

The Song Of The Servant

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In leadership studies today we hear a great deal about “leaders must be servants”. It is a great statement and embodies the essential mark of good leadership. Today I want to explore the first of four Servant Songs in the Old Testament book of Isaiah (Isa. 42, 49, 50, 53). Naturally, the question will come to mind concerning these songs, “Who is the servant?” In Acts 8:34, the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip this very question while reading one of Isaiah’s Servant Songs, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Philip’s response was clear—the servant is Jesus the Christ.

In reading Isaiah 42:1-9, the first Servant Song, I see four characteristics about Christ’s identity and character as the Servant. *First, Jesus Christ is the Servant of Justice*, “...he will bring justice to the nations” (verse 1). Christ’s justice is measured by truth, Christ’s justice is measured by righteousness, and Christ’s justice is measured by faithfulness. Christ’s justice is free of worldly favouritism and compromise. This is the hope today of suffering and persecuted Christians around the world—Christ’s justice will be established! Now if justice and fairness is the work and character of the Servant Christ, it must also be reflected in the lives of every confessing Christian. After all, we are reminded in John 13:15 that Christ is our example.

Second, Jesus Christ is the Servant of Compassion. Isa. 42:2,3. Perhaps these verses need to be whispered when they are read. Read them that way – “He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. “ What words! What pictures! Jesus is gentle and compassionate, full of true humility. Consider His own words: “I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). Here is the gospel promise – Jesus Christ welcomes the broken and fragile of this world! If this is the Servant’s work and character, the spirit of such compassion must be reflected in the servants of The Servant. The *manner* of Christian work is not optional but essential -- patience, tenderness, gentleness and sincere compassion.

Third, Jesus Christ is the Servant of Light. Jesus is the servant of light to the Gentiles (verse 6b). The reality of the world in which we live is that there is much darkness and evil. Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12) -- to all nations and peoples. The Christian message is one of illumination in a world of darkness and misery. Christians are “reflectors” of the message of light, communicators and torch bearers of this message.

Fourth, Jesus Christ is the Servant of Salvation. Read verse 7, “to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.” Charles Wesley captured the essence of Christ as the Servant of Salvation in two lines:

“He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free,”

New life is possible and transforming grace is a reality. This is the work of Christ the Redeemer. This message is to resonate from the Church and to be embodied in the Christian community. We are a community redeemed by the Servant of Salvation.

Yes, we need servant leaders in all areas of society today. Isaiah 42, the first Servant song, gives us the basis for true servant leadership: it is to acknowledge the greatest servant of all – the Lord Jesus Christ by believing, accepting and obeying Him. May we “Behold this Servant” and embody the reality of having seen the Servant in our lives.

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