<sup>6</sup> "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;  
 I will take you by the hand and keep you;  
 I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
 a light for the nations,  
<sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind,  
 to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
 from the prison those who sit in darkness.  
<sup>8</sup> I am the Lord; that is my name;  
 my glory I give to no other,  
 nor my praise to carved idols.  
<sup>9</sup> Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
 and new things I now declare;  
 before they spring forth  
 I tell you of them."

## Outline

1. Introduction
  - a. Context- The Book of Isaiah and the concept of the Messiah.
  - b. The Advent season as a time for reflection on these themes.
2. The Identity of the Servant
  - a. Understanding Isaiah's 'Servant Songs'- The portrayal of the servant in Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52-53.
  - b. Dual Interpretations- The Christian view of Jesus as the humble servant and the Jewish perspective of the servant as Israel.
  - c. The Humility of the Servant- Contrasting the expectations of a conquering Messiah with the humble and meek character of Jesus.
3. Always Start with Jesus
  - a. The Importance of Jesus in Biblical Interpretation- Reading Old Testament prophecies through the lens of Jesus' life and mission.
  - b. The Incarnation- Jesus as both divine and human, and what this means for understanding biblical prophecies.
  - c. Jesus' Life as an Example- His humble birth, life of service, and obedience to God's will.
4. Serve As You Have Been Served

- a. The Act of Washing Feet- How Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet, including Judas Iscariot's, exemplifies true servitude and humility.
  - b. Serving from a Place of Gratitude- Serving others not based on our feelings or expectations but as a response to God's love and sacrifice.
  - c. Christian Service in Daily Life- Applying the lessons of servitude in our interactions and relationships.
5. Conclusion
- a. The New Covenant- Living a life responsive to God's voice and guidance through the Holy Spirit.
  - b. Personal Application- Daily choices to align with God's will, serving others as an expression of the grace we have received.
  - c. Encouragement to Embrace Servanthood- Following Jesus' example in our lives, transforming through love and service.

### Notes

In the book of Isaiah, particularly chapters 42, 49, 50, and 52-53, we encounter the "Servant Songs." These poetic oracles are a blend of prophecy and poetry, offering a unique perspective on the Messiah's identity. Christians often read these songs as clear references to Jesus. This interpretation sees the descriptions of the servant in Isaiah as prophetic depictions of Christ's life and mission. This aligns with the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Messiah who fulfills Old Testament prophecies.

However, it's crucial to note the Jewish interpretation differs significantly. Traditionally, Jews do not view Isaiah's words as messianic prophecies. Instead, they often interpret the "servant" as a symbol of Israel itself, not as an individual Messiah. This perspective is rooted in the Jewish expectation of a Messiah as a powerful, conquering king in the line of David, contrasting sharply with the humble and suffering servant depicted in Isaiah. The servant in Isaiah is portrayed as meek and humble, not as a conquering hero. This characterization challenges both contemporary Jewish expectations and some Christian interpretations. For the original audience, the servant's identity was likely perplexing, possibly leading them to think of figures like Isaiah himself or even Moses.

Despite the differences in interpretation, many Christians view Jesus as fitting the servant's description perfectly. They see him as chosen and approved by God, humble and meek, and a

bearer of justice for all nations, not just Israel. This view is supported by New Testament references, like Jesus' baptism, where God expresses His pleasure in Jesus.

The Advent season, a time for Christians to anticipate Jesus' birth, offers an opportunity to reflect on these themes. Jesus' humble birth as a baby in Bethlehem resonates with the servant's portrayal in Isaiah. It echoes the story of David's selection as king, emphasizing God's preference for the humble and meek. A key takeaway from exploring these texts is the importance of starting with Jesus in Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. This approach helps in understanding the broader narrative of the Bible, where Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment in the New Testament's revelation of Jesus Christ.

An essential aspect of Christian belief is that Jesus embodies both divinity and humanity. Acknowledging Jesus as a Jew does not diminish his divinity; rather, it enriches our understanding of his mission on Earth. This dual nature is central to interpreting biblical prophecies, especially those found in Isaiah.

A recurring theme in biblical interpretation is humility. The danger of arrogance in teaching or understanding scripture is real. This humility is not just about acknowledging different interpretations but also about the manner in which we hold and share our convictions. It involves approaching the texts with a heart and attitude reflective of Jesus. In John 13, Jesus washing the disciples' feet, including Judas Iscariot's, serves as a profound example. It demonstrates that leadership and discipleship are about servitude and humility. This act transcends just caring for

those within the church; it extends to serving all, including those who may betray or oppose us.

Jesus' life exemplifies true leadership – not through dominance or force but through humble service. He chose to be born as a baby and live in submission, showing that true leadership is about following God's will, not exerting personal control. In Isaiah, the prophecy of a servant who would bring justice and establish God's kingdom is seen as a foretelling of Jesus. This servant is not a mighty earthly ruler but a humble figure bringing peace and reconciliation, not just among nations but between humanity and God.

Jesus' mission transcended earthly justice. He brought eternal justice, reconciling not just neighboring nations but humanity with God. This fulfillment of prophecy is central to the Christian faith and informs the Christian understanding of both the Old and New Testaments. In the Christian faith, the act of washing feet symbolizes humility and service. It's a practice that echoes the actions of Jesus, serving as a reminder that true servitude is not about quantity or recognition, but about emulating Christ's humility and love. It's not a competition or a means to earn a spiritual ranking. Instead, it's a way to express gratitude and emulate the servitude of Jesus. The focus should not be on the numbers or the extent of our service but on the heart and intention behind it.

Humility plays a crucial role in service. The act of washing feet, especially those considered unclean or 'crusty,' is a metaphor for serving without seeking glory or recognition. This humility is central to Christian service, steering away from arrogance and

pride. Jesus' example of washing feet, including those of Judas Iscariot, demonstrates a level of humility and love that transcends human understanding. It's a call to serve others as Jesus served, without discrimination or expectation of reward. Christian service should stem from a place of gratitude for what God has done, not from our feelings of being served. Our motivation to serve should not fluctuate with our emotions but remain constant, rooted in the understanding of God's ultimate sacrifice for humanity. There's a stark contrast between serving out of a sense of obligation and serving out of love and gratitude. Christians should avoid the trap of serving based on how they feel they've been served, which can lead to a miserable and unfulfilling spiritual life. Instead, they should serve as a response to God's love and grace. Jesus continuously serves us, washing not just our feet but our entire being with His sacrificial love. It's a reminder that our relationship with God is not based on our actions or worthiness but on His unending grace and forgiveness.

Understanding the depth of Jesus' service is crucial. It's not about the severity of our sins or the magnitude of our mistakes but about recognizing and accepting Jesus' ongoing work in our lives. This understanding deepens our relationship with Him and fuels our desire to serve others. Serving in the Christian context is not about earning points or proving our worth but about experiencing the joy of being part of God's work. It's a journey of continual learning and growing, much like the disciples who were constantly discovering the depth of Jesus' teachings. Embracing servanthood in our daily lives, following Jesus' example, is not just about the acts of service we perform. It's about the attitude and

heart we bring to these acts. By serving as Jesus served, we participate in a divine expression of love, transforming not only those we serve but also ourselves.

In the Christian journey, the New Covenant symbolizes a transformative relationship with God. It's not merely a passive reception of divine teachings; it involves an active response to God's voice in our lives. Every day presents a choice: to follow our desires or align with God's will. Central to this is the role of the Holy Spirit. As believers filled with the Spirit, we have the unique privilege of hearing God's guidance. This connection empowers us to move beyond selfish ambitions and to live in a manner that reflects Christ's humility and service. Philippians 2:3-8 serves as a profound reminder of Christ's example. Despite being in the form of God, He chose to humble Himself, embracing servitude and obedience even unto death. This self-emptying, or kenosis, of Jesus is a model for our interactions with others. The concept of selflessness is intertwined with our understanding of sin. As followers of Christ, we're called to relinquish our pride and ego, laying down our desires in service to others. This is not about earning salvation, but a natural outflow of the grace we've received.

A common misconception is equating responsibility with requirement. While Christ's death and our faith in Him are the only requirements for salvation, our responsibility to live selflessly stems from gratitude, not obligation. This distinction is vital in understanding the New Covenant. Reflecting on Isaiah 42, we see the servant chosen and empowered by God. Initially, this refers to Jesus, but it also extends to us. Through Christ, we are invited into

a ministry of servanthood, called to serve others as Jesus served. The church is envisioned as a community of servants, exemplifying Christ's justice and love in the world. This service isn't based on institutional ideas but is guided by Christ's example and God's will. Our Christian life is a constant dialogue with God. Each day, we're presented with the question: "What do you want to do?" The ideal response is to seek God's will, to listen for His guidance, and to act accordingly. This is a journey of trust, obedience, and love. The ultimate answer we receive from God is to love one another. This command, however, takes on a different meaning when it comes as a personal directive from the Holy Spirit. It's no longer a mere obligation but a heartfelt response to God's love for us.