

Date: 8.3.09

Text: Isaiah 42-43

Title: The servant of the Lord

Place: Kingscliff, Tweed Heads AM/PM

File: Isaiah 42-3

## **Introduction**

Last week I quoted a commentator who said that the book of Isaiah is the Mount Everest of prophecy. It soars to incredible heights. It paints a vision of an incredibly powerful God. It surveys God's wonderful relationship with His people from go to woe. And we saw that last week didn't we? Here is a God who will not just condemn & judge. He is one who will come to us, speak to us, show us his ways and his power and will reach out his hand to help us.

It's a great picture! Like the picture of Mt Everest from Base Camp. High and mighty. Untouchable. Incomparable. But how do we get to this God? How do we experience this power, this help, this strength that He offers us. Because he is holy, and I am sinful. He is strong and I am weak. He is all knowing and I know so little. So how can we experience this God? Who will help me find my way back to him?

Well Isaiah 42, tells us who. And it is a bit of a surprise. Using the Mt Everest illustration, it is like we are at base camp and wondering how on earth am I going to get up there? Will I have to hire a chopper to fly me up? Well I get into a massive plane that will parachute me down? Will I ask an Arnold Schwarzenegger type figure to bash our way to the top? And the answer is, I have to put my trust in a local Sherpa. A small man, without bulging muscles. A man who knows the terrain, because he has climbed it many times before. A man who will stay with me, through thick and thin. He is the one, the only one that can get me to the top.

For if we want to be ready when the Lord comes again; if we want to be able to connect with a God who made the heavens and the earth; if we want experience the strength of the one who made us and who never grows tired and weary, we have to put our trust in His servant, the one who helps fulfil God's mission.

### **1. The Mission of the Servant.**

And yet God's chosen one, according to Isaiah 42, is not a mighty warrior, a street fighter, a politician, a rich man. He is a servant. Not a master, but a slave. Someone who is gentle and humble. Someone who is meek but not weak.

Unlike the foreign conquerors of the day, God's Servant wouldn't come shouting His decrees in the streets, nor would He crush the oppressed or discourage the disheartened. He would not be a city street preacher or political rebel inciting the population, nor a royal messenger reading the king's proclamations. The servant had been given royal power by the divine King. Yet He would exercise that power in such a way that He would not damage the hurting or the disenfranchised - not even a broken reed that appears useless or a wick so uncared for it could no longer produce clear light.

Conquerors use their power to squash and rebuild. God's servant will be radically different. He will be gentle or meek. Most people, especially conquerors, would break a weak, useless reed, but He will not do so. Rather He will support it and straighten it out. He will not even blow out an untrimmed dying light. He will trim it and give it His oil. He will strengthen and encourage his people.

Because this is a man who has God's Spirit within Him. For we might have this opinion that God is all about power and might, lightning and thunder, sword and judgement and if we do we have only half the picture. For a refrain that appears again and again in the OT is this one *"the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse nor will he harbour his anger forever. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."* (Ps 103)

God has a mission for his servant, one to bring justice to this world, to call those who are his own back to the fold and to do that mission most effectively the servant of the Lord will need to be humble, he will rely upon God's spirit and he will need to follow God's word. For one of his aims, according to verse 4, is to teach God's law to the islands, even to the extremities of this world, so they will put their hope in it.

Isn't that amazing, God's mission is not achieved by tanks, by warfare, by building huge Churches with steeples up to the sky. It is about establishing justice, it's about being humble and gentle, it's about relying on God's spirit and sharing God's word. And that is exactly what the servant of the Lord will do.

He is called in righteousness, so he will live in righteousness. He will establish a covenant, an agreement, a promise between God and His people and so he will conduct himself in such a way that people will be able to trust God by trusting what he has to say. He will be a light to the Gentiles, so his life will be one that gives hope to people. So he will be willing to make his way to those who are in prison, who are blind, hurting, who are lost and he himself will lead them back to God. Although it seems as hard a task as climbing Mount Everest, the servant of the Lord will be like that Sherpa and accompany them all the way to the top, all the way to God. He will make sure that God saves them.

As the Old Testament scholar John Oswalt once said, "God's answer to the oppression of the world is not more oppression. His answer to arrogance is not more arrogance. Rather in quietness, humility, and simplicity by the Spirit of God, He will take the evil of the world and return grace. That is power."

So who is this servant of the Lord? Well it should have been the nation of Israel. God's people were the ones meant to be chosen and called for such a task, but they were found wanting, severely wanting. And so God sends a representative from Israel, someone in the line of the mighty King David, a descendent of Abraham, a man called Jesus.

The meek and mild Saviour showed the world the meaning of word justice even as He suffered under the injustice of His own people and a foreign government. As God's Servant,

Jesus did what Israel could never do. He perfectly carried out the will of the Father so that people everywhere may believe in the Holy One of Israel and have access to God's justice. He helped them and us to climb the mountain, to come back to God.

Jesus didn't shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. He didn't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smouldering wick. When he saw those who were bruised, battered, lost, broken, he didn't discard them. He came softly and gently... to mend the broken reeds of the world.

Now that leper was a bruised reed...He was diseased...cast off by society... shunned by everyone...destined to a slow and terrible death... But Jesus came and touched him... and his life was forever changed!! The demon-possessed man was a bruised reed... He was living among the tombstones... naked... tormented... cast out by society... But Jesus came and touched him... and his life was forever changed!!

The woman caught in adultery was a bruised reed...She was about to be cast away by society... stoned for her sin... and they would have been justified in their stoning her... according to the laws of their day... But Jesus came and touched her... & her life was forever changed!! Come to think of it, I was a bruised reed...a guy with my head the books.. very little friends.. next to no social skills but then Jesus came and touched me... and my life has been forever changed!!

## **2. The manner of the Lord.**

The mission of the servant was to bring us back to God, and to help us see the manner of the Lord. And what a wonderful God He is. For that's what the first part of Isaiah 43 is all about. He is the God the created you, the God who formed you, the God who redeemed you. The God who summons you by name. The God who owns you. Can you hear the words coming tumbling out of Isaiah's mouth?

He is the God who will be with you as you walk through the deep waters. The God who will protect you as your path goes through the flames, the One who wants to help you climb to the top of the mountain, who wants to bring you to Himself and so he calls you by name.

Isn't it amazing that God would call you by name? In an old jury roll call in Sussex County in England in 1658 there is a list of 39 Puritan names. Among them are the following: The-Gift-of-God Stringer; Live-in-Peace Hillary; Joy-from-Above Brown; More-Fruit Flower; Faint-Not Hewett; and Search-the-Scriptures Morton. There was also a young Puritan maiden listed who, when asked for her baptismal name, replied: "'Through-Much-Tribulation-We-Enter-The-Kingdom-of-Heaven,' but for short they call me Tribby."

When we become a Christian, God gives us a new name and then proceeds to call us by name. Maybe when we will see God face to face we will be called "Trust in the Lord Blundell", "Grace-Given-to-Me Douglass" or "Give-God-the-Glory Green."

For this is the sort of God whom we can be reconciled with. A God who made us and when we decided to do our own thing and walk away from Him who was willing to even buy us

back. He didn't say to us "good riddance". He didn't say "They have made their bed, I'll let them sleep in it." No he is willing to go to any lengths, in any direction, north, south, east and west on order to bring his people home.

And we have this wonderful picture of God summoning us and then walking with us. Through the waters. Just as he walked through the Red Sea with the Israelites with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. Then He went on and walked them through the River Jordan and on into the Promised Land. So God walks with us through the flood waters, through the times of danger, of stress, when we feel like we can't keep our head above the flow.

And he walks with us through the fire. Just as he was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the book of Daniel while they were in the fiery furnace. So when the heat is on, the pressure is mounting, danger is on every side, we are to realise that we are not alone. God will protect us. God will keep us. God will make sure that nothing hurts us that is outside his wonderful will for our lives.

For that is the manner of the Lord. Caring, protective, gentle. Not just all powerful, all knowing, all holy, yet he is that as well. But a God who is always there and who always cares. A God whose love will never let us go. I think Henry Crowell's poem "When Thou Passest Through the Waters" captures the wonderful truth found in this chapter beautifully.

*"Do you feel your heart discouraged as you pass along the way?  
Does there seem to be more darkness than there is of sunny day?  
It is hard to learn the lesson, as we pass beneath the rod,  
That the sunshine and the shadow serve alike the will of God.  
But to me there comes a promise, like the promise of the bow,  
That however deep the waters, they shall never overflow.*

*"When the flesh is worn and weary and the spirit is depressed,  
When temptation comes upon you like a storm on ocean's breast,  
There's a haven ever ready for the tempest-driven bird,  
There is shelter for the tempted in the promise of His Word;  
For the standard of the Spirit shall be raised against the foe,  
And however deep the waters, they shall never overflow.*

*"When sorrow comes upon you that no other soul can share,  
And the burden seems too heavy for the human heart to bear,  
There is One whose grace can comfort if you'll give Him an abode,  
There's a Burden-bearer ready if you'll trust Him with your load;  
For the precious promise reaches to the depth of human woe,  
That however deep the waters, they shall never overflow.*

*"When the sands of life are ebbing and I near dark Jordan's shore,  
When I see the billows rising and I hear the waters roar,  
I'll reach out my hand to Jesus, in His bosom I will hide;  
It will only be a moment 'till I reach the other side.*

*It is then the fullest meaning of the promise I shall know:  
"When thou passest through the waters they shall never overflow."*

Aren't those words wonderful and aren't they also true? For haven't we found what the hymn writer has said, "What a friend we have in Jesus? " Where he is always with us, that He never leaves us or forsakes us, where he helps us in times of trouble and leads us to times of refreshment. The mission of the servant. The manner of the Lord and then finally

### **3. What's missing in the response?**

For the last part of our passage, Isaiah 43:22-26 highlights Israel's response to the mission of the servant and to the manner of the Lord. And quite simply that response is apathy. *"Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob." "You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings. You have not honoured me with your sacrifices." "You have not bought any fragrant offerings for me... But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses."*

They should have been men and women of justice. They should have been willing to be gentle and humble with each other. They should have made their sacrifices to God. Turned from their sins. Attempted to be the light to the nations. And they couldn't be bothered.

God has wearied himself for them. God has made all the sacrifices for them. God has even promised to blot out their transgressions and to remember their sins no more and they couldn't care less. Sure they take what God has to offer but they won't put themselves out in the slightest. They will align themselves as one of God's people but they have no intention of living as one of God's people. They will burden God with their sins, but that doesn't mean they will turn to God from their sins. As we look at the response to Isaiah's preaching we see that something is missing from those who hear this message.

And yet when Jesus comes to Israel some 600 years later, the same thing will happen. The rich young ruler might want to have eternal life but he doesn't want to sell his belongings to get it. The crowds might like to listen to Jesus' sermons, they are thrilled to see his amazing miracles. But when the teaching gets too difficult, when they are forced to pick up the cross and follow Jesus, they walk away. It is all too hard.

And don't we do the same? We package the message of Jesus as one of forgiveness of our sins, a relationship with God, answered prayer, blessings. And we like that. But sacrifice? Devotion? The cross? Obedience? Turning from our wrong ways? Witnessing for Jesus? Obedience? They are hard aren't they? Lets' just think about a God who is always with me and forget that if he is with me and if I'm doing the wrong thing, He wouldn't like that!

Grace can so easily be turned into cheap grace. We take what God is offering us, but we don't have to do anything in return, in thankfulness, in gratitude. But anything you are committed to will involve a cost. A cost of time, a cost of money, a cost emotional energy. If it doesn't require anything from you, then you are not committed to it.

I know some people that are committed to getting fit. So they spend money on a gym membership, on personal trainers, on cycle bikes, on walking machines on fitness clothes, on training as part of a team. You are committed to it and it requires time and devotion.

I know some people that are committed to fishing, to rods and reels, to bait, to hooks, to lures, to getting up at 4:30am to drop a line in the creek. But do you know fishing has never cost me a cent. I have never lost any sleep over fishing. Because I'm not committed to it! And if your faith in God, hasn't cost you much in terms of time, of energy, of devotion, of hard work. If bringing in justice into this world hasn't cost you anything, because you haven't kept knocking your head against the brick wall of injustice. If you have made no sacrifices attempting to open eyes that are blind, in freeing captives from the prison of sin or release those who are in darkness into God's glorious light, then you are just not committed to it.

And so God's word will pierce our heart and soul. And God might be saying to us there's something missing in our response. Because we believe in grace, amazing grace, but not cheap grace. Because of what the servant of God has done for you, because of the manner that God has expressed his grace towards you, you and I need to respond with a life of devotion, of gentleness, of justice, of righteousness.

I want to end with a story which may not seem relevant at first. But hopefully upon reflection you will see why I am telling you it. It's about a great Christian of yesteryear, a theology professor at Princeton Seminary, called BB Warfield. While he was still at the height of his academic powers, his wife got sick. And she became an invalid. So he took care of her for ten years. During that ten year period, he never spent more than 2 hours away from his wife. Even though she was handicapped, she still loved to read. And so Warfield would sit at her bedside each day & read to her. He was always gentle and caring with her.

One day, someone asked him, "have you ever thought about taking your wife to an institution?" Then you could write bigger books and have a bigger ministry." But Dr. Warfield said, "No way. My wife is my ministry. I will never leave her side. I am going to love her and take care of her as long as God grants us life."

Now that's how the Lord Jesus feels about us. He will not walk away from us. He will not abandon us. He will not throw us away like yesterday's news. He will minister his love and his compassion to us just as Dr. Warfield did for his wife. And that's what we are called to do for others. Not to make a name for ourselves, to always be upfront and be loud and forceful in what we do, but to be a real servant of the Lord – gentle, humble, caring. To support people, to be there for others, to point them toward Jesus.

The way to climb the mountain of the grandeur of the Lord is not through the helicopter, the parachute, the commando, but through the Sherpa, the humble servant of the Lord. Who will be there with others every step of the way and bring them eventually to the summit of God's presence. Jesus was the Sherpa par excellence. You and I need to learn to walk in his footsteps.