

Group Study Outline

Launching Questions

Where do we see injustice in the world today?
Is justice something we personally long for?

If so, we've got some good news to look at together!

Study questions

READ Isaiah 42:1-9

What will the servant do?
What will that be like?
Does that sound good?
In what way will he do it? Will he be easy to spot?

Who is this servant?
How can we know for sure it's Him?
But can it *really* be Jesus? He has come and the world is still unjust... (Discuss)

What impact does reading this have on you?

READ Isaiah 42:10-17

How does Isaiah tell us to respond?
Are we responding like that to this news?
If not, why not?
Imagine somebody says, "This isn't that great." How would you enthuse to them about this to show how encouraging it is?

Who is told to praise God for what He will do through His servant?
What is significant about that?
Why do we often think this news is just for people like us?

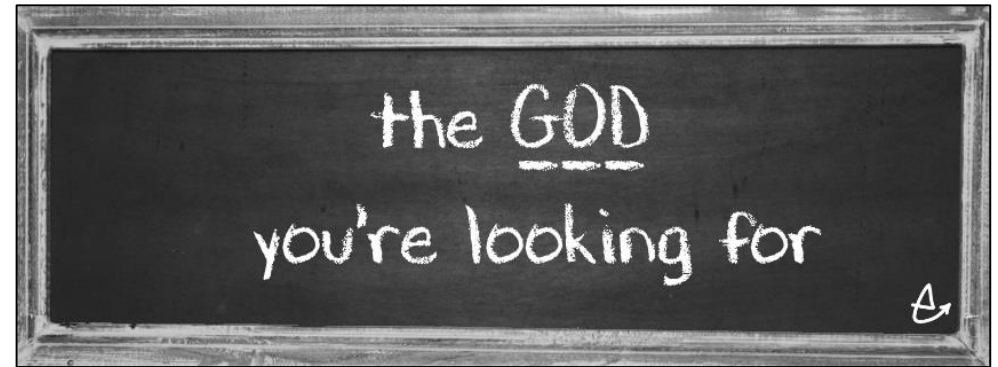
v17 shows that justice includes judgement. How is *this* good news?

Having read this passage, what would you say to someone who was suffering and feeling that the world isn't fair?
How could we remind one another more of these truths?
Are there particular verses or details from Isaiah 42 which you have found encouraging and want to remember?

Pray

- as we're told to do, turn this news into praise!
- for those who are especially struggling in this unjust world
- for us to share the news with the nations

Isaiah 42:1-17



Isaiah at a glance

Isaiah prophesied at a time (approx. 740-680 BC) when God's people had rebelled against him and judgement was imminent in the form of the Assyrian and Babylon empires. But in chapters 40-55 Isaiah looks beyond this coming judgement to a time when Babylon itself will be destroyed, God's people will return to Jerusalem, and ultimately God's kingdom will draw people from all nations into relationships of peace with God and one another. In the process, Isaiah gives us a grand portrait of the great God who will achieve these far reaching plans – the God we are all looking for.

It has been said that "to read and believe these chapters means that we have a God who is working out his great salvation purposes in human history, whose word can be trusted and whose kingdom will know no end." What an enormous encouragement for God's people back then, and for our Connect Groups today!

Where this passage fits in...

Our passage introduces who it is who will sort out the mess. It is God's chosen servant, who we discover to be Jesus. This is first of a number of "Servant Songs" in Isaiah, the most famous of which being Isaiah 52-53. We are getting clarity on how God will redeem not only Israel/Judah but all the nations.

Theme Sentence

Praise God because God's servant (Jesus) will bring justice to the world.

Application

- Understand that Jesus will bring justice to the whole world.
- Praise God for that! Be encouraged in the midst of struggles.
- Pass on this hope to others, however far off they seem.

Commentary

- 1-4 God wants people to meet His servant. The Lord loves him. He has God's Spirit to give power for the task. He is just the right man for the job God has in mind. That job is to bring justice, a phrase found in v1, 3 and 4. It's important to define justice rightly. It includes judging sinners (17) but primarily in mind here is vindicating God's suffering people. It is good news.

The historical context is important to remember. Israel in the north had already been taken off by the Assyrians, never to return. Now Judah in the south faced the same threat from the Babylonians. They would be in exile for 70 years. But, before it even happens, Isaiah tells them of God's plan to bring them home again. Justice must refer in part to that act of restoration for Judah. But it goes beyond that as justice is also repeatedly said to be for "the nations" as well. Justice is about all the world's wrongs being put right.

v3 is tricky. It is often taken to refer to the servant's gentleness with suffering people, not needlessly snuffing out a person who's "flame" is burning low. That is no doubt true and a great comfort to know that the one who will fix the world will care for individuals gently even while dealing with the bigger picture. But v2 implies that it's also about not being attention-seeking. He won't make a scene. One might miss him as he slips unnoticed through the streets, not even breaking a twig or blowing out a lamp, the kinds of things you might use to track somebody – "Look, that branch is snapped! He went that way!"

This surprisingly low key approach of the servant is underlined in v4 which mentions that he won't "grow faint or be discouraged", things which might imply opposition and struggle with the task, such that lesser men might be tempted to give up. Not our man! Behold him!

But who is he? When is he coming? We don't need to guess. These opening 4 verses are quoted in full in Matthew 12:15-21 identifying the servant as Jesus. He was bringing good news and proving by His miracles that He was able to fix the broken world, and yet He was opposed by the Pharisees. And so He withdrew from public life for a time and quietly got on with the job without "lifting up His voice". Despite the opposition to and non-obviousness of Jesus, He is the Lord's servant to bring justice to the world. God wants us to behold Him!

- 5-8 The Lord then speaks to the servant (the "you"s are all singular here). He gives him the job description. When justice comes it will be light to those in darkness. Sight for those who are blind. Freedom for those enslaved. (Especially good news for the first hearers facing captivity in Babylon.) And again the promises are for the nations not just the people of Judah.

When Jesus finally came, we see Him doing exactly these things. He healed the blind, to show He could do the bigger miracle of dealing with spiritual blindness *and* complete the package deal of Isaiah 42 by bringing justice to the entire planet.

- 9 This verse is now addressed to the reader / hearer again. (The "you" is back to being plural.) Here we are encouraged that God will definitely fulfill this plan through His servant. In the past God told us amazing things through the prophets, things which have now come to pass. So that now He's telling us *new* things we can be sure He'll do it. We get told them centuries in advance to increase our certainty.

- 10-12 In the next section, we are told the appropriate response to this news about justice. We should praise God!

All kinds of people in different places are told the same thing. Whether you go out to sea, live by the coast, in the desert, up a mountain... Wherever you are, hear this news and rejoice!

In particular, it is noteworthy that Kedar is in the Arabian desert and Sela is in Moab. Those are in Gentile territory! And yet they are called to rejoice that the servant is coming to bring justice. This really is good news for the whole world.

- 13-14 God is pictured in startling images. Firstly as a mighty man hyping himself up before battle, shouting, crashing his weapons and flexing His muscles. The sight of this man of war would be very encouraging for those on His side. But intimidating for His enemies, who are mentioned at the end of v13. Justice includes judgement.

The second image is even more striking. God will cry out like a screaming woman in labour! Here we're told this noise is in contrast to a period of His silence. This quiet might refer to the 70 years in exile or to the 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus. In context it would fit that it refers to the softly spoken era of v2-3. While God's servant is not easy to spot for a time, there will come a day when God will hold His tongue no more and all will see and hear what God is doing.

- 15-17 That day will be one of turning the world upside down and inside out. Mountains and hills torn down, rivers turned into islands; a global shake-up. As promised in v6-7, the blind will be helped and led into the light. And those who trusted in false gods (see also v8) will be utterly ashamed. This is final universal judgement.

The words of v16 are enormously encouraging, especially to those suffering and aching for justice. "These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them." He has already begun bringing justice through Jesus and one day this Servant will complete the task. Praise God!