

Palm Sunday S.S. Lesson 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed. Palm Sunday signals the end of Lent, the 40 day period of fasting and reflection that begins on Ash Wednesday, and kicks off Holy Week, the seven days leading up to Easter. Palm Sunday marks Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. As he enters the city, crowds gathered, waving palms.

"A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8-9)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come today to gather and scatter these branches of blessings. With them we remember Jesus' joyous ride into Jerusalem, where the hope of the many were gathered and lifted high. Like those bearing the palms from so long ago, we are gathered in celebration and rejoicing, eager to greet the One who saves. Bless these palms of remembrance and glory. Bless our hearts as we relive the story. And as those who cast their palms and their dreams before a triumphant Christ, we ask that, "You guide us down the difficult road of Holy Week. Give us fresh new insights and a renewed will, that we may hear your Word to us today". Lord, we give praise, honor and glory to You for blessing and providing for us. Lord hear our prayer requests for members of our church, families and

community that are ill, suffering, and going through medical treatments. We cry out to you Jesus asking that you eradicate the Coronavirus, that is plaguing the world.

Father only you can stop the spread of this disease and heal the ones that are affected, Father we are asking for your help, praying that you will stop the virus, heal the ones that are sick, and have mercy on the families that have lost love ones. We pray that you, Lord, will protect all personnel in the medical community as they continue to care for the sick. We pray for our national, state, and civic leaders asking that you, God will give them the wisdom to know what to do as they lead in this anxious time. God lead us to serve others with love and that Your goals on earth be accomplished as You empowers us. Father, forgive us when we have failed to honor Your commandments. We ask all these things in our LORD and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Lesson for April 5, 2020 is "God's Just Servant" from Isaiah chapter 42:1-9

Information for this lesson and the prophet Isaiah was obtained from Raymond C. Stedman (1917-1992), sermons. He was a long-time pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, CA. Stedman also worked alongside, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, a preacher widely known in Evangelical circles for his radio ministry. The Bible Knowledge Commentary by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.

Background information: Today's lesson emphasizes God's promises of a just kingdom. The prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah as the champion of justice.

The prophet Isaiah, for his part, had a lengthy ministry, from approximately 740 to 681 BC.

The book of Isaiah is divided into three parts:

Chapters 1-35, deals with Isaiah's times. He is speaking to his contemporaries. This section is set against the backdrop of the Assyrian period. Although Judah is powerful, wealthy, and influential, it is spiritually decadent. Isaiah speaks to these times and talks about the injustice of that period. Though God looks for righteousness and justice, what he sees is the cry of the oppressed, and Isaiah predicts that judgment is coming. In those opening chapters Isaiah speaks very explicitly about the problems that exist in the nation and about the judgment that is coming.

Chapters 36-39, is a historical bridge between the first and third sections and introduces at least one of the causes of the Babylonian captivity.

Chapters 40-66, Isaiah speaks about the Babylonian captivity, which is to take place at least 130 years after his time. He predicts its coming, tells them what it will be like, predicts the regathering to the land, the rebuilding of the temple, and the restoration of the nation in Judah. Isaiah also talks about one who is designated as the Servant of the Lord, the Servant who will effect salvation, the one through whom God will accomplish his purposes in the nation. This is very much the center of Isaiah's thinking, particularly in the section from Chapters 40 through 53. This song in the first four verses of Chapter 42 is the first of the references to the Servant of the Lord.

Chapter 41 is a court scene. God calls all the Gentile nations to stand before the bar of judgment. God is the judge and prosecuting attorney and the jury. He asks these nations to present their case. He brings together two classes of Gentiles. There are the Gentiles off to the East (from Mesopotamia), and the Gentiles from the West (around the Mediterranean coast). The issue in this court scene is: Who can bring about justice in the world? Who can effect justice? Who can set things right? God calls on the nations to present their case, and then he presents his case. He describes his mighty acts in history, and how he is going to effect salvation, and then he asks the nations, "How will you set things right?"

The end of the exile is foreseen in the chapter 41, preceding our lesson scripture: God, "calling him in righteousness to his service?" (Isaiah 41:2) to bring the captivity to its end. That man has been identified as Cyrus II, the king of Persia who conquered Babylon in 539 BC (44:28 and 45:1, where he is designated "shepherd" and "anointed," respectively). Cyrus issued a decree permitting the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem beginning in 538 BC (Ezra 1:1-8). Isaiah called Cyrus by name almost 150 years before he rules. Later historians, said that Cyrus read this prophecy as was so moved that he carried it out. Isaiah also predicted that Jerusalem would fall more than 100 years before it happened (586 B.C.) and that the temple would be rebuilt about 200 years before it happened. These prophecies came from a God who knows the future.

We are told that the word "servant" occurs more than three dozen times in the book of Isaiah. In chapter 41, the Lord applies it to Israel, my "servant" (Isaiah

41:8-9). This servant was fearful and for that reason, God reassured the people of his love. They didn't need to fear as their exile in Babylon was not evidence that God had cast them away forever. God promised Israel that they were still his covenant people. The Lord encouraged his helpless servant Israel by declaring that the people need not fear, because God would help them (41:10-14).

The Lord addressed the nations and their idols. He challenged the nations to provide evidence that idols had ever correctly predicted the future. After announcing judgment on the false gods, God proclaimed that he had "stirred up one from the north" (Isaiah 41:25) – surely once again alluding to Cyrus.

Against the backdrop of a pagan king as an instrument of God to rescue our exiled people, Isaiah introduced the fascinating servant to the Lord.

In Isaiah 42:1-9 (today's text), is the first of Isaiah's five "servant songs," in which the servant is identified with the Messiah to come (see 49:1-6; 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-4). These messianic songs point out what the servant is to accomplish on behalf of the world. In Isaiah 42:1-4, God introduces a Servant who is charged with a specific task and whose style of carrying it out is described.

Verse 1 identifies God as the source of all that the Servant is and is called to do. God presents the Servant in intimate terms: "Here is my Servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight."

The servant introduced here bears some similarities to the anointed shepherd Cyrus and servant Israel in having

God's approval. This servant is profoundly different from both. The quotation of Isaiah 42:1-4 that is found in Matthew 12:18-21 establishes this servant to be Jesus. As previously mentioned, God both supports and delights in him (Matthew 3:16, 17). This suggests that this servant will be obedient and godly in a way like no other.

Verse 1b says, "I will put my Spirit on him." Members of ancient Israel did not experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as Christians do today (see Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21,38). The servant is marked as special for a special purpose, and Jesus' baptism clearly points back to this verse. On that occasion the Spirit will descend on him after he rises from the water as the Father expresses his pleasure with his Son (Luke 3:21-22; see Isaiah 11:1-5).

Verse 1c states, "and he will bring justice to the nations." We cannot miss the servant's mission of bringing "justice" to the world, since it is mentioned three times in the first four verses of Isaiah 42. The justice that the servant "will bring" also includes making available God's salvation.

The style of witness of the servant stands in stark contrast to the way of the nations and their leaders. The servant won't even "shout or cry out" nor "raise his voice in the streets." God's answer to the world's arrogance is not more arrogance.

The crowds at Jesus' triumphal entry will shout, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! (Luke 19:38)." While the crowd speaks in loud voices (Luke 19:37), Jesus never says a word. Jesus will not speak up even to defend himself against false accusations.

As in ancient times, many people are attracted to leaders who drew attention to themselves, boasting of their abilities and accomplishments. Remember that Jesus did not boast.

Instead of using his power to crush the mighty, the servant will be so gentle that he won't even "break off a bruised reed" that is bent over. With gentleness, the servant will minister to the weak and the broken. We are told that the servant's mission is tied to "justice." Where the servant Israel has failed, servant Jesus will succeed.

The servant bears witness with quiet, patient gentleness, confident that the nations will be drawn to God's reign of justice, not by human force but by the embodied power of compassion and righteousness.

To live faithfully in the service of the justice of God is to pattern one's life in the nature of God.

The Lord is not merely Israel's "God" but is "the Creator" of all things. On this basis, God rightly claims authority not just over the land and people of Israel but over all nations (Psalm 82:8).

God is the one who gives "breath" and life to people (compare Genesis 2:7 with Acts 17:24-29). How unfortunate that those very people in turn create idols that have no breath themselves (Jeremiah 10:14; 51:17), let alone able to impart breath to others.

From verse 4, we learn of the Servant's persistence: "He

will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."

The point is though the Servant ministers to the bruised and crushed, he himself is never bruised or crushed. He doesn't give up; he doesn't get fainthearted. He doesn't say to us, "One more time and I'm not available; one more time and I won't forgive."

How many times have we said, "Here I am, Lord, doing the same thing. Can you ever forgive me?" Certainly he can. He never gives up. He will persist until he will bring about justice. That is the ministry that was given to the Servant. He was one submissive to the will of the Father. He is the one who ministers to us and to our needs. He had from the Father all the resources necessary to bring about justice and to set things right, and he set about doing it. He quietly and patiently ministered to the weak and lowly, to the oppressed, to the downtrodden. He not only accomplished what he set out to do, he gave us the example. He is the one who has called us to the same ministry.

Having presented the servant and his mission, in Verse 6, the Lord addresses and commissions his servant. God has "called" the servant according to his own nature – his righteousness. The servant doesn't have to fulfill the mission by himself. God says, "I will take hold of your hand." Therefore, the servant will do the Lord's work in God's power according to God's will.

Verse 6 says, "and I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. From Scriptures, we know that the Messiah is to fulfill the Davidic

Covenant and establish a new Covenant through personal sacrificial death. This covenant is without end (Isaiah 54:10; 59:21; 61:8).

The "people" here refers to those who have already received God's revelation – the Israelites (see Isaiah 49:8).

Their role as a priestly nation is meant to draw other nations to the Lord. The servant is to become the instrument through which nations come to share the light of God's salvation.

Verse 7 makes clear that the order of God's justice involves healing of human illness and the reform of oppressive political structure. The Servant was assured that He would be a covenant for the people. He would fulfill God's covenant promises to Israel, and would also be a light for the Gentiles.

In verse 8, God's declaring of his "Name" recalls the scene of Moses at the burning bush. There God revealed his personal name to Moses at the event that commissioned Moses for his task. That task was to go back to Egypt so that God could establish his covenant with Israel at Sinai.

Isaiah's own calling has made him more aware of the fact that God is holy and the whole earth is full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3). God alone has all authority so "idols" cannot share his "glory" or "praise." Isaiah was affirming that God, unlike idols, can tell the future. Both the servant and Isaiah's audience are reminded that the servant's mission will confirm that God is beyond comparison.

In Isaiah 41:22, God challenges the idols to reveal the “former things” – the things God has revealed in prophecy and brought to pass later. However, God can reveal not only those things but also the ultimate end result. Events predicted about Cyrus and the servant “have taken place,” and this confirms God’s sovereign authority.

We are told that the “new things” of the Old Testament era likely point to Israel’s restoration following the end of the Babylonian exile (see Isaiah 43:19-21). Historical hindsight reminds us that God’s plan for his people will remain unfulfilled until the coming of the servant Jesus and his perfect work. There is hope for all the world.

From the section stepping into the world – Our passage, reminds us that Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, came not to just to redeem individuals. He came to redeem the world as a whole, and that includes bringing justice to the oppressed. (see Isaiah 42:6-7). Jesus comes to set right all that is wrong in the world, to bring justices to all who are treated unjustly. Jesus’ ministry was not only one of equality but one of inclusion. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, ministered to Samaritans and Gentiles and was not afraid to touch lepers and others with diseases. Jesus frequently reminded his listeners that the kingdom of God was for all, Jew and Gentile alike (see Matthew 21:33-44). As the Servant of the Lord was chosen by God especially to bring justice to the nations, we who have been united to Christ in baptism should likewise understand our calling to be bringers of justice. Our home and churches should be places of equity and

inclusion. We should believe that the doors of the kingdom are open to all. We must tear down barriers of race, socioeconomic standing, nationality (or citizenship status), political views, and all other human-made divisions because we are followers of the Servant who came to be a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, and to release captives (verses 6-7).

This Holy Week, let us follow the Servant of the Lord as we work to make our churches and communities models of equality and inclusions, striving to bring ever closer the beloved community of harmony and justice that God intends.

Closing: For the love that cast out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020
"Resurrection Hope" from Mark 1 and 1st Corinthians 15.